Global Modernization, 'Coloniality' and a Critical Sociology for Contemporary Latin America

José Maurício Domingues

Abstract
This article analyses recent social, cultural and political developments in Latin America, with special reference to the 'modernity/coloniality' project, as well as offering an alternative sociological interpretation of the contemporary subcontinent. It analyses in particular Walter Mignolo's work as the main expression of that 'post/decolonial' project, a general interpretive effort that reflects actual social changes but offers misguided theoretical and political perspectives. The article then proposes a discussion of modernity as a global civilization which is now unfolding its third phase, characterized by greater complexity and pluralism. In addition it argues that modernity should be seen as a two-pronged phenomenon, featuring not only domination but also emancipation. Against the reification of modernity, the article suggests that we see it as woven by multiple and contingent modernizing moves.

Key words
complexity ■ critical theory ■ decolonization ■ Mignolo ■ third phase of modernity

THE DISCUSSION of the relations between Latin America, modernity and the West has a long tradition in the social thought that developed in that subcontinent since at least its independence from Spain and

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Portugal (Domingues, 2003 [1992], 2005). Identity questions, especially in relation to the West and the specificities of the new countries, as well as practical deeds are present in this, implying all sorts of positions and in a way pre-dating what later on emerged as postcolonial theory with reference to Asia and Africa. Partly in continuity with that tradition, partly as an attempt to break with it, a more specific sort of postcolonial or 'decolonial' theorizing gained strength with reference to Latin America more recently, gathering now around the 'modernity/coloniality' project (Escobar, 2003). At the core of this project stands the critique of Occidentalism as the necessary and even pristine counterpart of Orientalism (Coronil, 1996; Said, 1978). Older intellectuals Aníbal Quijano and Enrique Dussel have had a strong influence on the project's ideas and have become associated with it, although I think their views differ from those associated with the project, especially with regard to modernity. As the heir to the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group, which was operative between 1992 and 2000 in the United States (Rodríguez, 2001), though perhaps more selectively and depending more on a specific standpoint, the 'modernity/coloniality' project has maintained a certain level of plurality but has had Walter Mignolo as its main expression.

Originally a current born and bred in the United States out of the critical engagement of some Latin American academics, the project has had a growing impact in Latin American countries, although no systematic debate has as yet developed around these views in the subcontinent. The theoretical constructions of those associated with this project mirror and somehow express issues that appear as actual challenges to Latin American social life and political dynamics. In fact, democratization (a true 'molecular revolution', despite and against the neoliberal project), social complexification and globalization have far-reaching implications for Latin America. These include, of course, changes in identity-building and social movements, although these vary in magnitude and direction in each country (Domingues, 2008).

This article will initially present a reasonably detailed sketch of Mignolo's multiple ideas, moving then to a more general criticism of his work, which is based on a problematic wholesale rejection of modernity and a one-sided perspective on the ethnic issue. As Mignolo is among the few to propose a general theorization of Latin America at present, and as he is the intellectually most productive member of that project (Escobar, 2003; Mignolo, 2000a), as well as insofar as his ideas are put forward in a radical and provocative manner, this *démarche* will allow for a clear understanding of both the insights and shortcomings of this Latin American post/decolonial project. In contrast, I shall then advance the outline of an alternative sociological standpoint, which I deem more appropriate to tackle the current situation. A more subtle and complex view of modernity will be presented and its development will be grasped through the idea of contingent, episodic 'modernizing moves', leading today to the unfolding of the third phase of modernity in a particular manner in Latin America, whereby we will also

be able to make sense of the emergence of its new, sometimes ethnically based, social movements.

Mignolo's Key Ideas

Two books are fundamental for Mignolo's general framework: *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (2000a) and *The Idea of Latin America* (2005a), although *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (2003 [1995]) already presented some essential elements. Mignolo has interesting insights. Overall, however, his views are marred by two basic misconceptions: (1) a reductive view of modernity, in which only domination appears as relevant and no ambivalence is allowed to seep through; (2) the idea that only what is not modern – or is at least in an ambiguous relation with modernity – is valuable in Latin America. This view is a sort of inverted mirror of modernization theory, with serious cultural and political consequences. The increasing emphasis on a 'decolonial shift' or 'delinking' (Mignolo, 2007a, 2007b) seems to be a somewhat veiled attempt to overcome such impasses.

