Decolonizing Western Epistemology / Building Decolonial Epistemologies

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The maintenance of life is an expression of knowledge, a manifestation of adequate behavior in the domain of existence. In the form of an aphorism: "Once we have accepted that there is no possibility of making testable claims about an observer-independent reality, the fundamental change in our epistemology has been completed. All forms of observation and explanation are now expressions of the system's operation with whose production we may now deal. A re-orientation has come about, a change from Being to Doing, a transformation of the classic philosophical questions."[1]

IN GENERAL: THE LEFT AND THE DECOLONIAL

What shall we understand by decolonizing Western epistemology and by building decolonial epistemologies? In answering these questions my essay is an attempt in conceptual elucidation. The words "decolonial" and "decolonization" have been used widely since the second half of the twentieth century, during the Cold War, to describe processes of liberation mainly in Asia and Africa. "Liberation" and "decolonization" were synonymous words. From the Algerian Front de Liberation (1954–62) to the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (1994) the word "liberation" prevails. However, these movements shall be distinguished from the Colombian Ejército de Liberación Nacional (1964), which was founded on Marxist-Leninist principles. The Algerians' Front and Zapatistas' Ejército have in common a decolonial horizon, not a Marxist-Leninist

one. What are the differences? And does it really matter for the issue at hand?

Decoloniality is a double-faced concept. On one side, it points toward the analytic of coloniality, the darker side of modernity. On the other, it points toward building decolonial futures. In the first case, it is analytic and theoretical. In the second it is utopian. However, the analytic procedures are already decolonial: Coloniality is always already a decolonial concept, a concept that was not created by any other way of thinking, discipline, or ideological frame than decoloniality. The first sentence of the announcement that Roberto Esposito was to deliver a lecture on biopolitics at ICI (Institute for Cultural Inquiry)-Berlin[2] stated that in the past few decades no global-political phenomenon could be explained without the concept of biopolitics. One can say also that in the last few decades no global-political, epistemic, and aesthetic phenomenon can be explained without the concept of coloniality. And more so: The same phenomena can be explained by both biopolitics and coloniality. One will be a eurocentered explanation; the other a decolonial one. For that reason, decolonizing epistemology is the first step toward building decolonial epistemologies. In the last analysis, to build future decolonial epistemologies implies to begin by decolonizing Western epistemology. However, that will be another essay and another argument. For this essay my intention, as stated in the title, is to remind the reader that decoloniality is always a double-faced concept.[3]

The Algerian uprising and final outcome were not inspired by Marxism-Leninism but by more than a century of French colonialism. The recent upheavals in North Africa and the Gulf are not the outcome of reading Marx and Lenin, but of the simple fact that living is knowing and knowing is living. And when living is no longer possible, it requires a different epistemic path. In Algeria in the fifties and in North Africa and the Gulf in the second decade of the twenty-first century, the upheavals are decolonial responses to the persistence of coloniality. Certainly, Egypt and Tunisia were not lately colonized by the British and the French. But both countries had governments that were local regimes taking the place of colonial posts of yesterday. For this simple reason, the upheavals are both against the local dictators and against their Western supporters (the European Union and the United States of America). Not only are a few governments changing, but, more radically, a certain way

of sensing and knowing is changing. Knowledge is not created by political theorists, philosophers, or ethicists, but by the global political society. The struggles were not and are not against capitalism, not directly, but against Western civilization and its imperial/colonial arrogance, which of course includes capitalism. And capitalism is not merely an economic structure; it involves the subjectivities and belief systems that go with it, without which it couldn't be sustained. Decolonization is a struggle prompted and provoked by the management of coloniality (a shorthand for the colonial matrix of power), which is more than colonialism and more than capitalism. Both are constitutive of what is generally understood by Western civilization.

Marx and Lenin had not much to say—or at least they did not say much—about the struggle against Western civilization. Marx was part of it, and Lenin belongs to a historical tradition (Russia of the last two centuries before the revolution) that wanted to see itself as part of Europe and the West. Algeria is different; its past is part of the Arab-Islamic world with a strong presence of the Berber population, whose history goes back well beyond the Christian era. In 1517 Algeria became part of the Ottoman Sultanate. With the arrival of French civilization after Napoleon, the counter-perspective was that of Indigenous, not Marxist-Leninist, cosmology. Patrice Lumumba in Congo established relations with the Soviet Union not because he had converted to communism but because he couldn't sustain the decolonial project and had to fall into the hands of one of the two competing imperial projects, capitalism or communism. The anticolonial struggles of Algeria and Congo (as well as others struggles for decolonization in Africa) are not the same as anticapitalist struggles. Anticolonial struggles are defined by racism, whereas anticapitalist struggles are defined by classism. Anticapitalist struggles emphasize the working class (proletarian and peasant) but are not specifically concerned with occidentalism. Fausto Reynaga puts it in a clear and straightforward way.

