Mignolo's Epistemology of Coloniality

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WALTER MIGNOLO'S EPISTEMOLOGICAL CLAIMS ABOUT SUBALTERN KNOWL-edge owe much for their inspiration to the work of Michel Foucault. Thus it is little wonder that, in some important respects, Mignolo bears a similar relationship as Foucault to the discipline of philosophy, and to epistemology in particular. Even though the entirety of Foucault's theoretical writings concerned knowledge in the human sciences, the principal discussions in Anglo-American epistemology continue to ignore Foucault's work, an inattention considered justified on the grounds that Foucault's analyses of knowledge are taken to be a species of critical sociology, not normative epistemology. It is also largely believed that Foucault repudiated the very possibility of the normative goals of epistemology given the constitutive relationality between power and knowledge.

Yet Foucault himself formulated that relationality as dyadic rather than reductive, insisting that knowledge is not reducible to power, even though it cannot be properly understood as disassociated from power (Foucault

1980; Alcoff 1996). Power operates not only in the spheres of application and discovery—the two spheres traditional epistemologists acknowledge as affected by "irrational" elements—but also in the spheres of justification and the delimitation of the "regime" (or sphere) of the truth, or what passes for truth. Foucault worked out these claims with detailed case studies that both supported them and elucidated their meaning. For those of us who found these arguments plausible, even persuasive, the normative implications are clear: epistemology needs to work with this better and more truthful description of how actually existing knowledges (as opposed to idealized reconstructions) emerge, and needs to incorporate not only an analysis of power in its analysis of knowledge but also a set of normative criteria for judging various relationships between power and knowledge. Foucault provided such criteria in his epistemic assessments of hegemony-seeking versus subjugated knowledges: subjugated or local knowledges always tend to do less violence to the local particulars and are also less likely to impose hierarchical structures of credibility based on universal claims about the proper procedures of justification that foreclose the contributions of many unconventional or lower-status knowers.

Like Foucault, Mignolo has also spent a considerable amount of time analyzing knowledge in its relationship to power and presenting case studies of hegemony-seeking power-knowledges that arose in the context of European colonialism. For Mignolo, the epistemic effects of colonialism are among its most damaging, far-reaching, and least understood. Also like Foucault, Mignolo's critical project has produced new conceptual formulations in the attempt to explain and describe colonial knowledge practices and anti-colonial epistemic resistance. The question of how these new concepts fit with the existing problematics of epistemology has given rise to a similar cognitive dissonance, which it will be the project of this article to reduce.

One of the main problems in Foucault's work was his own colonial unconscious, however, and here his influence on Mignolo comes to a striking end. Foucault characterized the formation of disciplinary power-knowledge regimes as originating within Europe, and he presented the development of the modern episteme in such a way that divorced it from its colonial context. New publications of Foucault's lectures from the 1970s reveal a sustained

discussion of race on his part, and a real attempt to understand the formative role that constructions of race have played in the processes of governmentality and especially in the development of bio-power. Yet in these lectures, he does not thematize race or colonialism in his analyses of knowledge.[1]

Many of Foucault's followers, however, seem untroubled by this approach. Perhaps they accept the common view that colonialism is related to power, to juridical forms of management and to evaluative conceptions of difference, and to conceptions of the human, but not necessarily to the European Enlightenment's theory of knowledge, which was, after all, openly anti-authoritarian. The Enlightenment took on as one of its main projects to critique the scholasticism and authoritarianism of the religious-based epistemologies of premodern Europe (Tiles 1993). How can such a project be supportive of colonialism? Further, how can an analysis of colonialism aid not only in the critical project of identifying the latent Eurocentrism still operating in our major concepts but also in the positive project of reformulating and reconstructing epistemic norms? If the answer to both questions is yes, then we will have shown that epistemology itself needs to incorporate an analysis of coloniality.

Mignolo's work has answered yes to both questions. He has been in critical dialogue with Foucault's conceptualization of subjugated knowledges, appropriating and critiquing as well as re-adapting this concept to the case of colonized knowledges. He has theorized the relationship of knowledge to power squarely within a colonial context, even right up unto the present day in his recent arguments against poststructuralism and postmodernism. This analysis has both critical and reconstructive implications for epistemology, especially his critique of colonial knowledge, his call for a geopolitical analysis of knowledge, and his articulation and defense of border gnosis.

Many Latin American philosophers—from Leopoldo Zea to Enrique Dussel to Mignolo and others—have pointed out the hierarchical patterns of epistemic judgment under colonial systems. As Zea succinctly put it, the identity, the rationality, and the very humanity of the peoples of the "New World" were "put on trial and judged by the jury of its conquerors" (Zea 1988–89, 36). Amerindian peoples were not considered to be in a position to present their own epistemic credentials, much less to judge European ones.

