Article

The Decolonial Imperative: a Postcolonial Critique*

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ABSTRACT

The imperative to decolonize has now taken several disciplines by storm. For many, postcolonial approaches are the foil of the call to decolonize, presented as tainted by coloniality and as having a reduced to non-existent liberating potential. This essay highlights critiques of the Latin American decolonial project, including decoloniality as an academic power struggle that leads to self-progression and enrichment of Global North academics and institutions, lack of self-awareness of its own entanglements in coloniality, and forms of intellectual fundamentalism and policing of thought under claims of virtuosity. The essay closes by pointing out that the decolonial project also complements the current and ongoing corporatization of universities.

Keywords: *Decoloniality, Postcolonial approaches, Intellectual fundamentalism.*

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In recent times, decolonial theory has taken the status of a cult, almost a religious sect, with its devotees and charismatic high priests who speak with self-granted authority based on an unsubtle anti-europeanism.

(BROWIT, 2014, p. 42)[1]

Decoloniality and the imperative to decolonize have now taken several disciplines by storm. There are calls to decolonize Geography, Tourism, Medieval Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, among several more fields of thought.[2] In Geography, for instance, Tariq Jazeel (2017, p. 334) describes the recent UK International conference of the field on Decolonising Geography as an "imperative-made-conference-theme". With that conference, the coloniality of geographical knowledge production was identified as "every geographer's problem" – now "geography's decolonial imperative" and thinking about the "inconvenient truth of coloniality" is the collective task of all members of the field (JAZEEL, 2017, p. 334).[3]

For many, the foil of the call to decolonize is postcolonial approaches, presented as tainted by coloniality and as having a reduced to non-existent liberating potential.[4] In this division, postcolonial approaches are presented as a field that tackles the aftermath of colonization without transcending it. Decoloniality deals, instead, with material that is unknown, and has been marginalized and kept untainted by western thinking. Although decolonial thought is allegedly not anti-European, it presents delinking from western/westernized thought as a main goal. As Walter Mignolo (2007, p. 452) explains, the "programmatic of de-coloniality moves away and beyond the post-colonial" and the decolonial turn "is a project of de-linking while post-colonial criticism and theory is a project of scholarly transformation within the academy". Postcolonial approaches allegedly impede delinking from coloniality because of their intellectual origins, while decolonial thought succeeds because it "starts from other sources" (MIGNOLO, 2007, p. 452). As Ramón Grosfoguel (2007) explains, the Latin Americanists who took the side of an epistemic decolonial turn considered it essential to transcend the western canon of thought in order to critique Eurocentrism from subalternized and silenced knowledges. While postcolonial studies were recognized as a critique of modernity from the Global South, the decolonial project saw the need "to decolonize" postcolonial studies. Tariq Jazeel exemplifies before this severance and the placing of postcolonial studies as a foil for the decolonial turn. Jazeel (2017) notes that the conversation between postcolonial theory and decolonial scholarship is "antagonistic," and siding with Mignolo, asserts that decoloniality is a project of delinking that looks outside the academy for the "decolonization of theoretical modernity" and searches for what was "obscured by Eurocentric rationality;" while postcoloniality is only a project of scholarly transformation within the academy.

[1] En tiempos recientes la teoría decolonial ha asumido el estatus de un culto, casi una secta religiosa, con sus devotos y sumos sacerdotes carismáticos que hablan con una autoridad auto-otorgada basada en un antieuropeísmo sin matices."

[2] See, among others, Finex Ndhlovu (2016) for diaspora studies, Sara C. Motta (2017) for political science, Ester Massó Guijarro (2016) for heritage studies, Sandra Harding (2016) in social studies, Zeynep Gulsah Capan (2017) for International Relations, Martin Savransky (2017) in sociology, Robert Aman (2017) in Education, and Gurminder Bhambra (2014).

[3] Consider, in this regard, the April 2018 issue of National Geographic (2018) on Race.

[4] With critical theory as another foil to decoloniality, in 2007, Scott Michaelsen and Scott Cutler Shershow (2007) zoom into the intellectual contradictions of Mignolo's rejection of critical theory and deconstruction.

In the last five years, however, we can also find some critiques of the decolonial turn. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui seems to have inaugurated this possibility in 2010 with the booklet *Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: una reflexión sobre prácticas y discursos descolonizadores*. In 2013, Kiran Asher produced a particularly coherent critique of the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality collective for *Geography Compass*, and the sigla MCD (modernity/coloniality/decoloniality) for the project associated with Walter Mignolo, Aníbal Quijano, and their inner group. In 2013, Ramón Grosfoguel broke ranks with the MCD and gave a scathing interview in *Metapolítica* of what he called a loose network (GROSFOGUEL, 2013, 2016).[5] In Spanish, Jeff Browitt published a trenching rejection of the MCD project in 2014, and María Ximena Postigo (2015) did the same in 2015.

I will start this essay by highlighting these and other critiques of the MCD project. As proposed here, the few critical views leveled at the MCD need to be amplified and circulated to recognize some of decoloniality's main problems, especially as this epistemic turn becomes an imperative and engulfs new fields. These problems include decoloniality as an academic power struggle that leads to self-progression and enrichment of Global North academics and institutions, lack of self-awareness of its own entanglements in coloniality, and forms of intellectual fundamentalism and policing of thought under claims of virtuosity.