> The Manifesto of the Bolivian Indian Party (PIB) does not have to subject itself to a model, formal logical and intellectual rule of the political parties of the white-mestizo mélange of Bolivia and Indigenous America. It is not the manifesto of a social class. It is the manifesto of a race, a people, a nation; of an oppressed and silenced

> culture. No comparison can be established with Marx's *Communist Manifesto* because the brilliant "Moor" did not confront the West. He confronted the proletarian class against the bourgeois, and proposed as solution the class struggle, and within "Western Civilization" the communist revolution.[4]

My intention is not to evaluate whether one option is better than the other. I am just trying to clarify the distinction and to align my argument with the decolonial option. Decolonizing epistemology means to decolonize naturalized principles on which knowledge is built, in disciplinary formations as well as in ideological discourses in the public sphere. In this case, decolonizing epistemology impinges on the possible dialogues between Marxist Left orientations and decolonial options in the field of political theory.[5] The fact that I prefer decolonial options to the Marxist, or to the options offered by "the theological Left," both Christian and Islamic, doesn't mean that I attribute universal value to the option of my preference. The question is not which one is "right"—since no one is in transcendental terms—but which one is right for you. The Christian Left, in the West, is against capitalism, and we know also that there is a sector of the church that is not critical of capitalism. Briefly, there is no safe place. You can be Black and follow Martin Luther King Jr.'s or Condoleezza Rice's paths. Similarly, what we can call the Islamic theological Left is also against capitalism. But in Indonesia, for example, the official discourse of the State argues that Islam is compatible with capitalism.

Thus, although "decolonization" during the Cold War was basically connected to armed rebellion to expel imperial forces from the colonies, it was also a struggle confronting Western civilization and imperialism, rather than directly aimed against capitalism. It was also the struggle of the Third World against the First World. Capitalism as the focus of struggle defines the European Left more than decolonial thinking and doing. For that reason, Islamic intellectuals and activists, such as Ali Shari'ati (1933–1977) in Iran and Malik Bennabi (1905–1973) in Algeria, defined their decolonial positions at the intersection of Islamism and Third Worldism. In Latin America, Third Worldism was basically aligned with (although not necessarily surrendering to) the legacies of Marx, Lenin, and Mao (as they were projects basically endorsed by leftist Creoles/Mestizos since

Indians and Afro were not part of the picture). There was no other alternative than to conceive this particular version of the Third World in Latin America within European civilization. Discourses were then framed against imperialism and capitalism (basically the United States) but not confronting Western civilization. It is in this context that Fausto Reynaga defines la Revolución India and distinguishes it from Marxism.

The concepts of "coloniality" and "decoloniality" as introduced in the early nineties and as used subsequently indicate a new dimension in understanding the differences between—on the one hand—colonialism and coloniality and—on the other hand—postcolonialism and decoloniality. The experience of decolonization during the Cold War taught all of us that decolonization cannot be advanced if the principles of knowledge and understanding that regulate Western society, its imperial expansion, and its adaptations in non-European nations (Russia, the Soviet Union, Japan) are not called into question. Anibal Quijano's turning point was to link eurocentrism with knowledge and coloniality with eurocentrism. Thus, decolonization was redefined: Without decolonizing knowledge and changing the terms of the conversation, the rules of the game would be maintained and only the content, not the terms of the conversation, would be disputed. That is the trap the Christian theology of liberation and Marxism find themselves in—they are both part of Western civilization. And what is the option that decolonial projects envision so as not to be caught in the same trap? To answer this question is to answer what decolonizing epistemology and decolonial epistemology mean. Let's start then from the beginning.

In his foundational statement, Anibal Quijano proposed that decolonizing means to disengage (de-link) from eurocentrism (once again, not as a geography but as eurologocentrism), controlled by Western languages and institutions, since the Renaissance, grounded in Greek and Latin as the ultimate linguistic ground in which epistemic categories are lodged. Thus Quijano urged:

> The critique of the European paradigm of rationality/modernity is indispensable—even more, urgent. But it is doubtful if the criticism consists of a simple negation of the idea and the perspective of totality in cognition. It is necessary to extricate oneself from the links

> between rationality/modernity and coloniality, first of all, and definitely from all power which is not constituted by free decisions made by free people. It is the instrumentalisation of the reasons for power, of colonial power in the first place, which produced distorted paradigms of knowledge and spoiled liberating promises of modernization. The alternative then is clear: the destruction of the coloniality of world power. First of all, epistemological decolonization, as decoloniality, is needed to clear the way for new intercultural communication, for an interchange of experiences and meanings as the basis of another rationality that legitimately pretends to some universality.[6]

That is the blueprint for decolonizing knowledge and creating decolonial knowledges. The process started a long time ago, since decoloniality is part of the package modernity/coloniality/decoloniality. I have argued elsewhere that Guaman Poma de Ayala in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Tawantinsuyu and Ottobah Cugoano in eighteenth-century Africa/Caribbean/England wrote decolonial political treatises that were not acknowledged as such because coloniality of knowledge precisely ruled out everything that was not useful for the ruling ethnoclass and was not in the tradition of Aristotle, Plato, and Machiavelli.[7] The process has been accelerating in the past ten years, and the conference that originated this volume is part of such process.

My argument here is based on the work done by the collective modernity/coloniality/decoloniality in the past ten years. I am not representing the collective. Nobody does, for that matter. I am just arguing in tune and in dialogue with the contributions made by every member of the collective. There are two shared principles I assume as the two pillars of my own work: that (a) coloniality is constitutive of modernity and therefore there is no modernity without coloniality and (b) colonization (and therefore decolonization) shall be distinguished from coloniality (and therefore decoloniality). Whereas decoloniality refers to specific historical periods and applies to different imperial/colonial formations since 1500, mainly Western imperial formations but also those of Russia, the Soviet Union, and Japan, coloniality refers to a matrix for management and control of the economy, authority, knowledge, gender, sexuality, and

subjectivity. Consequently, whereas decolonization refers mainly to specific moments of political struggles to send the invaders back home, decoloniality opens up the domain of the epistemic and the hermeneutical, explanation and understanding, political and ethical processes delegitimating the colonial matrix of power and building a world that is nonimperial and noncapitalist. Building a world regulated by the principle "living in harmony" requires both decolonizing the epistemic foundation of the colonial matrix of power and building decolonial epistemologies that legitimate "living in harmony and reciprocity" rather than "living in competition and meritocracy."