This fact is clear. What is also clear is that extra-epistemic concerns are being used to do epistemic work in cases where, for example, one's ethnic or racialized identity determines one's epistemic justification or the status of one's beliefs. But these facts do not, for most epistemologists, have normative epistemological significance. Conquerors used bad epistemic practices, and it is assumed that the effort to establish good epistemic practices can only take negative lessons from such examples. However, we might also ask, following both Charles Mills (1997) and Michele Le Doeuff (1991) who have asked similar questions: what is the relationship between the project of conquest and this reliance on bad epistemic practices? Could it be that conquerors are in an epistemically poor cultural, intellectual, and political context for judgment, and are more likely to develop what Mills calls "epistemologies of ignorance" that include substantive cognitive practices that obscure social realities? If so, this would indicate that in developing an account of best practices, we need to consider more than individual epistemic agency and include a much broader array of structural background conditions that directly enhance or inhibit the pursuit and identification of truth.

The relationship between justificatory status and one's social identity is not, of course, foreign to the traditions of Western epistemology. In both ancient and modern canonical writings, epistemic credibility is associated with identity, and sometimes determined by it. Gender, age, one's status as a slave, the sort of work one performed, ethnic identities such as Jewishness, and since the modern period, one's racialized features were variously used to assess epistemic competence by philosophers including Plato, Aristotle, Bacon, Locke, Hume, Kant, and Hegel. (For an interesting take on the modern prejudices, see Shapin 1994.)

Thus, identity-based assessments were integrated into epistemic practice as well as into epistemologies that justified favoring certain groups over others with a measure of presumptive credibility. Much of Mignolo's analytics of epistemology, as we'll see, concerns its role in creating, developing, and maintaining a hierarchy of knowledge and knowers particularly adapted for colonialism, in which the most relevant distinction concerned one's cultural identity. Much of Mignolo's attempt to formulate an alternative to this imperial epistemology involves an effort to topple the cultural hierarchy that

colonialism enforced. But more than this, "subaltern reason," as he calls it, must aim to "rethink and reconceptualize the stories that have been told and the conceptualization that has been put into place to divide the world between Christians and pagans, civilized and barbarians, modern and pre-modern, and developed and undeveloped regions and people," especially to the extent such divisions are based on putative cognitive capacity (2000b, 98). Such a reconstructive project demands not only a new sociology of knowledge but also a new normative epistemology that can correct and improve upon the colonial worldview.

In the following section I offer a summary of Mignolo's main lines of critique of Western epistemology, before turning in the next section to his constructive epistemological project. Then at the end, I will return to two normative questions that are raised by his work on epistemology, but not fully answered: the question of truth, and the question of identity.

I. Critique

"Modernity" was imagined as the house of epistemology.

—Walter Mignolo (2006, 93)

Together with Enrique Dussel, his fellow Argentine exile, and Anibal Quijano, a Peruvian sociologist, Mignolo's main argument throughout his corpus has been that modernity emerged from colonialism, not after it nor simply alongside. Colonialism is constitutive of modernity, of its teleological macro-narratives of human progress, and of the material base necessary to provide both the surplus and the self-representation required to imagine Europe as the vanguard of the human race. To put this another way, colonialism is constitutive of both the base and the superstructure of modernity.

From Quijano, Mignolo has taken up the idea of a coloniality of power to refer to the system that organized the distribution of epistemic, moral, and aesthetic resources in a way that both reflects and reproduces empire (Quijano 1998). The concept of coloniality of power allows us to think through how the colonized were subjected not simply to a rapacious exploitation of all their resources but also to a hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge systems.

It allows us to understand the constitutive relationship between the historical a priori of European thought and its off-shore adventures. It also allows us to think through the Anglo- and Eurocentric structure of thought and representation that continues to dominate much of the world today, whether or not, in a given place and time, formal national liberation has been won.

From Dussel, Mignolo took up the idea of transmodernity, which signifies the global networks within which European modernity itself became possible. Transmodernity operates to displace the teleological and linear progression of modernity and postmodernity, rendering even the most anti-Western postmodernists still complicit with the temporal concepts of colonialism that erased the colonial difference. Whereas the concepts of modernity and post-modernity maintain the Eurocentric imaginary timeline of Greece → Rome → Renaissance → Modern World, relegating the colonized areas of the world as peripheral to the main story, the concept of transmodernity is intended by Dussel to displace that timeline with a spatialization in which the whole planet is involved at every stage in history. If modernity is imagined to be European, transmodernity is planetary, with principle players from all parts of the globe.

Both Dussel and Quijano have developed their concepts of transmodernity and of the coloniality of power, respectively, with a strong linkage to questions of knowledge and questions of reason. Quijano writes that the concept "coloniality of power" implies "the hegemony of Eurocentrism as epistemological perspective"(quoted in Mignolo 2000, 54). And for Dussel, transmodernity must be accompanied by what he calls a "liberating reason" as an alternative to the imperial, ego-logical reason of cartesian colonial modernity (see esp. 1995). But even more than these and other theorists of colonialism, it is Walter Mignolo who has focused on the epistemological effects of colonialism. Since the publication in 1995 of *The Darker Side of the Renaissance,* Mignolo's central focus in his subsequent work, including the collection of essays *Local Histories/Global Designs* and in several essays that have appeared in journals and anthologies, has been on the subordination of non-European modes of knowing, conceptualization, and representation.