Border Thinking and Exteriority

A good place to start is the notion of 'border thinking'. Mignolo (2000a: x, 11–12) defines it as 'border gnosis' – gnoseology being understood as discourse about knowledge, doxa and episteme. It emerged at the beginning of colonization as a logical consequence of the 'colonial difference', as a 'fractured enunciation in dialogic situations with the territorial and hegemonic cosmology', as a 'battlefield' (not as 'hybrid enunciation'). It is the moments when 'the imaginary of the modern world system cracks', remaining within its imaginary but 'repressed by the dominance of hermeneutics and epistemology' (Mignolo, 2000a: 16–23). Border thinking structures itself 'on a double consciousness' (cf. Dubois and Gilroy), 'a double critique operating on the imaginary of the modern/colonial world system'. As 'cultural critique', it establishes alliances with the monotopic critique of modernity (Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Marx, Freud, Derrida), affirming, however, the irreducibility of the colonial difference. It is neither counterculture nor a Hegelian synthesis, but rather a 'phagocytosis of civilization by the barbarian', implying a 'barbarian' way of theorizing (beyond making sense of facts or mere deconstruction, a style Mignolo seems to be firmly pursuing). 'Another thinking' implies the diversity of the world, unexpected forms of knowledge, as a 'key configuration' of border thinking: '*thinking from dichotomous concepts rather than ordering the world in dichotomies*' (Mignolo, 2000a: 81–7, 110, 303, 327).

'Border thinking' arises 'at the intersection of local histories enacting global designs and local histories dealing with them', the former stemming from the 'subaltern perspective', the latter launched by a 'desire for homogeneity' and a 'need of hegemony' (Mignolo, 2000a: 310). It is opposed to 'abstract universals', while border gnosis is the 'future planetary epistemological and critical localism' (Mignolo, 2000a: 88, 157). Rather than an

empty signifier, it works as a *connector* that can bring the diversity of local histories into a universal project, displacing abstract universalism and allowing for 'diversality as universal project' (Mignolo, 2000a: 92, 2001: 257, 263–4).

This resonates with many of the themes of the Frankfurt School, but even in direct dialogue Mignolo does not engage with their argument against 'logocentrism' (see Domingues, 2006: chs 1–2, 4). Horkheimer's approach intended to interrogate the basis of traditional theory in a capitalist society. Critical theory now, via border thinking, Mignolo argues, has to be applied to European ways of thinking so that silenced and subjugated knowledges become 'decolonized' and 'delinking', away from modernity, becomes possible (Mignolo, 2007a, 2007b: esp. 485). Rather than their ideas, it is the Frankfurt School's locus of enunciation that matters to him: the fact that those authors were Jews – an 'ethnic' feature they never privileged – placed them in a position of exteriority (see below) and produced a kind of 'barbarian theorizing'. Today people of foreign origins are in the same position in the United States (Mignolo, 2000a: 39, 100–9, 316).

Since there are different, simultaneous histories and decolonial thinking is the 'pluriversal epistemology of the future', breaking free from 'the tyranny of the universal', decolonial projects can subsume Marxist-oriented critical theory, but not vice versa. Once again Mignolo's interest in Marx lies basically in his Jewishness: he may have felt the *racial differential* inscribed in his body, translating it into a *class differential* (Mignolo, 2007b: 155–64, 494). The whole issue of the class structure of modernity – one of Marx's crucial contributions to critical thought – and, for that matter, all class societies, has no role to play in Mignolo's writings. He even tries to reduce Bolivian Aymara 'peasants' to an exclusive 'Indian' condition (Mignolo, 2007b: 496).