Let's move closer to ongoing processes of decolonization of knowledge and building decolonial epistemologies. The following argument is in tune and in conversation with María Lugones's and Nelson Maldonado-Torres's contributions to this volume, and with the work of Emma Perez.[8] You will see decolonial thinking at work grounded in particular, although similar, genealogies of thoughts and experiences of embedded in colonial epistemic and ontological differences. In my view, this distinguishes us (in the project modernity/coloniality or at least myself) from the genealogy of thought, experiences, and issues that generated the great work of thinkers such as Max Horkheimer, Simone de Beauvoir, and Michel Foucault, to give a few examples. If all of us are concerned and working toward a just and nonimperial world order (Ecuadorian quichua "sumak kawsay," to live in plenitude, living in harmony; Mandarin's "Ho" peace, harmony, union; or Western languages' "democracy") we do it in different ways because—due to the modern/colonial world order we are all living in—we share the same goals but have different ways to march toward them: Some are imperial, religious, or secular; others, national; others, decolonial. And that is the simple "fact" that requires geopolitics and body-politics of knowing, understanding, and being, to avoid modernity/rationality, as Quijano said, in its variegated forms: the imperial Right, the modern liberating secular Left (Marxism), and the modern theology of liberation. To extricate oneself (to de-link from modernity/rationality) means to de-link from the Right, the Left, and liberation theology. It means simply that the decolonial options need to be asserted in order to "extricate oneself" not only from the imperial/dominating option but also from current Western liberating options such as Marxism and theology of liberation. Decolonizing epistemology

means, in the long run, liberating thinking from sacralized texts, whether religious or secular.

IN PARTICULAR: THE DECOLONIAL OPTION

The previous section is already engaged in decolonizing epistemology and in working toward decolonial epistemologies. How come? By decolonizing Western epistemology I understand an analytic task. The analytic decolonial task consists in unveiling beliefs and assumptions, anchored in common sense, that naturalizes the world as we have been taught to see it.

The first task of decolonizing epistemology (and I will say more about "epistemology" below) consists in learning to unlearn in order to relearn and to rebuild. We will find our sources not necessarily in the canon of Western thought but in the corpus of decolonial thinkers, such as Fausto Reynaga and a hundred others.

Decolonial thinking means to dwell and think in the border (the slash "/" that divides and unites modernity/coloniality); which means in *exteriority*. *Exteriority* is not the outside, but the outside built from the inside in the process of building itself as inside. Exteriority is the dwelling place of the world population who do not belong to the house of civilization and democracy. Thus, modernity is a discourse defining its interiority by creating the difference to be marginalized and eliminated. The rhetoric of modernity has an abundant vocabulary to mark the difference, to create exteriority spatially and temporally: pagans, barbarians, primitives, women, gays, lesbians, Blacks, Indians, underdeveloped, emerging economies, communists, terrorists, yellows, etc. All of these will be incorporated into modernity or left out when necessary (see María Lugones in this volume).[9] Dwelling in exteriority means dwelling in the borders traced by the colonial difference from where border and queer thinking are already engaged in decolonizing epistemology and engaging decolonial epistemologies.[10] In fact, what is remarkable and groundbreaking in the work of Pérez and Lugones is the bringing together of decolonial and queer thinking (see below, "Coda").[11] The two enunciative pillars of the colonial matrix of power (racism and patriarchy supported by theo- and ego-epistemologies) are eroded and undermined, and from their ruins decolonial epistemologies emerge. We see in the work of Enrique Dussel, Lugones, and Pérez how modern rationality does something that is not

explicit: It implements the logic of coloniality that appears as the benevolent action of the savior.

Thus, the first step would be to de-link from Western modernity's pretense to universality and to open up to what Partha Chatterjee calls unapologetically "our modernity." "Our modernity" is a claim made from India with full acknowledgment that British imperialism is and will be forever a part of the history and the memories of India and Indians. In the inverse situation, if India will be forever in the history of Britain, it will also be part of the imperial memories of England. So then, from the perspective of "our modernity," "their modernity" has a different trajectory and a history of power differential: the epistemic colonial difference that entangled both civilizations in imperial/colonial relations. So then, Aristotle and Plato are still necessary but hardly sufficient. It would be necessary to bring next to the tradition of Western modernity the tradition of colonial India: the Vedic Age, the Southern Kingdom, the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498, the Muslim invasion, and the foundation of the Mughal Sultanate that would eventually fall under British rule. Ancient Greece and Rome and Christianity will constitute just a quantitatively small dimension, although a significant power component (the Western imperial component) that can hardly rule out and replace Vedanta rationality. Certainly, today India's state and economy have opted to embrace Western political theory and capitalist economy. It may last and erase all intent and possibility of engaging with its own past and find a new dignity as Western subjects. Or it may not. In any event, the fact that India's ruling elite took one of the four BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, China) doesn't mean that this state of affairs is totalitarian and that there is no room for advancing decolonial projects, particularly in the sphere of epistemology.

I have been arguing, following on Quijano's and Dussel's landmark epistemic insights, that decolonizing epistemology and decolonial epistemology have to be anchored in geo- and body-politics of knowledge.[12] Both are necessary to de-link from the theological and egological politics of knowledge in which Western modernity/rationality has been anchored.[13] Let me explain.