After these critiques to the MCD, I will point out that the decolonial project also complements the corporatization of universities. Decoloniality can provide well-meaning solutions that allow us scholars to feel ethical, while working along the ongoing corporate takeover and dismantling of universities as centers for critical thought.

Decolonial Self-Awareness

A classical decolonial idea is that of locus of enunciation: "the geo-political and body-political location of the subject that speaks" (GROSFOGUEL, 2007, p. 213). Locus of enunciation or positionality means that although a subject might be socially located "in the oppressed side of power relations," being on that side does not mean this subject is necessarily thinking "from a subaltern epistemic location" (GROSFOGUEL, 2007, p. 213). In addition to locus of enunciation or positionality, the inner circle of decolonial thought also asserts the special category of the Latin American scholar as a marginal figure within the western academy.[6] Thus, Latin American body-political identity gives the decolonial scholar a better geo-political locus of enunciation from which to identify fault lines that are not sufficiently visible to dominant counterparts.

However marginal in western academy and society, and however much epistemically subaltern, a Latin American decolonial scholar cannot evade socio-economic location through choice of locus of enunciation.[7] A similar critique against a self-identified marginal identity and an assumed subaltern positionality was aimed at postcolonial theorists,

[5] Following Rivera Cusicanqui, Grosfoguel (2013, p. 42) accounts for some of the fissures and provides a most acerbic internal critique of the MCD, especially in regards of Walter Mignolo and Aníbal Quijano. Grosfoguel states that there is no decolonial group but recognizes that he might have contributed to the creation of the image of a group. From the outside, there is a visible acquiescence toward the dominant theoretical figures that amounts to a group instead of a weak network – hence the interviewer's question, which took its existence for granted.

[6] As such, Walter Mignolo is presented as an Argentine semiotician, Aníbal Quijano as a Peruvian sociologist, Santiago Castro-Gómez as a Colombian philosopher, Grosfoguel as a Puerto Rican, etc.

[7] I should note my preference for positionality to the essentialism of identity. Or to put it differently, I prefer to understand body-politics as a matter of lived experience, not as an essence or delineated identity.

who were accused of speaking from a position of privilege within their postcolonies, from the ivory tower of prestigious western institutions and, eventually, *for* instead of *with* the subaltern. That the same critique has so seldom been leveled at the Latin American decolonial theorists is a testament to their insistence on their own non-metropolitan identity, as well as, perhaps, the vague notion found in the Global North that we are all a little racially mixed in the vast territories of the former Spanish and Portuguese Americas.[8]

Together with a rejection of postcolonial approaches as tainted by the west, the MCD has shown a marked lack of recognition of its own coloniality. As Kiran Asher (2013) underscores, this project refuses to engage with postcolonial theories on the grounds that these theories come from metropolitan institutions of higher learning without flinching at the fact that much of MCD thinking also comes from hegemonic and western/westernized universities. Willingness to see the colonial in ourselves, the acceptance that we all carry colonial formations within us, and by extension, that we cannot move forward without taking that "colonial taint" into account, has instead been a powerful intellectual tool within postcolonial approaches.

Settler postcolonial studies was a case in point, and I will bring forth an anecdote from the time I was striving to understand the meaning of Euro-American creoles working on medieval Spanish texts around Latin American Independence (ALTSCHUL, 2012). During one of three presentations I heard by a main member of the MCD, this scholar mentioned that someone with non-Iberian ancestry, whose immigrant family arrived in the area only after the late nineteenth century, was not incriminated in the genocide and expropriations that defined Spanish colonization in the Americas. However mangled my recollection, this Q&A comment clarified that the decolonial project, in its Latin American incarnation, did not have an answer to the riddles I was trying to solve. The discourse of innocence and distance was part of a typical Latin American justification, and if one followed its connotations, only Spaniards were implicated in the aftereffects of Spanish colonization. In regards to my project, it provided no avenues for explaining the fact that an independence cultural hero had dedicated decades of study to the national epic of Spain. Moreover, the idea of exonerating post-independence South Americans from colonialism was both patently incorrect and merely continued an unsatisfactory intellectual status quo regarding Euro-Latin Americans.

As noted, the way out of that intellectual status quo was settler postcolonial studies.[9] I detailed elsewhere how, at that time, Latin American Studies had no theoretical solution to the postcolonial situation of Euro-American creoles.[10] Decolonial approaches rejected the study of creoles as ethically problematic and had agreed to reject postcolonial studies in full because they allegedly did not match the specific situation of Spanish and Portuguese America.[11] In terms of decoloniality, MCD

[8] As stated by Browitt (2014, p. 36), "the question of the location from which one speaks cannot be conveniently forgotten simple because one feels like a 'barbarous' latinamerican . . . Epistemological accountability does not cease because one is an immigrant intellectual" ["la cuestión del lugar desde el que uno habla no puede ser convenientemente olvidada solo porque uno se sienta un 'bárbaro' latinoamericano . . . . La rendición de cuentas epistemológicas (*epistemological accountability*) no cesa porque se sea un intelectual inmigrante"].