Mignolo recognizes that the sort of displacement that characterizes border thinking was already present in the singular case of the *criollo* 'double consciousness', which failed to recognize itself as such, but was an expression of protest, rebellion and criticism by local colonial elites. Their critical consciousness emerged not from being considered not human, but from not being considered European while at the same time being Americans. In their worldview racial classification was maintained and humanity remained segmented. They ended up alienating themselves by adopting Western designs (Mignolo, 2000b, 2005a: 62–71). Some advancement and the critique of Occidentalism and occidentalization were present in the works of Leopoldo Zea and Edmundo O'Gorman (a philosopher and a historian respectively, who belonged to an important Mexican current of thought, strongly influenced by phenomenology). However, the ethnic question – the only one that seems to really ignite Mignolo's interest – did not reach them (Mignolo, 2003 [1995]: 323–4, 2000a: 108–9). José Carlos Mariátegui was the first to stand as a translator between Marxism and indigenous cosmologies, the first case of border thinking in the local

history of the Andes and of Latin America, the first to do what Zapatista Comandante Marcos later did (Mignolo, 2000a: 140–1).

The 'double translation', or 'infection', of the Zapatistas' 'theoretical revolution' allowed for a new ethical and political imaginary when discredited forms of knowledge entered into the double movement of 'getting in/letting in'. Translation here clearly goes both ways since Western, Marxist epistemology is appropriated by Amerindians, but transformed and returned with the latter's own contribution to the contemporary world. Translation, however, may appear also as more one-sided, since Mignolo suggests that what actually remain paradigmatic examples of subaltern/colonial criticism are located in the Caribbean, Mesoameria and the Andes. Border thinking and its brand of critique thus need to be not only peripheral but also *ethnically based* in order to validate its locus of enunciation (Mignolo, 2000a: 103). This is apparently the case with Bolivia's Vice-President Álvaro García Linera's role: a man of *criollo* origins, he is deemed a mere (one-way) translator of indigenous people's views and propositions (Mignolo, 2006a: 96–8). This seems to be a consequence of a passage in his original introduction of the concept of border thinking, where he argued that *the modern/colonial cannot be thought from within modernity* (Mignolo, 2000a: x–xi).

To a great extent these problems are dependent on the relation between border thinking, modernity and the notion of 'exteriority', which Mignolo finds in Levinas and Dussel. Without intending to tackle Levinas' complex philosophical approach here, it is worth recovering his original concept, directed against ontology and in particular Hegel's view of totality. For him, beings resist 'totalization', in their 'radical heterogeneity'. Thus 'exteriority, as the essence of being, means the resistance of the social multiplicity to the logic that totalizes the multiple'. But the 'me's' (*les moi*'s) do not form a totality in themselves either; there is no 'privileged plan' where they could be grasped in isolation: 'multiplicity' does not exist without relation (Levinas, 1961: 268–71). He was clearly positioned against a sort of monodology in which discrete beings are absolutely self-determining.[1]

In colonial times, Mignolo argues, Aztec and Inca intellectuals could not relate to Christian philosophy of history from the inside; they had to tackle it from a perspective of 'exteriority' as 'the outside made, or constructed, by the inside'. But this was then subsumed under the epochal, unilinear, and progressive (developmental) conception of Universal History to which every local history is attached, finding its main expression in Hegel's *Philosophy of History* (see Mignolo, 2003: 427–8, 454). However, a global or universal history is today an impossible or hardly credible task. Local histories are coming to the forefront, regardless of the hegemony of global designs, with the old Christian and Renaissance civilizing missions lying behind free market neoliberalism (Mignolo, 2000a: 21–2). Exteriority does not disappear at all, though. It is as though Mignolo is looking also for a position from which modernity could be criticized with much greater certitude and self-assurance. Clearly (and explicitly), he is not after an *immanent*

critique of modernity, that is, a critique that takes it to task for failing to fulfil its promises – and which, since Marx, via many Marxists, up to the Frankfurt School, was at the core of critical theory. As modernity cannot be criticized from the inside and border thinking is the locus of such a criticism, exteriority tends to imply an external relation with modernity, although since exteriority was defined as the outside created by the inside, it somehow therefore remains within its bounds. Analytical ambiguity rather than a dialectical conceptualization comes up here, in contrast to Levinas' definition of totality as encompassing the multiplicity of irreducible beings.[2]