The colonial matrix of power, put in place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was framed in and by Christian theology. Christian theology was the ultimate horizon of knowledge—since and after the

Renaissance—that incorporated Greek rationality (through the monumental work of Saint Thomas Aquinas), invented the Middle Age as its own tradition, and placed Islam in its exteriority, disavowing Muslim knowledge of Greek philosophy and Muslim contributions to Western civilization. Theology was then the ultimate and the supreme court of knowledge and understanding built on the foundation of Greek philosophy and biblical wisdom. All that was called into question, in the eighteenth century, when a new ethno-class, in France, Germany, and England slowed down theology to make room for secular egology. Carl Schmitt summarizes it with the clarity that characterizes his prose.

> It should have been noticed that any elaboration of political theology [is] not grounded in a diffuse metaphysics. They [theology and secularism] bring to light the classical case of a transposition of distinct concepts which has occurred within the systematic thought of the two—historically and discursively—most developed constellations of "western rationalism": the Catholic church with its entire juridical rationality and the state of the *ius publicum Europaeum*, which was supposed to be Christian in even Thomas Hobbes's system.[14]

There you have it in a nutshell. By 1651, the year *The Leviathan* was published, secularism was not yet accomplished, merely a decade or so after Descartes turned theology into egology, which had displaced God and put Reason in his place. Catholicism was the legal authority in matters of law, as Protestantism would be the authority in matters of economy, according to Weber. Law and economy under theological rules were supplanted by secular political economy (Smith) and the secular state (Locke, Montesquieu). Thus the theo-politics of knowing and understanding moved to the second row, but never disappeared. Now, to decolonize the European paradigm of rationality/modernity could not be successful if we remain within the theo- and ego-politics of knowledge.

Political theology and political egology are the epistemic foundations for the classification of the world in regions or continents and hierarchies (Europe, Africa, Asia, and America) and in sectors of the population and religious/secular racialization (Christians, Moors, Jews, Confucians, Buddhists, people without religion; white, yellow, blacks, reds). Both political

theology and political egology assumed that masculinity and heterosexuality were the norm and used them to classify and rank gender hierarchies and sexual relations. Theological politics and egological politics of knowledge are grounded on racial presuppositions and male heterosexuality. Thus to decolonize knowledge means to move away from all of that, to de-link from rules of the game managed by modern imperial languages and institutions.

To take seriously and act on the awareness that knowing responds to local needs (habits, memories) and that the politics of knowing is not in the clouds but rooted in the earth of geohistorical, body, racial, and patriarchal configurations (both of the individual and the community) means to take seriously the fact that in the "Third World" (a racist classification that puts together people and region of the planet [e.g., the Third World is inhabited by underdeveloped people]) needs and desires are not necessarily those that prompted the thoughts of modern, postmodern, and poststructuralist European thinkers. Certainly, there are eurocentered critiques of modernity that we can call demodernity, and there has been, since the sixteenth century, a critique of modernity from the receiving end of its effects, which configure the decolonial project. And therefore, whatever knowledge was generated in France or Germany to address their problems can be a hindrance and a distraction in addressing the problems in Bolivia or India. However, coloniality of knowledge has been so successful and pervasive that in the same way that political and economic leaders in the Third World, for personal convenience or conviction, thought that development and Western democracy would be good for Bolivia and India, these leaders have prevented themselves from thinking on their own; they have not been building "our own modernity." Political biography, or corpo-politics, was a similar phenomenon but enacted in relation to racialized, genderized, and sexualized bodies, bodies made inferior from theo- and egological epistemic hegemony in such a way that to be respected those bodies for belief or convenience had to become what they were not (Michael Jackson was a sad example). Thus, geopolitical epistemology and biographic political epistemology are two pillars of decolonial thinking. Notice that biographic political epistemology (or corpo-politics of knowledge) is exactly the opposite of biopolitics. Whereas biopolitics studies how the state manages the population, biographic politics of knowledge is political epistemology that refuses to be managed, that de-links and works toward communal futures

and toward building states at the service of the population rather than a population at the service of the state.

TWO CASES

I

A landmark essay in which geo- and body-politics of knowledge comes clearly to the fore was written by the Indian historian and political theorist Partha Chatterjee.[15] The essay is the English version of a lecture he delivered in Bengali language and in the city of Calcutta. The English version is not just a translation but also a theoretical reflection on geopolitics of knowledge and epistemic and political de-linking.

Unapologetically and forcefully, Chatterjee structured his talk on the distinction between "our modernity" and "their modernity." Rather than a single modernity defended by postmodern intellectuals in the First World, or the most dependent take on "peripheral," "subaltern," and "marginal" modernities, and so on, Chatterjee plants a solid pillar to build the future of "our" modernity—not independent from "their modernity" (because Western expansion is a fact), but unrepentantly, unashamedly, impenitently "ours."

This is one of the strengths of Chatterjee's argument. But remember, first, that the British entered India, commercially, toward the end of the eighteenth century and, politically, during the first half of the nineteenth century when England and France, after Napoleon, extended their tentacles into Asia and Africa. So for Chatterjee, in contradistinction to South American and Caribbean intellectuals, "modernity" means Enlightenment and not Renaissance. Not surprisingly Chatterjee takes Immanuel Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" as a pillar of modernity. Enlightenment meant—for Kant—that Man (in the sense of human being) was coming of age, abandoning his immaturity, reaching his freedom. Chatterjee points out Kant's silence (intentional or not) and Foucault's shortsightedness when reading Kant's essays: Missing in Kant's celebration of freedom and maturity and in Foucault's celebration was the fact that Kant's concept of Man and humanity was based on the European concept of Man from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment and not on the "lesser humans" who populated the world beyond the heart of Europe. So, "enlightenment" was not for everybody. Thus, if you do not embody Kant's

and Foucault's local history, memory, language, and "embodied" experience, what will you do? Buy a pair of Kant's and Foucault's shoes or cut your own feet?[16]