Hegemony in Mignolo's usage of the term is very much taken from the Gramscian idea of hegemony as the construction of mass consent. That is,

hegemony is achieved through a project of persuasion that works principally through claims to truth. Europe is ahead because Europe is smarter and more reflective than the rest of the world; the United States has the right to hog the world's resources because it knows best how to make use of them. Leading liberals like Arthur Schlesinger make the claim for Western epistemic supremacy without any embarrassment: Schlesinger claims not that Europe (and the U.S. as a European nation) has made no mistakes, but that Europe alone invented the scientific method, which gave it the capacity to critique its mistakes. Moreover, he claims that, although every culture "has done terrible things," "whatever the particular crimes of Europe, that continent is also the source—the *unique* source—of those liberating ideas . . . to which most of the world today aspires. These are *European* ideas, not Asian, nor African, nor Middle eastern ideas, except by adoption"(Schlesinger 1992, 127; emphasis in original). The result of the wide acceptance of such hegemonic claims in the United States and in Europe is a broad-based consent to imperial war as the presumptive entitlement of the political vanguard of the human race; the result of the acceptance of such hegemonic claims in the colonized world includes such symptomatic effects as the ones Samuel Ramos and Octavio Paz described when they said that Mexicans have an alienated relationship to their own temporal reality, and that they imagine the *real present* as occurring somewhere else than where they live. The *temporal* displacement or alienation of *space*, which causes the colonized person to be unable to experience their own time as the now and instead to see that "now" as occurring in another space, is the result of a Eurocentric organization of time in which time is measured by the developments in technological knowledge, the gadget porn of iPods and BlackBerrys, and the languages in which that technological knowledge is developed. Who is developing the latest gadgets? What language do they speak? These questions show us where the "now" resides, and thus, who is "behind."

In *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1977), Hegel works through a phenomenology of subjectivity precisely by beginning with the reference points "here" and "now." These are terms whose meaning cannot be elucidated without reference to a specific spatio-temporally located consciousness; we cannot judge either the justification or the meaning of a claim about "here" or about

"now" without knowing its specific context of reference. From these common indexicals, Hegel meant to show that all knowledge is similarly indexed to a specific subject, place, and time, in the sense that knowledge is dependent on justificatory procedures, measuring instruments, theoretical and metaphysical framing concepts, and categories of analysis that are intelligible within a given located domain—a fact that should not lead us to skepticism, in his view, but to see that to understand the world we need first to understand ourselves.

This explains why it is so important that the relationship between the colonized subject and *its* "here" and "now" is displaced by the colonial imaginary. If the knowing subject is the point of reference around which all knowledge claims revolve, what happens when that subject has only an indirect and long-distance relationship to its own "here" and "now," or when it has what Ramos called an alienated account of its own reality (Ramos 1962)? The result is that it can no longer serve as the reference point for knowledge, or judge the adequacy of claims of justification. It no longer knows.

For Ramos, Paz, Zea, Edouard Glissant, and the many others in this tradition who identified colonial alienation of consciousness, the solution to alienation is a positional shift to "our America" in which a philosophy reflective of its own Latin American reality might be developed. In his most recent work, *The Idea of Latin America* (2005), Mignolo expresses doubts about this alternative Latin America construction, predicated as it is on another exclusionary paradigm. Before we can go about the process of developing a new philosophy and new account of "our" reality, he argues, we need a more extensive period of epistemological reflection. We need to develop a decolonial critical theory that will be more thoroughly delinked from the contemporary variants of the modern imperial designs of the recent past.

The fact that language, space, time, and history have all been colonized through the colonization of knowledge must give us pause before we borrow the founding concepts of Eurocentric thought, such as center/periphery, tradition/modernity, and primitive/civilized, or the very evaluative binary structure that grounds these. Mignolo develops Quijano's concept of the coloniality of power, then, as a way to name that set of framing and organizing assumptions that justify hierarchies and make it almost impossible to evaluate alternative claims. Why was it said that there were no pre-Colombian books

or forms of writing, when it was known that the codices had been raided and burned in heaps? How could the claim that modernity represented an expansion of freedom not be challenged by its development within the context of colonialism? Why do we continue to conceptualize rationality as separate from and properly in dominion over the realm of affect, a distinctly Greek and nonindigenous notion, as Mariategui showed many decades ago? Why is it considered sufficient, even exemplary, to have one Latin Americanist in a university history department in the United States, when 5 or 10 or even 15 Europeanists are required? And in philosophy departments, it is not necessary to have a single one.