Modernity/Coloniality

To move further into the thick of Mignolo's ideas – and slide onto more sociological terrain – the pair modernity/coloniality is absolutely essential. Mignolo departs from Immanuel Wallerstein's (1974, 1980, 1989) work and the location of America appears as a derived topic (although now the colonial difference is inside the centre as well as in the periphery, as a result of all sorts of migration). He is highly indebted to the view of the coloniality of power proposed by Quijano (2007 [1989], 1993), implying: (1) a classification of people aided by 'culture' – in close connection with racism and capitalism; (2) institutional structures which perform this role; (3) the definition of spaces appropriate to the process; and (4) an epistemological perspective to organize the new matrix of power and channel the production of knowledge. Occidentalism is both a 'key-metaphor' and the 'self-description' of the West. More significantly and decisively, Mignolo thinks that, just as capitalism cannot exist without colonialism, modernity does not 'stand by itself, since it cannot exist without its darker side: coloniality' (Mignolo, 2000a: xi, 13–17, 23, 245, 328, 2003: 451, 543–4, 2005a: 30).[3]

The 'colonial difference' (a conceptual alternative to 'cultural difference', a colonial/imperialist invention, which is then opposed to 'cultural relativism' or 'multiculturalism' as a neutral response) consists in the 'space' of the enactment of the coloniality of power but is also where the 'restitution of subaltern knowledge' is occurring and border thinking is emerging. Therein '*local* histories' inventing and implementing local designs come across '*local* histories' as the physical as well as imaginary space in which 'global designs' are adapted, rejected, integrated or ignored, and the confrontation of two kinds of histories occurs. Coloniality is different but related to colonialism, referring to the 'logical structure of colonial domination'. It has been as clear in the 1500s as under the Bush administration, rooted in the 'colonial wound' of the 'wretched of the earth', a consequence of racism. Imperialism/colonialism are moments in history, while modernity/coloniality are deeper phenomena, which run through history from the 16th century to the present (Mignolo, 2000a: ix, 77, 439–40). Decolonization after the Second World War was not epistemic, but now there is an imagination pushing away from capitalism, the modern state, military power, beyond the four modern ideologies (conservatism, liberalism, socialism and coloniality; Mignolo, 2000a: 82–5).

Nation-building in the 19th-century Americas and in 20th-century Asia and Africa was the 'reconversion of the coloniality of power', i.e. 'internal colonialism' (cf. González Casanova and Stavenhagen). In other words, with the exception of the black and defeated Haitian revolution, independences were real, having an impact in the social imaginary, but were damped insofar as *criollos* and colonial links, both internal and external, limited the reach of the process of decolonization, which remains therefore to be accomplished (Mignolo, 2000a: 86, 104, 127–35, 248, 281, 313). In this case in particular, it is worth noting already that, strangely enough but understandably given his position, Mignolo chooses to disregard the paramount relevance of the modern imaginary and the French Revolution in the Haitian independence, although surely the French did not accept that black emancipatory revolution.

Since modernity rests upon and reproduces coloniality, it will *not* be the vehicle of its overcoming (Mignolo, 2000a: 6–7, 11, 83). I have already stressed the problematic effects produced by this conceptualization of modernity, how it relates to 'exteriority' and how Mignolo views the relation between modernity and critical thinking. Here it is important to underscore that Mignolo works with dichotomous thinking – good/bad – and that the complexity of modernity – its two sides: freedom and domination – is treated in a reductive manner, with only the latter (domination/bad) actually playing any role. Astonishingly, due to the underpinnings of his theory, Mignolo (2000a: 305–7) explicitly moves close to Huntington's position in *Clash of Civilizations*, accepting the thesis that there is an affirmation of non-Western societies and their values along with the rejection of the West – in fact of modernity.[4] We must note that, however inverted this view may be, it shares in the same separation between modernity and the other. What looks like a threatening development to Huntington is celebrated by Mignolo.

It is curious to note that Mignolo is not sympathetic to the social sciences, sociology in particular, for they would be complicit with modernity – area studies and the social sciences displaced essayism as a form of theorization (Mignolo, 2000a: 143, 324) – although he draws upon Wallerstein and Quijano, and has used their periodization of modernity as starting in the 16th century, also flirting once with postmodern definitions and with Castells 'network society'(Mignolo, 2003 [1995]: 329, 2001: 426). Although arguing for a surpassing of the humanities, he sticks to these – his own – guns: committed to the 'decolonial shift' and transdisciplinarity, they might be now extremely relevant (Mignolo, 2006b: 324).