[9] This is a realization I have not sufficiently acknowledged to my colleague Louise D'Arcens. The first time I was able to make sense of this conundrum was through an informal conversation with her, when replying to my query about how Australian scholars understood local medievalisms, she answered matter of factly that it was the purview of settler postcolonial studies.

[10] See my introduction to *Geographies of Philological Knowledge* (ALTSCHUL, 2012).

[11] As such, another significant interaction was a long conversation where my interlocutor doubted the value that the topic I was working on could have: what good could come from studying something as regressive as Euro-American's engagements with medieval Spain?

theorists positioning themselves as marginal Latin Americans did not have to consider their own location in the indigenous-settler-colonial gamut within Euro-America, nor contemplate questions of Euro-American settler colonialism. This is ironic because settler colonialism is part of the postcolonial critique belittled by MCD theorists, while Euro-Americans count as settler colonists in the Americas. One of the core points of settler postcolonial studies is that settlers are both colonizing and colonized: colonizing towards the earlier inhabitants from whom we take the mantle of new natives (we are now Argentinian or Colombian or Puerto Rican), and colonized and marginal vis-à-vis the European metropole. Settler postcolonial studies are, therefore, a tool that makes apparent the links in global coloniality that integrate Latin America to other settler colonies, while it also forces the Latin American scholar – off-white, "mestizo" or immigrant-born – to contemplate our own unsavory position within colonialism.

Logic of extraction

Another central critique to the MCD project has been the logic of extraction that drives decolonial approaches in search of untapped subaltern epistemologies. Decolonial approaches identify thought that is not known to, or had not been taken into account by, westerners, but that the west is now interested in having either within or without the academy. In terms of directionality, western decolonial thinkers need non-western thought more than non-western thinkers need decolonial academics. A main critique of decolonial approaches is, thus, precisely that it is the west that needs renewal, that has exhausted itself of alternatives, and now searches in the non-west for what will come to its rescue, or what again will offer riches for the profit of its educational institutions and tuition paying students. In terms of exchange and leveling of the playing field, decoloniality does not clarify what the non-west gains besides recognition in the global centers of prestige, and mobility for those identified as the experts in now valuable non-western alternative knowledge and epistemologies.[12] In addition, the logic of heroic rescuing of invisibilized thought, and the logic of discovery of a "new world" of epistemes, should not easily be accepted as an ethical example by those of us working on understanding the durations of coloniality.

Among core MCD theorists, the logic of extraction was discussed in 2007 by Castro-Gómez writing on nature and biodiversity. In 2012, it was forcefully put forward by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's incisive critique of the MCD. In 2016, Ramón Grosfoguel discussed this logic by way of a Canadian Indigenous thinker instead of Castro-Gómez (2007), and identified this extractive logic as part of the MCD and the work of Mignolo in particular (GROSFOGUEL, 2016). Grosfoguel noted how epistemic extractionism loots ideas and either marketizes them and transforms them into economic capital or appropriates them within the machine of western academia in order to gain symbolic capital (GROSFOGUEL,

[12] Noxolo (2017, p. 343), for instance, asserts that it was the decolonial theory produced by expat settlers from Latin America that "fed directly into governmental policy" such as Bolivia's *vivir bien*. The idea that Latin America needed Global North decolonial expats to produce and teach local alternatives to capitalism and consumerism should count as a colonialist travesty.

2016). As Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) reproached Aníbal Quijano and Walter Mignolo in particular, Grosfoguel (2012, 2016) charged Quijano of taking ideas from Global South thinkers without acknowledgment; and charged Mignolo with apropriating Global South ideas to acquire personal capital in the academy. Mignolo's case is identified as the most "perverse" because his colonialist extractivism is done in the name of "epistemic decolonization" (GROSFOGUEL, 2016, p. 136, my translation). Whether extracted to be marketized or transformed into symbolic capital, in both cases the radical and political edge of ideas is dulled – i.e., ideas are made available for consumption in the neoliberal academy, ineffective for the creation of a level playing field, and/or used for compensatory needs (GROSFOGUEL, 2016).

As noted, the extracted knowledges that decolonial approaches find worthy are those considered to have maintained non-western thought alive. As uncontaminated and living sources of non-western thought, however, non-western thinkers are approximated as living relics of the past in what Rivera Cusicanqui associates with Johannes Fabian's denial of coevalness. As Browitt (2014) also notes, Mignolo's proposition regarding indigenous knowledges presents these as if they were pristine and frozen in time – a "naïve and condescending" representation in which indigenous peoples have not changed and where indigenous cultures are considered "just" merely because they are non-European. Tellingly, this is also a variant of settler postcolonialist projections regarding the authenticity of indigenous inhabitants. For settlers, during times of political independence, indigenous populations were considered tainted by western culture and, therefore, not native enough to be the true owners of the lands taken from their ancestors. Reversing the valuation, the MCD now also projects and institutes its own views on the unstained or unadulterated indigeneity of Global South populations. Decolonial approaches take the mantle of virtuous behavior because of their appreciation and discovery of subalternized knowledge regardless of the reasons academia might have for doing so, or its not-so-ethical aftereffects.