One point in Chatterjee's insightful interpretation of Kant-Foucault is relevant for the argument I am developing here. Paraphrasing Kant, Chatterjee states that in the "universal domain of the pursuit of knowledge," which Kant locates in the "public" (not the "private") sphere, where "freedom of thought" has its function, he (Kant) is presupposing and claiming the right of free speech only for those who have the requisite qualifications for engaging in the exercise of reason and the pursuit of knowledge, and those who can use that freedom in a responsible manner.[17] Chatterjee notices that Foucault did not raise this issue, although he could have, given the interests of his own research. I surmise, following Chatterjee's argument, that what Foucault did not have was the colonial experience and political interest propelled by the colonial wound that allowed Chatterjee to feel and see beyond both Kant and Foucault. Thus, Chatterjee concludes this argument by stating that vis-à-vis both Kant and Foucault:

> It is the specialists, a phenomenon which appears alongside the general social acceptance of the principle of unrestricted entry into education and learning . . . In other words, just as we have meant by enlightenment an unrestricted and universal field for the exercise of reason, so have we built up an intricately differentiated structure of authorities which specifies who has the right to say what on which subjects.[18]

Chatterjee acknowledges, like Pauline J. Hountondji and Kwasi Wiredu in Africa (although independent of each other, since "influence" goes from Europe to the United States to Africa and India, but not yet in conversations between Africa and India), that the Third World (in Carl Pletsch's terms) has been mainly a "consumer" of First World scholarship; and like his African colleagues, Chatterjee bases his argument "on the way the history of our modernity has been intertwined with the history of colonialism. For that reason, 'we' have never quite been able to believe that there exists a universal domain of free discourse,

unfettered by differences of race or nationality." Chatterjee closes his argument:

> Somehow, from the very beginning, we had made a shrewd guess that given the close complicity between modern knowledge and modern regimes of power, we would forever remain consumers of universal modernity; never would we be taken as serious producers. It is for this reason that we have tried, for over a hundred years, to take our eyes away from this chimera of universal modernity and clear up a space where we might become the creators of our own modernity.[19]

I imagine you are getting the point. The argument is similar to arguments advanced by Guaman Poma in the early seventeenth century and Ottobah Cugoano in the late eighteenth, when both appropriated Christianity instead of submitting to it with the humility of the humiliated; it was indeed a slap in the face of European Christians when an Indian of Tawantinsuyu and an ex-enslaved African in the Caribbean, who reached London, unveiled the unhumanity of European ideals, visions, and self-fulfilling prophecies. Both paid dearly for their epistemic de-linking, their epistemic insolence. Kant thought, like Hume, that no Negro was able to reach the level of the least gifted white and that Indians were at an equal level of intelligence with Blacks.[20]

Yes, indeed, Chatterjee is aware that European nationalism in the nineteenth century and Hindu nationalism made similar claims. From the recognition of the shortcomings of the ways in which promoters of Hindu national ideals deal with "our" modernity, it doesn't follow that the solution is to fall into the arms of "their" modernity. The point is this: Thanks, Immanuel Kant, but now let us figure out how to pursue "our modernity," now that we have reached maturity by having gained India's independence in 1947 and expelling British colonists, their institutions, and their ideals of progress, development, and civilization. We have, so to speak, "our own" ways of being. In fact, I would translate Chatterjee into my own vocabulary: "We know that we have to decolonize being, and to do so we have to start by decolonizing knowledge."

II

Linda Tuhiwai Smith is an anthropologist in New Zealand. And she is a Maori national. Maori nationals live next to nationals of European descent, people who have coexisted in the same land since the British started their management of New Zealand. James Busby was named "Official British Resident" in May 1833 and was instructed to organize the Maori chiefs into a united body to deal with the increasing instability provoked by the greediness manifested by the French, the Americans, and the British themselves. As is well known, Maoris did not care about "private property," but Europeans did. The "New World" increased their appetite to transform land into private property since the sixteenth century.

Anthropology (that is, the Western discipline thus named) was assigned to study the non-European world in the human sciences distribution of labor; and it took charge of the Third World that reorganized during the Cold War. Now, it is not a secret that quantitatively the majority of anthropologists, men and women, were white and Euro-Americans. However, anthropology as a discipline also found its niche in the Third World. What then would a Third World anthropologist do when he or she was part of the "object of study" of a First World anthropologist? Well, one answer to the question is that a Third World anthropologist would do the same job and ask similar questions as a First World anthropologist and the difference would be that he or she is "studying" people living in his or her own country. There will be variations depending on whether in a given country the nationals are "natives" or "of European descent." It was more commonly accepted that anthropologists in the Third World would be of European descent—for example, in South America, South Africa, or Australia. The end result is that, in general, anthropological research in ex-colonial regions would be dependent on and secondary to anthropology as taught and practiced in the First World—nothing new or remarkable here.

The remarkable novelty comes when a Maori becomes an anthropologist, and she practices anthropology as a Maori rather than studying the Maori as an anthropologist. This is one way to understand and engage in shifting the geography of reason and the geopolitics of knowledge. Let me explain, starting with a quotation from Linda T. Smith's *Decolonizing*

Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples (1999). One section of the first chapter is titled "On Being Human."