Latin America and Liberation

The 'idea of Latin America' stands out in Mignolo's last book. Initially it is the 'invention' of America, linked to coloniality, that is at stake, against the view of its 'discovery' by Europeans. Following Quijano and Wallerstein (1992), Mignolo states that Americanity and coloniality are 'mutually imbricated' and based on the exploitation of Indians, Africans and white people of southern descent, depending also on the erasure especially of

indigenous imaginaries and social organization. Independence eventually created new countries and gave rise to Latin America, not so much as a subcontinent as a political project of creole-*mestizo/a* elites, with Brazil occupying a specific, decentred position therein (Mignolo, 2000a: 6–10, 47, 59–60, 131). 'Latin' America's history after independence featured its 'local elites' embracing 'modernity' and sliding deep into the logic of coloniality, whereas indigenous, Afro, and poor *mestizo/a* peoples' destiny was poverty and marginalization. Postcolonialism is here very limited, indeed misplaced, Mignolo thinks: it refers to a delusion and alienation as well as to the birth of internal colonialism. Only the emergence of dissenting social movements, especially those led by indigenous and Afro-descendants, not impregnated with republican, liberal and socialist traditions, allow for new ways and the overcoming of such a 'fracture' (Mignolo, 2005a: 22, 57–8, 65–8).

His fight against 'universals' is then resumed. Although 'human dignity' stands out in Zapatismo, it must not be taken as an abstract universal, working instead as a 'connector of similar colonial experiences'. Culture for Mignolo (2002: 246–9), who then forgets the Romantics' contribution, is a term that acquired its current meaning in the 18th century, replacing religion and aiding colonial expansion – communities of birth began to be conceptualized as 'national communities'. 'Mandar obedeciendo' (to rule obeying) is the title of a Zapatista declaration featuring 'justice, freedom and democracy'. But 'democracy', Mignolo argues, works there just like the word 'dignity', as previously mentioned: '[t]he words are universally used but they no longer have universal meaning'. Pronounced by Zapatistas they are different from when they are said in Washington or spoken by functionaries of the Mexican government. Why this should come as a surprise is indeed the surprise, for it is more than well-established in any branch of the humanities or the social sciences that imaginaries always imply multiple meanings and readings. This is, however, different from saying that whenever they are pronounced such terms are coined anew, as though there was not a long – *global* – history behind them, in the case of the Zapatistas to start with the first main revolution of the 20th century.

Referring to the Bolivian process, Mignolo (2002: 256–60 ff., 273–4) notes that not everything is democratic in the Ayllu (the Indian community), nor is it anywhere in any case. Europe has no monopoly of democracy and its origins. Furthermore, the Ayllu is no longer exactly what it was before colonial times, even though communal ties remain crucial. For him, in the case of Evo Morales – but also of Hugo Chávez – the idea of a 'move to the left' only partially grasps what is at stake, overlooking the paramount decolonial move, since the movement is basically sustained by the indigenous 'memory'.

In an even more problematic statement (somehow restating an affirmation about Francisco Bilbao and 19th-century liberalism; Mignolo, 2005a: 70), he affirms that in both Argentina and Bolivia the left was 'out of place' – as a 'transplant to the colonies', a 'nostalgic move of criollos and

mestizos' mimicking the French Revolution (Mignolo, 2006a: 93–4). In contrast to Morales, and even Chávez, Fidel Castro and Salvador Allende were alternatives who changed the 'content of the system', not the system as such: they 'come from *within modernity itself*' (Mignolo, 2005a: 100–1). He goes further then, stating that 'nationalization' in Bolivia was a term that sounded bad for both left and right. Apparently only for the Aymara people was this a good idea, since nature for them was not exterior to man, being 'land' infused with (colonial and anti-colonial) meaning, not only space one can sell. The same happens with gas, which is not a commodity either. In addition, he states that Chávez is different from Perón since the latter did not identify with the '*cabezitas negras*' (poor, racially mixed workers) who supported him, while the former draws upon the subalternized *mestizo* memories. Therein lies the 'decolonial' move of the Bolivarian Revolution – now carried out by *mestizos*. Lula, instead, is more a move to the left – but an autonomous one – showing that the dream of a global left is meaningless now (Mignolo, 2006a: 101–6).