To think through and beyond these persistent limitations in Western knowledge practices, Mignolo argues that we need to reinscribe what he calls the "colonial difference" into the order of representation. If the Eurocentric imaginary of modernity has forgotten colonialism and relegated the colonized spaces to the periphery and to the past in its description of universal reality (even if that "past" paradoxically exists in the "present"), the task of the colonial difference is to reinscribe simultaneity. To make "our America" no longer considered peripheral and behind the "now," hierarchical and binary categories must be replaced with pluralist and egalitarian ones.

Mignolo's concept of the colonial difference is thus an attempt to reveal and displace the logic of the same by which Europeans have represented their others. Non-Europeans are seen as existing on the *same* historical trajectory, but further behind; their goals are the *same*, but not achieved to the same degree; their knowledge is subject to the *same* justificatory procedures, but it is less well-developed. In this way, true otherness or difference is invisible and unintelligible. By use of the term "colonial difference," Mignolo seeks to break out of this logic of the same. He seeks both to reveal the way in which power has been at work in creating that difference (that is, the way in which colonialism creates "backwardness" both materially and ideologically) as well as the way in which colonial power represents and evaluates difference. The coloniality of power, in other words, produces, evaluates, and manages the colonial difference.

Now here let me signal one of the issues of critical debate I want to raise later on in the paper: What is the nature of the difference that Mignolo

means to signify by the term "colonial difference"? Is it an absolute or a relative difference; that is, does it stand alone or is it dependent on its relation to Eurocentrism? Is it, like the concept of race, an epiphenomena of colonialism itself, or does it preexist the colonial encounter in the way that Dussel suggests that "living labor" preexists capitalism? What, in other words, is the metaphysical status of the colonial difference?

I will return to this question, but here let me conclude this summary exposition of Mignolo's critique of Western epistemology before turning to his more constructive rebuilding of knowledge. First, we need to understand where Mignolo's critique of Western epistemology fits within the internal debates within Western philosophy itself, in which binary concepts and absolutist accounts of knowledge have come under so much criticism since the turn away from positivism (a trend that has occurred in both the analytic and continental traditions). One good way to illuminate his relationship to this internal Western critique is to look at Mignolo's changed relationship to the tradition of hermeneutics.

Within the debates of Western epistemology, hermeneutics, as the science of interpretation that focuses on understanding rather than mere propositional knowledge, is often portrayed as the other of epistemology, its more expansive sibling, or its gentler, kinder face. Because hermeneutics recognizes the interpretive step involved in all understanding, thus making it possible to pluralize meaning, many see hermeneutics as less prone to imperialism than epistemology proper. For epistemology in the Cartesian tradition, to note the role of the situation of the knower is to submit to relativism, and to acknowledge the ubiquity of interpretive frames would be to invite skepticism. Knowledge is either imperial or it does not exist. For hermeneutics, by contrast, the situated-ness of knowers, what Gadamer calls "prejudgement" and Heidegger calls "foreknowledge," that works to situate both knower and known in time and space, is a precondition of knowledge and not the sign of its demise. Just as Hegel showed that "here" and "now" cannot be elucidated outside of a context, so hermeneutics argues that knowledge is not intelligible outside of a tradition.

Much of Mignolo's critique of epistemology concerns its inability to acknowledge its location, the undeniable fact of its local history. Epistemology's

hegemonic effects are tied to its denial of its own spatial locality. Western epistemology systematically delocalized knowledge, Mignolo argues (2000b, 22, 41). So one might reasonably wonder why Mignolo rejects hermeneutics as vigorously as he rejects epistemology, given hermeneutic's acknowledgement of the local foundation of all truth.

The reason is because Mignolo sees hermeneutics (at least in his more recent work) as the corollary of epistemology, not its true other. Epistemology's proper focus is scientific knowledge; hermeneutics' proper focus is meaning and understanding. Both domains, however, are represented without the colonial difference. The question of what is meaningful or intelligible, in other words, is no less subject to colonial representations than the question of what is true (9). Both are judged within a European frame of reference. At one point Mignolo was adopting the phrase "pluritopic hermeneutics," following Raimundo Panikkar, to signify the way in which a hermeneutic approach might be cured of its Eurocentrism and provide a real alternative to monological and imperial unified standards of reference. Pluritopic hermeneutics, as opposed to the usual monotopic hermeneutics one finds in Gadamer, Heidegger, and the European tradition generally, does not assume there exists one single unified historical culture with which new meanings must be "fused," to use Gadamer's term. Rather, pluritopic hermeneutics assumes no central frame or unified tradition at all and thus opens up the determination of meaning to multiple possibilities even within the same historical horizon.