> One of the supposed characteristics of primitive peoples was that we could not use our minds or intellects. We could not invent things, we could not create institutions or history, we could not imagine, we could not produce anything of value, we did not know how to use land and other resources from the natural world, we did not practice the "arts" of civilization. By lacking such values we disqualified ourselves, not just from civilization but also from humanity itself. In other words, we were not "fully human"; some of us were not even considered partially human. *Ideas about what counted as human in association with the power to define people as human or not human were already encoded in imperial and colonial discourses prior to the period of imperialism covered here.*[21]

Well, you get the idea of the interrelations between the politics of identity and epistemology. You could certainly be a Maori, Black Caribbean, or Aymara and an anthropologist and by being an anthropologist suppress the fact that you are Maori or Black Caribbean or Aymara. Or you can chose the decolonial option: Engage in knowledge-making to advance the Maori (or Black Caribbean or Aymara) cause rather that to advance the discipline. Why would someone be interested in advancing the discipline if not for either alienation or self-interest?

If you engage in the decolonial option and put anthropology "at your service," as Smith does, then you engage *identity in* politics, unveiling and enacting geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge. You can also say that there are non-Maori anthropologists of Euro-American descent who really are for and concerned with the mistreatment of Maori and that they really are working to remedy the situation. In that case, the anthropologists could follow two different paths. One would be in line with Father Bartolomé de Las Casas and with Marxism (Marxism being a European invention responding to European problems). When Marxism encounters "people of color," men or women, the situation becomes parallel to anthropology: Being Maori (or Aymara, or Afro-Caribbean like Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon) is not necessarily a smooth relation, because Marxism privileged class relations over racial hierarchies and

patriarchal and heterosexual normativity. The other path would be to "submit" to the guidance of Maori or Aymara anthropologists and engage, with them, the decolonial option. Politics of identity is different from identity politics—the former is open to whoever wants to join whereas the second tends to be closed by the definition of a given identity.

I am not saying that a Maori anthropologist has epistemic privileges over a New Zealand anthropologist of Anglo descent (or a British or U.S. anthropologist). I am saying that a New Zealand anthropologist of Anglo descent *has no right* to guide the "locals" in what is good or bad for the Maori population. Granted, there are many locals in developing countries who, because of imperial and capitalist cosmology, were led to believe (or pretended they believed) that what is good for developed countries is good for underdeveloped countries, because the former know "how to get there" and could lead the way for underdeveloped countries to reach the same level. And there is also a good chance that an expert from England or the United States may "know" what is good for him or her and his or her people, even when he or she thinks that they are stating what is good for "them," the underdeveloped countries and people.

Returning to the quotation by Smith, it would also be possible to object that "we" denounces an essentialist conception of being Maori or that "we" indeed is not a tenable posture at the time when postmodernist theories really ended with the idea of a coherent and homogenous subject, be it individual or collective. Indeed, such a posture could be defended. But . . . remember Chatterjee. It would be fine and comfortable for modern subjects (that is, embodying the languages, memories, and cosmology of Western modernity, "their" modernity). It would not be convenient for a Maori, Aymara, or Ghanaian philosopher or an Indian from Calcutta, who are modern/colonial subjects and would rather have "our modernity" than listen to vanguard postmodern critics or Western experts on developing underdeveloped countries. Thus, geopolitics of knowledge comes to the fore. There are many "our modernities" around the globe—Ghanaian, Indian from Calcutta, Maori from New Zealand, Afro Caribbean, North African, Islamic in their extended diversity—while there is one "their" modernity within the "heterogeneity" of France, England, Germany, and the United States.

If you are getting the idea of what shifting the geography of reason and enacting geopolitics of knowledge means, you will also understand what the decolonial option (in general) means, or what decolonial options (in each particular and local history) mean. The decolonial option means, in the first place, to engage in *epistemic disobedience*, as is clear from the two examples I offered. Epistemic disobedience is necessary to take on *civil disobedience* (Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr.) to its point of nonreturn. Civil disobedience within modern Western epistemology (and remember: Greek and Latin, and six vernacular European modern and imperial languages) could lead only to reforms, not to transformations. For this simple reason, the task of decolonial thinking and the enactment of the decolonial option in the twenty-first century starts from epistemic de-linking: from acts of epistemic disobedience.

THINKING DECOLONIALLY

A basic, vexing question since decolonizing epistemology and building decolonial epistemologies began has been formulated in different languages around the world (at different times and places, that is, in different local histories) in the past five hundred years. The question is: How does one respond to the uninvited interference of Western ideas and ideals in the non-Western world? "Modernity" (whether by that name or under the name of "Christianity" in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) was always a problem for non-Western people. And it was always a solution for Westerners. Granted, you could find plenty of cases in the non-Western world defending and promoting modernity or Christianity and vice versa: Westerners criticized Christianity (Nietzsche, for example) and modernity (Foucault, perhaps), but the point is that chanting the glories of modernity is not a non-Western project, and decolonial critiques of modernity are not a Western project. Western critiques of modernity inside Western cosmology did not originate as anticolonial or decolonial critiques but as postmodern. In any event, the non-Western world had to deal with modernity either by jumping on the bandwagon, rejecting it, or figuring out what to do.

Fazlur Rahman has written one of the clearest and most compelling books on the issues at hand: *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (1982).[22] He summarizes the dilemma as follows:

> Two basic approaches to modern knowledge have been adopted by modern Muslim theorists: (1) that the acquisition of modern knowledge be limited to the practical technological sphere, since at the level of pure thought Muslims do not need Western intellectual products—indeed, these should be avoided, since they might create doubt and disruption in the Muslim mind, for which the traditional Islamic system of belief already provides satisfactory answers to ultimate questions of world view; and (2) that Muslims without fear can and ought to acquire not only Western technology but also its intellectualism, since no type of knowledge can be harmful, and that in any case science and pure thought were assiduously cultivated by Muslims in the early medieval centuries, whence they were taken over by Europeans themselves. To be sure, there are various nuances of these views and also "middle-term" positions.[23]

That is the dilemma not only in the Islamic world, beyond the classic responses: One consisted in adopting either a pro-Western orientation to solve non-Western problems (e.g., Ataturk in Turkey), and the other was a radical rejection of Western modernity and its local representatives (e.g., the Muslim Brotherhood). Lately, two new orientations emerged that are relevant for the topic at hand: One is de-Westernization and the other, closer to what I see in South America, the Caribbean, and the United States (particularly among Latina/o and Native American scholars and intellectuals), is understood as decoloniality.