Politics apart, Mignolo believes that the most radical struggles of the 20th century will be enacted in the field of knowledge and reasoning, in peoples' 'minds'. '*Latinidad*' is being deconstructed by Indians, Afros, women of colour, gays and lesbians. 'Critical consciousnesses and decolonization' will stem from them – those who were excluded from that exclusivist construction (Mignolo, 2006a: 100–1, 2006b: 323).

We finally arrive at the notion of 'liberation', which Mignolo uses instead of 'emancipation', since he wants to speak from the perspective of 'external borders', with the latter belonging in the internal borders of the modern/colonial world system. He restates Dussel's (1996 [1993]) contention that an 'ethics of discourse' (a standard version of multiculturalism, which maintains universal abstracts) accommodates the 'recognition of difference' and the 'inclusion of the other', the latter having nevertheless little to say in this regard, contrary to an 'ethics of liberation'. Still drawing upon Dussel, Mignolo states that modernity has a 'rational concept of emancipation', but appears also as a 'myth' that justifies genocidal violence. Therefore, in a geopolitical move, he suggests that we had better use the word 'liberation' – political and economic as well as epistemic – in accordance with actual movements in the Third World. 'Emancipation' is committed to modernity and is therefore of no good use. 'Liberation' instead points to 'delinking', decolonization and border thinking, away from a linear trajectory of Western history and thoughts. This is what has been worked out by the World Social Forum and countless other similar movements, such as Zapatismo, the philosophy of liberation, indigenous and Afro movements (Mignolo, 2002: 267–8, 2007b: 458, 469).[5] But it should be noted that, in contrast, although critical of modernity, Dussel (1994) proposes the concept of 'transmodernity' to allow for what might be, in a Hegelian way, a sublation of modernity, rather than its sheer dissolution.

Pushing his argument further, Mignolo states that Bush's 'spreading of democracy' in the Middle East is an illustration of Habermas' project of the

'completion' of modernity: emancipation. To ground his criticism he uses Koselleck's idea of 'space of experience' and 'horizon of expectation', speaking then of local histories and specific spaces with different horizons, which can be, for decolonization, pluriversal and connected by border thinking (Mignolo, 2007b: 454–8, 469, 494 ff.). Kant's influence is everywhere in terms of the coupling of Enlightenment and emancipation. But that would be self-contradictory, albeit elided in the discourse of modernity: to achieve what Kant proposes ('understanding without guidance') we have to go against Kant's tutelage through border thinking (Mignolo, 2005a: 56).[6] Liberation must come to the fore. I for one think that only strong prejudices explain how one can envisage that this is not tantamount to emancipation – notwithstanding rhetorical variations, a strategy Mignolo often uses – and deeply indebted to modernity, especially to its horizons of expectation, which are at this point to a great extent truly global – not to mention the incredibly harsh commentary on Habermas' views. If we bear in mind Mignolo's (2006b) recent acceptance, despite reservations, of the value of citizenship for humanity (in a transformed situation and depending on the overcoming of racism), the issue becomes even more blurred.[7]

A Critical Overview

We can now carry out a more general assessment of Mignolo's work and propose a general critique. As already pointed out, the main problem in his whole framework is the strange but real enough inversion of some of the key operations of modernization theory.[8] That old paradigm used to oppose tradition and modernity, with the latter standing as a great evolutionary achievement. Universalism, individualism, affective neutrality, rationality, the rule of law and several other aspects were opposed to all the 'traditions' that existed in Latin America (Iberian, and even more so those rooted in the Indian and African backgrounds), with their particularism, irrationality, patrimonialism, familism, excessive affectivity, etc. Mignolo is careful not to imagine that Indian cultures are today actually traditional. Instead it is their exteriority that matters to him. However, once this issue is settled, the operation can follow its course unfettered – and in fact his rhetoric has become ever fiercer in this regard. Anything, then, that is not of Indian origins – or 'radically' African, and then his only example is Ecuador, as though other black movements did not matter if they showed other characteristics (that is, were not strongly Africanized, for instance as is mostly the case in Brazil).[9] Moreover, if it does not imply an epistemic break with modernity (hence coloniality), any movement is at best compromised if not deemed complicit with 500 years of domination, contrary to the new decolonial project. This inversion of the exotic as well as of the geopolitical traditional perspective of modernization theory, and even of the common sense of North American and European societies, has regrettably led Mignolo into the vicinity of Huntington's perspective.