However, Mignolo has recently backed off from using the concept of pluritopic hermeneutics as a positive alternative. His adoption of pluritopic hermeneutics was aligned with the project of colonial semiosis, which aimed to effect a rerepresentation of the colonized other to free it from the hegemonic terms of Eurocentric conceptual imagery. That is, colonial semiosis is a way of revealing the multiple realities covered over by colonial systems of meaning. The point is not simply to reveal multiplicity, but to reveal the lines of tension and conflict, or the points of contradiction, between colonizing and colonized spaces. Thus, he explained, "colonial semiosis require[d] a pluritopic hermeneutics since in the conflict, in the cracks and fissures where the conflict originates, a description of one side of the epistemological

divide won't do" (17). We need to be able to see multiple sign systems at work, and under negotiation and contestation, in any given field of meaning.

But now, Mignolo claims that both epistemology and hermeneutics, whether monotopic or pluritopic, need to be transcended since they have both presupposed a subject-object distinction, with epistemology focused on the de-subjectified object and hermeneutics focused on the non-objective subject. He explains that

> "Border thinking" is the notion that I am introducing now with the intention of transcending hermeneutics and epistemology and the corresponding distinction between the knower and the known. . . . To describe "in reality" both sides of the border [which, I take it, he understands a pluritopic hermeneutics to be attempting to do] is not the problem. The problem is to do it from its exteriority. . . . The goal is to erase the distinction between knower and known, between a "hybrid" object (the borderland as the known) and a "pure" disciplinary or interdisciplinary subject (the knower), uncontaminated by the border matters he or she describes. To change the terms of the conversation it is necessary to overcome the distinction between subject and object, on the one hand, and between epistemology and hermeneutics on the other.[2] (18)

I think he is making two points here. The first is that, although the interpretive reflexivity of hermeneutics might allow one to represent "both sides" (that is, colonizer and colonized) by bringing in the spatial location of meaning, this is not a sufficient corrective, or even the best way to articulate the goal, because it leaves unanalyzed the formation of the representational divide itself. We need to take a further step back to reach the level of exteriority where representations are made possible in the first place. It is not enough to *acknowledge* the interpretive frame if that frame itself is not theorized in relation to coloniality and its construction of the colonial difference. His second point is that hermeneutics is still implicated in the ontological bifurcation of subject and object presupposed by epistemology. This unmediated approach blocks our ability to critique the mediations by which objects are constructed, and then known.

I remain unconvinced that hermeneutics presupposes an unmediated subject-object opposition, because it comes precisely out of a Hegelian rejection of such dualism, and because the concept of horizon works effectively to show that neither understanding nor truth can be accounted for if we accept such bifurcations. In general, Mignolo is often operating with what appears as an overly simplified account of Western philosophical positions, although simplifications are understandable and arguably even necessary to try to think at the very broad level of coloniality. And moreover, for those (like me, at least occasionally) who want to remind Mignolo and others of the complexity of the Western epistemological tradition, we would still be rightfully called to account for the uniform way in which that very complex tradition effects a simplification and repudiation of non-Western thought. That is, if Western epistemology is truly complex, as it would certainly seem if one sets Putnam or Quine or Brandom against Frege or Russell or Popper, then how does one explain the lack of complexity in the way in which most Western philosophers attend to the thought that originates from feminists or any of those outside the West? Western epistemology's internal complexity is somehow able to coexist with a uniform resistance to engaging with the implications of the fact that its own historical genealogy precisely maps onto the period of European colonialism. For this reason I believe we should consider seriously Mignolo's insistent claim in recent years that paradigms originating in the West do not need to be "expanded" or "pluralized" but more robustly transcended.

In some respects Mignolo suggests that the cause of the problem is less in content than in goal. The target of his critique is rarely the content of specific epistemological positions or theories but rather of their imperial assumptions and scope of application. The philosophy of science, for example, never presents itself as the philosophy of Western science, but as the philosophy of science *tout court*. This leads me to the last aspect of Mignolo's critique of epistemology I want to discuss before turning to the constructive project: his argument with social science. Mignolo takes issue with Immanuel Wallerstein's idea that the social sciences need to be "opened up," arguing that instead of being opened up, they need to be superceded. Wallerstein wants to open up the social sciences to a more planetary enterprise, to transcend

the segregated model of area studies in favor of a unified domain of inquiry. Thus he wants to expand their scope and range of reference as a way to correct for Anglo- and Eurocentrism. The problem with this plan, Mignolo suggests, citing Orlando Fals-Borda, Vine Deloria, and others to support him, is that "opening is not the same as decolonizing" (2000a, 80). The project of opening up without decolonizing runs the risk of simply furthering colonial expansion if the methodology remains "dependent on the epistemology of North Atlantic modernity—the norms of the disciplines and the problems of the North Atlantic" (80), that is, on the conceptual imagery of colonial epistemologies.

For Mignolo, the basic problem is that the systems of knowing and representing that developed in European modernity were constituted by and within the coloniality of power. Thus, Mignolo has moved further and further afield of traditional Western philosophical concepts in his attempt to disentangle his approach to knowledge from the snares of colonizing assumptions. For this, as the recent critical discussion in *South Atlantic Quarterly* indicates, he is losing some of his postmodern allies. Postmodernists, however radical their critiques, are rarely in the business of reconstructing epistemic norms, a project that in the next section I will argue has engaged Mignolo.