De-Westernization and decoloniality share the common goal of de-Westernizing and decolonizing epistemology. Where de-Westernization and decoloniality break apart is in that de-Westernization doesn't question the "nature" of the world economy, capitalism, but it questions the control of authority and the control of knowledge (or the complicity between principles of knowledge and Western political theory). In that process, the racist foundations of Western knowledge are called into question. A powerful argument has been advanced in this respect by the strongest advocate of de-Westernization, Kishore Mahbubani, in his book *Can Asians Think?* (1999). The argument begins by making explicit the meaning of the question in the title. I can ask that question and get away with it, Mahbubani explains, "because I am Asian." If, instead, he ponders, he would ask the question "Can Europeans Think?" most likely it

would be taken as an insult or as incredible arrogance, since the logic of the question is connatural to the European idea of thinking and how the idea of thinking was used to disqualify or suspect thinking beyond Greco-Latin conceptual genealogies of thought and practice. And, he adds, "if I were to ask 'Can Africans Think?' I would be taken as an ally to the European Kantian tradition where Africans were closer to the animal kingdom than to the human race."[24] The question is potent in that it questions epistemology and racism, that is, epistemic racism. It could be a decolonial argument. However, since de-Westernization remains faithful to development and the capitalist economy, the challenge is to Western control of authority and Western control of knowledge. De-Westernization is contributing to the polycentric world order of the twenty-first century in which the West (the European Union and the United States) is becoming one player (a powerful one, no doubt) among many forces in contention. What de-Westernization is doing, in other words, is taking to its limit the second trajectory outlined by Rahman: appropriating and making their own, without fear and without imitating and wanting to become Western, what Western civilization has contributed to world history. Beyond de-Westernization in China there is a revaluation of Confucianism, not as a religion, but as a philosophy of living, thinking, and doing. And in the case of Islam, de-Westernization is based on arguments showing the compatibility of Islam and capitalism.[25]

Decolonizing epistemology and decolonial epistemology have a different pedigree than de-Westernization, although both share the confrontation with Westernization or occidentalism. For that reason, it is common to find references to Japan among progressive and radical Islamic thinkers. Why, they ask, was Japan able to take a route of its own since 1895 whereas the Islamic world kept falling into desuetude? Such claims could go either way, de-Westernization or decoloniality. Claiming "our modernity," instead, as Chatterjee does without invoking the example of Japan, not only means that there is no one modernity, or a model of it, that is European, and then peripheral, subaltern, or alternative modernities, but that "modernity" belongs to everyone and to no one. To claim "our modernity" in this way is already a decolonial claim, whereas Japan's modernity is conceived and enacted as de-Westernization. Although de-Westernization takes issue with two major spheres of the colonial matrix of power (control of authority and control of knowledge/subjectivity,

focusing on racism and human rights), decolonial thinking confronts the entire colonial matrix. Nonetheless, the starting point of decolonial thinking is to de-link from Eurocentrism (or occidentalism).

What do de-Westernization and decolonization have in common? A paragraph by Malik Bennabi helps us understand the point where both projects meet rather than where each project follows the path of its own local history.

> It is abundantly clear that the problem facing us does not concern the nature of Western culture. It actually concerns the particular character of our relationship to it. In this respect, the Muslim who stood as a student at the school of Western culture was one of two types: genuine student or the "tourist" student. Neither of them goes to the real roots of a civilization. Rather, they go either to its distilled products or to its garbage. That is to say, they go to where it loses its life, its warmth as well as its reality embodied by the ploughman, the craftsman, the artist and the scientist, that is, those multitudes of men and women who daily perform, in the cities and the countryside alike, the great work of civilization.[26]

Malik Bennabi wrote these words in Algiers in 1970. "We" refer to "we the Muslims." However, the situation depicted is common to all local histories of the non-Western world that had to confront the West. The problem is "the particular character of our relationship with it," and "we" are all those who are in the same trap and dwell in diverse local histories. Here we find the colonial difference that María Lugones elaborates in her essay. The observation is useful to distinguish Western culture and civilization from Eurocentrism. Western culture is one among many other cultures or civilizations in the world, past and present. For, in the present, Western civilization is not the only one. Such thinking is Eurocentric thinking, whose latest version was neoliberalism. Western civilization coexists today with Chinese, Japanese, Indian, African, Islamic, and Indigenous civilizations in the Americas, Australasia, and Africa. We can debate how we characterize and define civilizations, but that is another matter. The point I am trying to make is that Western civilization is not universal; it is one among several today. But because of the Eurocentric (and imperial) bent of Western civilization and its

"success" in slaughtering people and expropriating lands and natural resources in the name of civilization, all other civilizations have to deal with it, have to define the particular "character of our relationship with it," to define "our modernity," with reference to it. There is the starting point of decolonial thinking, of decolonizing epistemology and creating decolonial epistemologies. This is also where the decolonial option emerges next to existing liberating projects such as the Marxist Left, the theologies of liberation (Christian, Jewish, and Muslim), and countless social movements that are in the process of forming a new social actor (next to the state, the market, and the civil society)—this new political actor is the global political society. There is no one-to-one correlation between the political society and decolonial projects, but there are some projects that are clearly decolonial, that is, projects that could be understood as responses to the making, transformations, and persistence of coloniality. Among them we can count Sovereignty of Food and La Via Campesina, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the politicization of African religions in the Americas (Candomblé, Voudou, Santería, Rastafarian). In the academy, decolonial thinking, decolonial philosophical thinking as Nelson Maldonado-Torres has articulated, and decolonial queer thinking, as Emma Pérez argues, are radical epistemic transformations (e.g., decolonizing epistemologies) that are becoming integral parts of the political society at large.