Friends and enemies

Despite attempts to break from binary thinking, decoloniality uses a recognizable "us-versus-them" mentality. As such, it is openly based on the notion that "all knowledges are epistemically located in the dominant or the subaltern side of the power relations" (GROSFOGUEL, 2007, p. 213-214). Based on this binary structure, it separates according to sides: either a thinker speaks from a location of decoloniality that counts as friendly thought or a thinker speaks from a dominant location and produces antagonistic or tainted-by-coloniality thought. It is MCD theorists who judge what thought is on what side of the epistemic line. One of the main risks of engaging uncritically with the MCD is, therefore, no less than resuscitating old binaries and even simple reversals (ASHER,

2013). As Asher (2013) also highlights, it is MCD scholars themselves who classify "whose work contributes to decolonial thinking and whose is to be rejected on the basis that it [is] tainted by modernity." (ASHER, 2013, p. 839). Jeff Browitt (2014, p. 27, my translation) likewise notes that the main decolonialists are eager to propose a "'colonial difference' that avoids dualisms," but perform in practice a "static and reductive interpretation" based on fixed binaries such as Europe/not Europe, and modernity/the other to modernity.

Although, in principle, what is in tune with subalternity or with dominant positions could be particular ideas instead of particular thinkers, MCD valuations of friendly or enemy thought can be noticeably *ad hominen*. It is not ideas regarding specific issues that are placed in one or another side of the subaltern-dominant border that the MCD patrols, but thinkers themselves become valuated as worthy of attention. Asher (2013, p. 839) points to this when she asks "why ignore Spivak and claim Gandhi?"; Grosfoguel (2013, p. 42-43) personally critiques Mignolo and Quijano as having a colonial attitude and defends Catherine Walsh against accusations of coloniality by Rivera Cusicanqui. Rivera Cusicanqui (2012, p. 101-102) herself highlights how one day you are "in" according to the MCD and on another day you are "out". The possibility of running afoul of this influential group, coupled with the gilded doors that inclusion could open, may explain to an important degree the very few published critiques to be found of the MCD project.

As hinted at before, the "us-versus-them" logic comes with extraordinary access to resources. The main MCD practitioners are, today, at the height of the university ladder, surrounded by the best libraries and research opportunities that money can buy. From there, the MCD collective dominates and floods the intellectual marketplace. This is not about productivity but republication. There is a point when readers are confronted with a successful marketing campaign and no longer an academic exchange of ideas. The amount of repetitious publications makes most scholars in the majority of world academia unable to carve enough research time to read and respond analytically, let alone access the full corpus. The need to read dozens of similar outputs in order to make sense of what are sometimes less than watertight propositions, stated nevertheless in dogmatic fashion, can quickly become a form of intellectual pounding. This is a peculiarity of the MCD, as not many academics work in similarly compact groups, state propositions in categorical ways, or republish ideas with slight increments for years of their academic life.

Self-referentiality is also a problematic peculiarity of the MCD. It creates an inner group that seems sufficient onto itself, sometimes regardless of the topic under discussion, and produces an echo chamber that elevates the standing of scholars who must be credited with having already discovered an intellectual territory. In this epistemic battle, and as references can be demands for a cut in the marketplace of ideas, the MCD

network can trample others, whether like-minded or not, unless they provide citation rent. An example of particular standing is, again, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012, p. 103), who describes how she was asked to cite Quijano and Mignolo for ideas she had developed through very different sources and before these scholars had themselves developed decolonial thinking. I suspect other scholars who have been peer-reviewed in de/postcolonial topics have had similar experiences. As my own anecdote, I was told by a book reviewer, who after two lengthy reports I believe was an MCD scholar, that I had not properly considered the oriental nature of Spain and matters pertaining to al-Andalus. I believe I was being pointed to *Rereading the Black Legend*, a collection highlighting how al-Andalus and Sefarad have become important areas for the MCD. My reply to the reviewer was an excessive footnote, produced in the discomfort that colleagues should be asked to privilege the work of particular groups, especially considering the century-long historiography on the topic of Iberia's orientalization.

The actions described in this heading amount to a form of intellectual combat, but they are also part of a logic of conversion. As the modern/colonial world-system was successful in creating coloniality, in swaying others to agree to the dominant colonial position, decoloniality strives to force a quasi-religious transformation and to create a world converted to speak from the side of subalternity. Critics consider, however, that the main objective of the quasi-religious transformation sought by the MCD is more likely to prevail in academic power struggles and to police thought than to produce true change. As underscored particularly by Rivera Cusicanqui (2012), the transformation of the world in practice, and even the true leveling of the playing field, is secondary to the MCD project. Asher (2013, p. 839-840) also notes that when the MCD parts waters between those who are untainted and those who are stained by modernity/coloniality, its main goal seems to be "patrolling theoretical and political borders" and "identity politics and nationalism within academia."[13]