II. Reconstruction

The concepts just discussed—coloniality of power, the colonial difference, and colonial semiosis—can be thought of as conceptual tools for decolonizing both the metaphysics and epistemology—what there is and what we know—of contemporary thought. They also provide a lexicon for methodologies in the social sciences and humanities. Clearly, Mignolo has taken up and developed these concepts as a way to aid in the reassessment and rearticulation of temporal grand metanarratives, as well as to assist in more local projects of analysis, such as assessments of indigenous movements in particular places. Still, these concepts are born out of a foundation of critique: a critical analysis of the ways in which colonialism still infects the way the world is viewed.

I want next to consider in a more general way what the normative epistemic lessons might be of this work, and in particular, the concept Mignolo develops as a successor to both epistemology and hermeneutics: border thinking, or more properly, border gnosis. This concept, as Mignolo develops it, is not aimed so much at the usual normative epistemic concerns about justification and belief formation, but rather at the way in which knowledge is normatively defined in reference to its other(s).

The idea of border thinking is to specify the locality of subaltern knowledge as a *border* location rather than simply the beyond of Western knowledge or the site of pure difference. Situating knowledge and knowers in a local nonfungible context is revolutionary in itself, going against what Mignolo refers to as "the 'normal' procedure in modern epistemology to delocalize concepts and detach them from their local histories" (2000b, 41). Logic, procedures of justification, and the whole range of epistemic virtues are still generally presented as having universal reach.[3]

Mignolo's idea of border thinking can be distinguished from a theory of situated knowing, such as Donna Haraway or Lorraine Code have developed, which argues that specifically situated knowers are not interchangeable, because the idea of border thinking is a theory about the epistemic resources that accompany a very specific site rather than about the limitations that accrue to every site (in this sense, it is closer to Sandra Harding's standpoint theory). The idea of the border has become an overly used trope with vague and overly broad references, but Mignolo means something very specific having to do with epistemic rupture: "By 'border thinking' I mean the moments in which the imaginary of the modern world system cracks"(2000b, 23). Border knowledges are thus those that emerged from the encounter itself, not simply from a local context of any sort. For Mignolo, the concept of the border is meant to signify that the locality of subaltern knowing, far from simply being "the other side" of Western knowing, has a border-like quality, near the West, but not of it entirely, making it reminiscent of Du Bois's double consciousness and Leopoldo Zea's double reality. Positioned at the fissure or fault-lines of Western hegemony, border thinking already knows from the start the inherent incoherence of the Western knowledge system, the fact that it is not a true universal. Mignolo says, "'Border thinking' is still within

the imaginary of the modern world system, but [it has] been repressed" (23). This location both within and outside confers on it a hybrid, doubled positionality with a capacity for critique in both directions.

That doubled positionality is key to the border's epistemic resources. If the subaltern simply champions what the West has disparaged, there is a risk that what is being championed is a Western construct, represented through the concepts and imaginary of the colonial world. Yet border thinking is a "double critique" that implies an ability "to think from both traditions and, at the same time, from neither of them" (2000b, 67). If border thinking is what has been repressed from the imaginary of the colonial world-system, then decolonization should not be understood as a move into an entirely different space but as a transformation "of the rigidity of epistemic and territorial *frontiers* established and controlled by the coloniality of power" (12). Part of the project involves revealing the hybrid character of so-called Western knowledge itself, not in the sense of an internal debate but more in the sense that Le Doeuff has argued, that there is a keen rhetorical attentiveness and mythic content even within the principal domains of logocentrism. Thus border thinking implies a dissolution of borders or at least a transformation of how and where they are identified, rather than border control or an approach that would try to accommodate both sides in a plural hermeneutic.

The goal of border thinking is de-subalternizing knowledge itself. This requires getting at the mechanisms by which knowledges are constructed as non-knowledges and non-knowledges are constructed as absolute. Here is where the concepts of gnosis and gnoseology come in. Gnosis is "a term that would take us away from the confrontation—in Western epistemology, between epistemology and hermeneutics, between nomothetic and ideographic 'sciences'—and open up the notion of 'knowledge' beyond cultures of scholarship" (Mignolo 2000b, 9). The contrast between the nomothetic and the ideographic is the contrast between alphabetic and pictorial based representation, between law-based and exemplar-governed forms of communication, a contrast that played a central role in determining which cultures had "writing" and which were deemed preliterate, and thus, uncivilized. In reviving the concept of gnoseology, Mignolo does not intend to signify anything having to do with the heterodox Christian Gnostic movement, although he

does probably enjoy invoking the association of gnosis with heresy. Rather, the concept of gnosis at work in his account is that more general concept that the Gnostics themselves made use of, which involves a more inclusive concept of knowledge that incorporates both doxa and episteme, both established and unconventional knowledges, both systematic and informal, and for Mignolo, both dominant and subjugated.