CODA

"Decolonizing Western epistemology" is in principle a scholarly and disciplinary proposition. However, I understand it as affecting both the *episteme* and the *doxa*. By this I mean that the task of all of us who are engaged in decolonial thinking, decolonizing Western epistemology, and generating decolonial epistemologies want to have a transformative impact on public opinion, through our teaching and interventions in the public domain through whatever means (blogs, independent media, inter-net-working, radio when it applies, video-making, etc.).

Zero-point epistemology was historically founded in Christian theology and sixteenth-century Western cartography (e.g., mappemonde); and it was logically founded in the separation between the knower and the known, the knowing subject and the known object. Max Horkheimer described it as "traditional theory," pervasively infecting secular sciences

in the nineteenth century, which he confronted with "critical theory." One of the key distinctive and transformative features of critical theory is to fuse the knower with the known, the knowing subject with the known object. In other words, there is no object or phenomenon to be known independently of the knowing subject. It is the knowing subject that constructs the known in the process of knowing. Horkheimer was defending this thesis in 1937. By that time Einstein and Heisenberg had already been arguing in the same direction in the field of physics. Lately, Horkheimer's "critical theory" has been accepted in the reorientation of the social sciences and continues to be argued in the physical sciences.

Although "critical theory" was a welcome corrective to zero-point epistemology, it still remained caught in its web. Or better yet, critical theory calls into question the knowing subject but not the epistemic presupposition in which he or she is grounded—that of the *modern* subject. But it so happens that since the sixteenth century, coexisting with the European modern subject was the *colonial subject*. And the colonial subject was exterior to zero-point epistemology: He was the object being described, the *anthropos*, he who is beyond Western rationality, she who was different from *humanitas*. And when critical theory came into the picture, things did not change for the colonial subject: If the knower was fused with the known, the known remained exterior to critical theoretical minds. In the best of all possible situations, there is a "recognition," and as result of the recognition, he or she can learn the basics of Western epistemology: That is, recognition means epistemic instead of religious conversion.

Until the *colonial subject* would be able (through five hundred years of struggle in the Americas, three hundred in Asia, and, depending on from when you count, five hundred or three hundred years in Africa, and three hundred years in Central Asia and the Caucasus [counting from Peter the Great]) to understand, analyze, and figure out, not how to stop what cannot be stopped, but how to move away, to be in and out, to de-link, from the colonial matrix that will remain in place, flexible as it is to adapt to changing circumstances. In order to de-link and move forward, decolonial epistemologies are needed. And they are already in the making. And they have been for five hundred years although little known, and when known celebrated as "resistance," as "opposition," not in the affirmation of something else in relation to what was being negated.

Thus, decolonial thinking is what colonial subjects do when they do not want to assimilate and are not happy with remaining colonial subjects. That is the difference between critical theory and decolonial thinking.[27] Decolonial thinking means engaging in knowledge making and transformation at the edge, in and of, the disciplines. There are already countless examples, testimonies, and statements, and perhaps a collection of essays should be made out of this dispersed creativity. I end by quoting in this regard Gloria Anzaldúa, reflecting on the process of writing. Let's read this paragraph both as it is and then sometimes replacing "writing and speaking" by "knowing and understanding" and other times adding it. And keep in mind that Anzaldúa is not part of the group of *Tel Quel,* who, in the seventies, were expressing similar concepts of "writing" (and you have Jacques Derrida elaborating on "writing" and "philosophy"). Remember the coexisting views of the critical modern subject (of critical theory) and the critical colonial subject. The critical colonial subject is decolonial, in writing, thinking, doing, knowing, and understanding. That is where decolonial epistemologies found their "morada" (their dwelling).

> One thing I urge you to do when you are reading and writing is to figure out, literally, where your feet stand, what position you are taking. Are you speaking from a white, male, middle-class perspective? Are you speaking from a working-class, colored, ethnic location? For whom are you speaking? What is the context, where do you locate your experience? In the Bronx, in Southern California? Why are you doing this research? What are your motivations? What are the stakes, what is at stake—to use a popular theoretical expression. In other words, what's in it for you? What are the terms of the debate and who set up the terms? . . . These may be some of the stakes for people of color. As a white person you may have similar stakes or you may be doing it because you are tired of living in a racist country, you are tired of your ignorance and you want to learn about other peoples, other cultures. You may want to make a better world in which we all can live and in relative peace. Or you may do it out of guilt.[28]

We have here in a nutshell the cross-fertilization of decolonial thinking and queer theory. Decolonial thinking in its specific formulation, that is,

as responses to the logic of coloniality and the rhetoric of modernity, has its foundation in the concept of race/racism whereas queer theory finds its motivation contesting the heteronormativity founded in patriarchy. If we take racism and patriarchy to be the two pillars upon which imperial enunciations are supported, the intersection of decolonial and queer thinking can productively join forces in decolonizing and queering epistemology, and work together toward the future in building decolonial and queer epistemologies.