A second critique to the quasi-religious transformation sought by the MCD is that it comes with a search for orthodoxy. As Browitt (2014) notes in the epigraph, decolonial theory has taken the mantle of a cult, with new converts and self-authorizing charismatic high priests. MCD pontification, stated in categorical language, functions as a demand for orthodox belief and practice, and embeds an expectation of conversion to decoloniality that will be judged successful or not by the same MCD inner group. Many readers may agree with the need to find alternatives to colonial thinking, neoliberalization and rampant capitalism, but that is not equal to following the decolonial project and its main artificers. As Asher (2013) had to clarify while offering a critique to decolonial orthodoxy, she was "not advocating an uncritical acceptance of *anything*" (ASHER, 2013, p. 840). As a long-term enthusiast of sci-fi and fantasy, I catch myself thinking in terms of dystopia. In this alternative orthodoxy-

[13] Browitt (2014, p. 38) considers that the motivation behind Mignolo's work is to show himself as an original thinker who produced a counter-theory to Eurocentrism ["Parece obvio . . . que lo que motiva a Mignolo es el deseo de presentarse como un pensador de alguna manera original que ha creado una contrateoría al pensamiento eurocéntrico"].

seeking world, everyone is checked for the adherence of their thought to the "subaltern" or the "dominant" epistemes as determined by the powers that be, and those deemed fully converted police others' positionalities and scrutinize true thoughts and intentions. Besides my active imagination, this not-so-futuristic vision is one reason why the discussion of fundamentalism by the decolonial collective, and decoloniality's lack of self-awareness of its own coloniality, is disquieting.

Decolonial fundamentalism and pluriversality

Decolonial thought identifies delinking as the way in which decoloniality escapes Eurocentric fundamentalism. Speaking of Eurocentrism and fundamentalism, Grosfoguel (2007) explains that what all fundamentalisms share is the premise that there is only one epistemic tradition from which Truth and Universality can be achieved. In contrast to fundamentalism, decolonial approaches propose a "pluriversal as oppose[d] to a universal world" (GROSFOGUEL, 2007, p. 212). Decolonial thinking allegedly transcends fundamentalism because its epistemic perspective requires "a broader canon of thought than simply the Western canon" (GROSFOGUEL, 2007, p. 212), i.e., decoloniality sees itself as non-fundamentalist because, by bringing non-western thought into the fold, it breaks the truth and universality of Eurocentric fundamentalism.

Despite this self-understanding, there are several contradictions within decolonial thought that cannot be isolated from fundamentalism. To begin with, according to decoloniality, the pluriversal project will achieve the goal of a "truly universal decolonial perspective" (GROSFOGUEL, 2007, p. 212). Mignolo (2007, p. 452-453) spends significant time explaining that "the destruction of the coloniality of global power" proposed by Quijano does not aim at producing a new concept of Totality that would be different from the modern one but equally totalitarian. As Mignolo (2007, p. 452-453) explains, Quijano is proposing a "none-totalitarian [sic] concepts of totality" similar to his own concept of "heterogeneous structural-histories" and *pluriversality as a universal project*." This last sentence is an example of the rabbit hole structure of much of MCD writing – fostering a quest for full understanding that despite straightforward grammatical clarity does not provide an end point but forces the reader deeper into further essays that will refer to additional concepts and earlier essays by the collective. According to Mignolo's explication of the non-totalitarian nature of pluriversality as a universal project, he states that the decolonial epistemic shift in fact "brings to the foreground other epistemologies" instead of totality (MIGNOLO, 2007, p. 453). So a model of thought that displays its non-fundamentalism by way of epistemic diversity seeks its own universality and stresses epistemic conversion. Noted at the start, decolonial thought has fostered a myriad of imperatives to decolonize – decolonizing has become urgent, it is everyone's present task.

One noteworthy example in terms of contradictions regarding the non-fundamentalist character of decoloniality is precisely "pluriversality" as the answer to fundamentalism based on epistemic diversity. Following Grosfoguel (2013, p. 45), pluriversality starts by taking into account thinking that is critical instead of just any thinking. I agree that not all thinking is of similar standing. The problem of pluriversality in regards of epistemic diversity, however, is the existence of a founding criterion to allow us to distinguish the thinking that is critical from the thinking that is any kind of thinking. This criterion is not based on internal consistency or on theoretical coherence but on whether that thinking already agrees with our positions. The allegedly pluriversal thinking of pluriversality has first to qualify: to be accepted in pluriversalism thinking must first be "anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-patriarchal, anti-eurocentrism [sic], anti-colonialism [sic]" (GROSFOGUEL, 2013, p. 45).[14] To exemplify this criterion, we can subvert Grosfoguel's earlier discussion of Marxism and religion and state that pluriversalism accepts the diversity of epistemic religious traditions but only so far as these traditions first agreed with the qualifying criterion that religion is the opium of the people. Without this initial consent, thinking would not qualify as critical for decoloniality's pluriverse. Let us clarify that this is not about whether we disagree with anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-patriarchal, anti-eurocentric and/or anti-colonialist thinking. But if we agree with epistemic diversity, we cannot start by restricting the range of acceptable thought and discourse, as if we already knew that everything that can be said from outside the borders of our given perspective should be denied existence. That fundamentalist impulse is the same regardless of what element is ascribed or denied value. Critical thinking does not thrive within pressures for intellectual submission or by limiting thought to someone else's specifications. When we envision a pluriverse that is built through our ability to divide friendly from enemy thought, and then reject what does not cater to our chosen worldview, we are working from within a fundamentalist logic.