The Greeks defined the project of epistemology through a splitting of doxa (opinion or mere belief) from episteme (justified belief). Epistemology then became the theory not of all belief or even of all that is considered knowledge (what Foucault calls "what passes for truth"), but only of that subset that can pass the test of justification. But this test is itself constructed by epistemology, leading to a circularity of reasoning that preempted the possibility of having an outside critique of epistemology from the sophists, the rhetoricians, or any discourse defined as outside of the domain of knowledge proper or justified belief. The sophists, of course, did not see themselves as not being concerned with knowledge; they simply had a different idea about what knowledge was, an idea that indexed it to a specific context of public disputation in a given time and place. Their contextualized account of truth—that truth is determined as the outcome of a public debate—emphasized human practice over reference to a transcendent real, and resembles not only contemporary consensus and pragmatist theories of truth, but also some versions of coherence theories. Nonetheless, this account of truth was not recognized by Plato or his followers as an alternative theory about the procedure and criterion of truth, but was instead misrepresented as interested only in persuasion and thus doxa or mere opinion. The Sophistic approach, as one might imagine, had its own analysis of Plato's theory, emphasizing its rhetorical maneuvers, its conceptual imagery, what we might today call the unconscious of the text, all of which Plato's rigid demarcations between episteme and doxa rendered irrelevant to consider.

In reviving the concept of gnosis and gnoseology, Mignolo intends to avoid being committed to any given side of this debate, and thus to begin from a more expansive account of what knowledge might include. By incorporating rather than rejecting these various traditions of thinking about what knowledge is, gnosis, as he uses the term, includes the possibility of pictographic,

mimetic, and other forms of knowing—to include all the epistemes, for example, that Foucault describes in *The Order of Things* without one superceding, or sublating, the others (1970). The point of this is not to ignore incoherence or contradiction among all these diverse styles of reasoning, but to avoid epistemology's circularity of reasoning by which it defines its own current doxa about justification as the only legitimate practice, which thus works to render it immune from external critique and unmotivated toward dialogue. Gnoseology has no a priori commitments to placing the borders of knowledge in any given way, thus it can more readily incorporate an analysis of specific borders, as well as the presumptive preference for borders. Border thinking is a play on two concepts: the concept of thinking from the border and thinking about the border.

The fact that gnosis is broader than knowledge, and gnoseology is broader than epistemology, also has the significant effect of altering the locus of enunciation or the type of enunciatory space from which knowing can be imagined to emerge. Think here of the knowledge of midwives—excluded from having the status of justification because its manner of development was oral rather than written, among illiterate women rather than learned men, and often based in personal and shared experience rather than experimental technique (Dalmiya and Alcoff 1993). Practical, first-person, experientially based knowledges of all sorts were discredited in the modern period within the West, in favor of propositional knowledge that could be rendered fully in linguistic form. Is it a coincidence that the practical knowledge that Aristotle considered legitimate became forgotten in modern epistemology in the era of colonial expansion, and that Western scientific techniques alone became the paradigm of knowing? When the Enlightenment critique of scholasticism effectively circumvented one form of epistemological authoritarianism, another form of authoritarianism had to replace it or else the colonial masters would have no claim to epistemic supremacy.

Mignolo develops two more ways to contrast border gnosis from contemporary epistemology relevant to this "forgetting" of practical knowledge. The first involves a contrast between denotative (or roughly, representational) and enactive (or practical) epistemology, and the second involves a contrast between territorial and border epistemologies. Border thinking, as

Mignolo develops it, does not have a denotative or representational aim. It is not focused on an object domain that it wants to "get right," but on an epistemic field of operations that it wants to transform. It is also not staking out a territory (such as the territory of justified true belief) so much as it is transforming and complexifying the possibilities of spatialization and evaluation across differences. The overall effect of this is something like taking a practical knowledge approach to epistemology itself, with a concern for the who and the how as much as for the what.

III. Conclusion

I find these new conceptual approaches very suggestive. In terms of their normative implications for the doing of epistemology, Mignolo is helpfully moving us away from the transcendental, imperial, universal formulation of the project of epistemology. He argues that we need to enlarge the scope of what epistemology considers, to make it inclusive of both doxa and episteme, and to destabilize the epistemic weight of these rigid and weighted distinctions. This has the potential to provide a more rigorous, less circular and flawed, approach to judgment, and it also expands the domain of issues with which epistemologists should concern ourselves, such as the locus of enunciation. The project of gnoseology amounts to introducing the idea of situated epistemologies, it strikes me, thus going beyond Haraway's idea of situated knowing to the possibility of localized accounts of best epistemic practices. Mignolo argues in favor of this meta-approach by thinking through the conditions of the locality of colonial space and in relation to subaltern subjectivity. He wants to render the doubled sense of reality that Zea saw only as a veil or problem as instead an epistemic resource for both imagining multiplicity as well as invigorating critique.