Let us be clear again that the critique is about the impulse. Whether it is couched in the language of the Pluriverse or Universality or Truth, the impulse to dictate value from one's own core of power is not radically distinct. This impulse also allows the MCD's rejection of postcolonial studies because decoloniality speaks of expansion and inclusion but it is also a project that carved its academic space by disparaging the politics of intellectual contenders as insufficiently non-colonial and non-western. The rejection of postcolonial studies is not a theoretically coherent position of the MCD, but part of an academic power struggle where the stage had to be cleared of competitors. As identified by Browitt (2014, p. 27), the linking of postcolonial discourse with colonial thinking is based on "caricature" and "weak arguments."[15] Or put differently, the antagonistic nature of the conversation between postcolonial theory and

[14] El pluri-versalismo . . . tiene como criterio para distinguir o cualificar como pensamiento crítico el anti-capitalismo, anti-imperialismo, anti-patriarcalismo, anti-eurocéntrismo [sic], anti-colonialismo". (GROSFOGUEL, 2013, p. 45).

[15] La objeción a los estudios postcoloniales está basada en una caricatura de los mismos que utiliza argumentos endebles fundados en binarios estáticos". (BROWITT, 2014, 27n1).

decolonial scholarship is not mutual, and did not start on the postcolonial side of the exchange.

In terms of decolonial universalizing, one should point out that the idea of modernity/coloniality is firmly established on the European colonization of the Americas. In other words, the MCD project funnels the understanding of the world through the universalized example of the Spanish and Portuguese conquest of the Americas, and despite itself, follows a historiographical storyline where Europe is the centerpiece of the world. As Browitt (2014) notes, Latin American decolonialists reduce the creation of modernity almost exclusively to the looting of the Americas without recognizing any of the dynamics that were already in place long before the "simplistic and reductionist initial step of Iberian colonization" (BROWITT, 2014, p. 28). Regardless of our differences concerning the spirit of modernity, Browitt (2014) rightly notes that colonialism is simply not an European phenomenon and, as is well known to medievalists that during the medieval period, the English were already practicing colonialism in other isles. Browitt (2014) also rightly underscores that the Inca and Aztec empires were themselves colonial, and violently imposed their own civilizations onto other local groups. As such, another enabling concept from the postcolonial side of the aisle is "midcoloniality", a concept the medievalist Jeffery Jerome Cohen (2000, p. 3) proposed to account for historically concurrent processes of de-colonization and re-colonization, and to avoid the sense of "after" that the "post" of postcolonial studies implies.[16] As with midcoloniality, despite the MCD's self-promoting rejections, the field of postcolonial studies seems able to work through the complexities and avoid the noted simplifications found in Latin American decolonial thought when it is scrutinized.

Postcolonial decoloniality

The antagonism between postcolonial and decolonial approaches is also important in terms of approximations that can be considered as unacknowledged crossovers, or ways in which decoloniality has moved toward its postcolonial adversary while maintaining its antagonistic stance and self-appointed comparative ethicality. Crossings from a decolonial to a postcolonial approach, while maintaining the party line in terms of rejection of postcolonial perspectives, shows how the overt decolonial dismissal of postcolonial thinking is not due to incompatibility but due to an academic power struggle fostered from within the decolonial project.

One recent example of postcolonial decoloniality is in the special issue of the journal of the Royal Geographical Society and the Institute of British Geographers, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, whose imperative-turned-conference-theme was mentioned at the beginning of the essay. In the introduction to the issue, Sarah A. Radcliffe (2017, p. 329) called postcolonialism a project that is engaged

[16] I use the term postcolonial as postcontact -- i.e., after colonial contact, regardless of how many colonial contacts are under consideration.

with "enduring Western influences" while the decolonial project seeks to find inspiration elsewhere. Following the already examined antagonism, Radcliffe (2017, p. 329) demeans postcolonial approaches as just "provincialising of Western claims" while the decolonial turn is about "re-thinking the world *from* . . . marginalised" locations, including the marginalized academia of the Global South. Already showing some of the fissures, however, Radcliffe (2017) claims that the MCD project identifies and recuperates forms of thinking that, within an overall epistemicide of the knowledges of colonized subjects, "have not been *entirely* defined by Euro-modernity." (RADCLIFFE, 2017, p. 330, my emphasis). The move from decolonial delinking toward tenets more akin to postcolonial approaches becomes clearer as the piece progresses. Despite the rejection of the postcolonial project as merely engaged with "enduring Western influences" or just provincializing of Western claims, Radcliffe (2017, p. 330) asserts that decolonial thinking seeks to "de-link from Euro-American frameworks," but it does so by acknowledging that "western frameworks have often been vernacularised, resulting in original, critical 'southern theory'". Let us recall that a main problem the MCD found in postcolonial studies was its contagion with western epistemology. As Noxolo (2017) identifies in this special issue, the emphasis of decolonial thinking is precisely on *delinking* from thought and practices with roots in European imperialism. Furthermore, as Asher's (2013) *Geography Compass* essay is likely a main reason why the imperative-to-decolonize in Geography has not come without criticism, it is worth noting her identification that MCD scholars classify thought to be rejected "on the basis that it [is] *tainted by modernity*" (ASHER, 2013, p. 839, my emphasis). In different words, one cannot follow a decolonial position based on delinking from a westernized epistemology, to then declare that decoloniality is open to western knowledges and that it seeks to generate multiepistemic formations in which "(plural) border thinking *adds* to – not replaces – diverse 'Western' knowledges" (RADCLIFFE, 2017, p. 330). If our epistemic structures, if our ways of knowledge production are Eurocentric, decolonizing means modifying these structures – not *adding* to western knowledge, but precisely replacing to make space for other epistemologies. We can subvert the exclusionary aspects of the decolonial project by adding border thinking instead of subtracting western knowleges, but this should be done under clear recognition that it is a modification of the MCD, and one where continuing to exclude postcolonial theory as merely engaged with "enduring Western influences" and the "provincialising of Western claims" is incoherent and even disingenuous.