But I would press Mignolo on two points. The first concerns his notion of truth. Mignolo rejects the project of reclaiming epistemology and advocates for the shift to gnoseology, because he sees epistemology as fundamentally a project that is pursuant of truth, and because he sees truth as necessarily imperial, territorial, and denotative. But it is difficult to interpret Mignolo's own project in any way other than as a project concerned with truth and with

the way in which the colonial systems of knowing inhibited and precluded both the understanding and the identification of truth. The denotative approach might have limited application to the shift he has in mind, but there is still an epistemically based normative distinction operating in his critique of the coloniality of power.

Take for example Mignolo's use of Glissant's concept of diversality, a concept he contrasts to universality but also to plurality in which alternatives are not in active integration or interaction. Diversality maps differences as coconstitutive and as potentially integrated, in the way that a bicultural identity can shift between multiple frames of reference without collapsing the differences but also without organizing them into hierarchies. As opposed to imperial resolutions, Glissant wants to maintain the fundamental ambiguity of colonial identity, that doubled reality that is alive to more than one "here and now." This is not merely an ethically or politically motivated alternative to universality, I want to suggest, but a metaphysically motivated one. It is an alternative model for conceptualizing subjectivity and knowledge that might make sense of the existence of many worlds as well as to make visible their interrelationality and connectedness. This surely has political advantages, but it also can make possible an advance in descriptive adequacy for pluritopic horizons.

Thus I would contest Mignolo's claim that truth is out of the picture. And I would argue against the shift from epistemology to gnoseology (rather than redefining epistemology) if it is mainly motivated by a desire to dispense with truth. However, what is important here is not the word we use for the project so much as retaining the normative epistemic content to the project of critique and reconstruction that Mignolo and other postcolonialists want to pursue. If gnoseology can retain the critical and normative dimensions that aim to improve our understanding of truth, as well as the more inclusive aims in regard to forms of knowing, then I am on board.

I think there is a similar issue with regard to Mignolo's treatment of identity and difference, and which relates to the question I raised earlier concerning the metaphysical status of the colonial difference. On the one hand, Mignolo resists the reification of difference and thus emphasizes how difference is constituted by coloniality. This could lead a reader to imagine

that for Mignolo, difference a mere epiphenomenon of coloniality. But this is not his view. The colonial difference is for him a source of critical knowledge because its *content* conflicts with dominant knowledges. Thus, difference is constituted only in part by colonialism: its value and meaning is interpretively constitutued by colonialism, but this is not all there is to the colonial difference. In other words, it has metaphysical status.

Mignolo's ambivalence about making this explicit is related to his ambivalence about identity. On the one hand he shies away from identity politics, but then again he articulates a form of it when he makes such claims as "for those whom colonial legacies are real (i.e. they hurt), that they are more (logically, historically, and emotionally) inclined than others to theorize the past in terms of coloniality" (2000b, 115). The concepts of identity and of identity politics are also assumed in the ongoing project that he defines as "shifting the geography of reason," that is, both to motivate the shift and demarcate its direction. So I would like to see Mignolo work through more precisely and clearly how he is understanding the concepts of truth and of identity.

Let me end with a point that underscores the significance of Mignolo's overall project. The discourse of national independence in Latin America, much more so than of African liberation discourses, was marked in no small measure by its acceptance of a Eurocentric frame. Leading thinkers such as Sarmiento and Alberdi did not contest the modernist macro-narrative except to the extent it excluded them. The significance of Mignolo's work, for me, is the extent of his commitment to contest the status of Eurocentric metanarratives and refuse the gambit that might work for white male elites in Latin America but not for anyone else. In attempting to think beyond the house of modernity, Mignolo has truly built a house of many rooms.

N O T E S

1. And this is true even though he was developing his account of power-knowledge in the very same period as the lectures on race. In these lectures, race is the locus of operation for bio-power, it is the target or frame around which bio-power develops, but it is not a category that organizes knowledge.

2. I would note that this is a much more sophisticated epistemology than Scott Michaelson and Scott Cutler Shershow give him credit for in their recent critique (2007). By their account, he erects a new metaphysically essentialist binary between Europe and its colonies and he romanticizes Amerindian cultures. However, as this passage makes clear, Mignolo's account of what the colonial difference involves rejects transparent representations of the other.

3. This essentially positivist approach to knowledge has been effectively critiqued within both analytic and continental epistemologies, as Quine and Kuhn demonstrated the paradigm- or theory-specific nature of observation and the phenomenological and deconstructive movements also targeted the transcendental pretensions of Western thought. Nonetheless, none of these movements against positivism were reflexive about the colonial context of the west or the way in which this particular context may have impacted the development of a paradigm of context-free knowledge.

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