Most interesting in regards to subversions of the original MCD propositions are the self-decolonizing stances espoused by Grosfoguel in one of his critical publications. Via Rivera Cusicanqui, whose critique he echoes directly, Grosfoguel (2013) became disenchanted with the decolonial network as done from its epicenter, stating that Quijano and

Mignolo have to be decolonized from themselves. A most significant aspect of this interview, however, is one of self-recognition where Grosfoguel (2013) accepts that we are all still directly entangled in coloniality. In Grosfoguel's (2013) words,

> I am not positioning myself as if I was beyond eurocentrism and coloniality. All of us in some way have been affected by modernity coloniality and some of us have engaged with the challenge that decolonizing ourselves means, but none of us, including myself, can claim to have achieved it. (GROSFOGUEL, 2013, p. 46, my translation).[17]

As he also recognizes that is precisely the self-recognition that Mignolo and Quijano "refuse to make" (GROSFOGUEL, 2013, p. 46, my translation).[18] This self-recognition is not only to break ranks with the MCD core thinkers but also a way of moving toward basic tenets of postcolonial studies that the MCD had openly rejected in its intellectual power struggle. The self-recognition of one's own continuing coloniality, and of the colonial bases of decolonial scholarship, is not a form of delinking but a form of decolonial postcolonialism, a form of decoloniality that does not pontificate from a virtuous higher ground, but is attuned to the complicities and complexities of postcontact societies.

All together now

Not long ago, I would tell graduate students that, having left behind nineteenth century nationalism, humanistic disciplines would soon start to recognize what was our new common intellectual paradigm. Nationalism was not an individually chosen paradigm, and so the decolonial project is also part of a larger social framework. The consolidation of the MCD as a powerful group of scholars who mainly cite themselves has a part to play in the institutionalization of this decolonial paradigm. Yet a pressing issue is the extent to which the managerial forces of the neoliberal academy are on board in establishing decolonial and identitarian designs at the university. It is ironic that the imperative to decolonize matches the imperative to diversify of the new managerial university. We must be able to explain how an allegedly anti-establishment decolonial epistemology and thought is easily endorsed by the establishment itself. As Pheng Cheah (2006) questions, decoloniality does not account for its own similarities with calls for cultural pluralism stemming from centers of political power, nor for the strong demands for language learning and cross-cultural understanding encouraged by multinational corporations.[19] As much as decoloniality does not critique its own insertion into colonial durations, neither does it critique its own place in the new corporate neoliberal academy.

One of the alliances between decoloniality and the neoliberal higher education system is the decolonial critique of the university and its agreement with the neoliberal attempt to change it into a space of applied knowledge and activism instead of critical thinking and inquiry.

[17] no estoy posicionándome como si yo estuviera más allá del eurocentrismo y la colonialidad. Todos de alguna manera hemos sido afectados por la modernidad/colonialidad y algunos nos hemos planteado el reto que representa descolonizarnos pero ninguno, incluyéndome, podemos reclamar haberlo logrado". (GROSFOGUEL, 2013, p. 46).

[18] que se niegan a hacer estos dos autores [Mignolo and Quijano]". (GROSFOGUEL, 2013, p. 46).

[19] As Cheah (2006, p. 11) notes, "how are we to account for the startling similarity between . . . pluriversality and intercultural communication and the kind of cultural pluralism espoused by UNESCO? Here one should also note the importance of language learning and multiculturalism to the operations of multinational capital."

The new managerial corporate university has steadily moved toward training for measurable skills, creating what Molly Worthen (2018) called a "vast landscape of glorified trade schools". This has been exacerbated by what David Graeber (2018) describes as the "bullshit" of academic work, whereby most of the time spent by faculty is now devoted to answering (and creating new) managerial tasks. Under managerial neoliberalism, intellectual work and research at the university level have become practically a luxury in systems like the current UK model.

By demanding conversion and intellectual submission, reinforced by a sense of heightened virtuosity, the decolonial project also conjoins itself to the demise of the university as a space for critical thinking and in the shift toward activism and applied knowledge.[20] Educating for intellectual conversion, no matter how lofty the goal, is a capitulation of the core task of higher education. By capitulation I mean graduating students that follow the accepted intellectual imperatives of today instead of students who can make up their minds about whatever imperatives are thrown their way today and in the future.

I will close this essay with another example of the contradictory alliance between the imperative to decolonize and the neoliberal managerial university found in Sarah Radcliffe's (2017) introduction to the special issue on "Decolonising geographical knowledges". Radcliffe (2017, p. 331) proposes that decoloniality offers a solution to what Raewyn Connell (2007) termed "extraversion" in her 2007 *Southern Theory*; a term for how the worldwide neoliberalization of universities has increasingly required the submission of non-metropolitan and extra-university knowledge to output-driven, Anglophone-oriented scholarship. Radcliffe (2017, p. 331) considers that the successful strategy proposed by decolonial scholars is that of "entering and exiting academia" in order to encounter and engage critically with other knowledge-producing processes. Radcliffe (2017) adds to the solution of entering and exiting academia that of more systematically co-producing knowledge with "decolonial-inspired actors and institutions" beyond the academy.

The question to ask is the extent to which exiting academia to engage others outside the so-called ivory tower is a resistance to the neoliberal university. Because noticeably, in the UK academy, it is neoliberal universities themselves that are demanding scholars to prove their relevance by connecting with those outside the academy. In other words, to enter and exit academia to demonstrate academics are "relevant" to the world at large is now an imperative of the UK neoliberal university. The basic idea of "impact" that is growing in importance for the grading of grants is precisely the idea of exiting academia and of changing the yardstick of relevance to the interests of non-academic actors. This is followed by demonstration of non-academic impact for audit-minded managerial culture of how precisely scholarly work has applications outside the university, or how non-academics have

[20] In addition, decolonial critics like Grosfoguel (2012, p. 83-84) consider the westernized university "a machine of global mass production of *Eurocentric fundamentalism*" that inferiorizes and destroys the potential of non-western epistemologies, and the institution where the political and economic elites managing the world system are created.

used academic knowledge for their own purposes: with numbers and statistical figures, precisely how many non-academic actors interacted with the academic work, how, exactly, did it change these non-academic stakeholders' thoughts, and what is the demonstrable proof of this change. The main model on which this new managerial culture is built is the applied segments of the university, such as medicine and public health.

The notion that the decolonial project is a resistance instead of another pawn in the hands of neoliberal managerialism is perhaps too well-meaning of an interpretation. While the corporate university demands that scholars show their impact outside academia to prove their relevance to non-academic society, the decolonial turn demands "exiting" academia to engage with other processes of producing knowledge that universities cannot access. Several strategies of bending over backwards are needed to both heed the criticism of neoliberal universities, and then seamlessly propose that the same practices demanded by neoliberal universities are the solution to that critique. As such, Radcliffe (2017) identifies risks for academics co-producing knowledge with decolonial-inspired actors and institutions beyond the academy, but she views those risks as a form of resistance instead of an alliance with neoliberal corporate tenets. In her view, co-producing knowledge outside the academy will take less established and untenured researches into a territory that is unrecognizable to the neoliberal academy and will open the imperative to work on "negotiating decolonial forms of 'impact', scholarship and partnership within the university" (RADCLIFFE, 2017, p. 331). As noted, the neoliberal academy demands outside engagement in knowledge exchange and impact outside the academy, so this is a peculiar statement to be made from within the UK neoliberal higher education industry. Radcliffe (2017) goes on to explain that in order to ensure that decolonial theorizing avoids becoming domesticated and retains its critical force it entails that "the university" think carefully about the extent to which its interests and engagements reflect those of its surrounding communities. Considering the growing importance of non-academic impact in UK higher education, one should note, instead, that engagement with surrounding communities is a direct form of domesticating the university. Forcing disciplines and scholars to be judged by outside interests is, in itself, a form of domestication – of disciplining a once autonomous professional community and make it answer to the authority and desires of others. It is a form of ensuring that academics follow orders from outside, from wealthy donors, as so openly happens in the United States, or from sectors of society that have their own agenda and are not concerned with the long-term health of a profession or with the main task of universities to train critical thinkers.

Activism and turning outside the academy to demonstrate our relevance cannot become our main job as university faculty. If activism

is to engage with the problems around us, then steadfast critique and resistance to the managerial capitalism overtaking higher education – under myriad cloaks including that of decolonizing knowledge – is precisely an activist target tailored to our local context.

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O imperativo decolonial: uma crítica poscolonial

RESUMO

O imperativo de decolonizar tem sido considerado urgente em várias disciplinas. Para muitas, o adversário é as abordagens pós-coloniais, apresentadas como viciadas pela colonialidade e quase totalmente desprovidas de potencial para a liberação. Este ensaio ressalta críticas ao projeto decolonial latino-americano, incluindo apreciações da decolonialidade como um conflito acadêmico de poder que leva à progressão profissional e enriquecimento dos acadêmicos e instituições do norte global, da falta de autoconsciência do emaranhamento próprio na colonialidade, e de formas de fundamentalismo intelectual e policiamento do pensamento sob premissas de virtuosismo. O ensaio conclui notando a complementariedade do projeto decolonial com a transformação, atualmente em curso, das universidades em corporações.

Palavras-chave: *Decolonialidade, Abordagens pós-coloniais, Fundamentalismo intelectual.*

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