I have no doubt that border thinking is – in the broader frame I have pointed out as interestingly present in Mignolo's writings, not the narrower,

ethnically based one that prevails – a structure shared all over the Americas and often across the world by people of non-Western origins, especially when Western culture impinges upon them without much of a choice. This is – or used to be – obviously the case with indigenous people in Latin America. But it is incorrect to dismiss other forms of border thinking and 'exteriority' – in the sense of Levinas, that is, belonging in a totality without, however, allowing for a reduction to the logic of its dominant tendencies. White people of distinct classes, blacks with all sorts of cultural orientation, *mestiços* or *mestizas* (mixed people of different origins), are very much prone in the Americas to feel that they belong in the West and are not part of it entirely, or at least that they occupy a problematic position. That was Zea's (1976) intuition a good while ago, although rather than rejecting ethnic overtones he put forward an encompassing and unitary model of Latin American men. More specifically, people know or perceive their belonging to modernity, but feel that theirs is a marginal or peripheral position in this regard, that they are not fully accepted in it or that they belong also to other, however entwined, civilizational configurations. How they react to this varies a lot, from a demand for recognition and inclusion within a broader modernity, plus perhaps a critical stance (varying from mild 'border thinking' to radicalized 'another thinking'; cf. Walsh, 2006), to trying desperately to mimic the United States and Europe (or even Japan), i.e. the central countries of modernity. That was something pointed out by sociologists via the concept of 'demonstration effect' (Germani, 1965) and by an endless intellectual debate in which the particularities of '*nuestra América*' were opposed to what was a reified sort of model to which we had to conform (Domingues, 2003 [1992]). Besides, much more attention should be paid, contrary to Mignolo's views, to the 'contradictory' and 'ambivalent' aspects of all cultural systems and statements, which prevent any 'purity', whether this is based on a supposedly unsullied tradition or not (as in Mignolo's case), within a flexible, hybrid, fragmented, floating and transformative understanding of cultural forms. Even the place of utterance (Mignolo's locus of enunciation) does not allow for assurance: the context cannot be read off 'mimetically' from the content – and vice versa (see Bhabha, 1994; see also García Canclini, 1990).

Mignolo had originally suggested that incommensurability underpins cultural relativism, whereas pluralism or diversity is what obtains in heterogeneous cultural communities. During the 16th and 17th centuries, therefore, the problem of cultural relativism manifested as confrontations of incommensurable conceptual frameworks was therefore the case in the Americas. But could we not say that, from the beginning of colonization, the history of such frameworks is one of the 'transformation of cultural relativism into cultural diversity'? That would be true should we assume that:

> . . . Amerindians and Native American legacies and the American version (North, South, and Caribbean) of Western civilization have been transformed to the degree in which the initial incommensurability between conceptual

> frameworks has been converted into cultural diversity by means of dialogues between rational individuals, violence between communities generated by the possessive needs of Western expansion, and confrontations between conceptual frameworks. (Mignolo, 2003 [1995]: 327)

This line of reasoning has disappeared from Mignolo's writings: 'exteriority', read as if discarding modernity and totality, is there to substitute for it. Parallel histories, therefore, would provide for something such as a sort of *purity* – no contamination by modernity – as well as radical otherness.

All this line of reasoning raises the issue of 'essentialism'. But Mignolo is careful in this regard. When speaking of Latinos being against modern paradigms in the United States – where they are being joined by people with other origins – he is not referring to all Latinos but to projects that stem from them and assume 'histories of oppression' and the 'colonial wound', as a matter of 'ethics', of 'choice', not of 'skin color'. Similarly, projects by blacks do not need to represent 'all blacks', nor be only for blacks. He rejects – in principle only, not in deed, in my opinion – the 'modern myth of representation' as well as the idea of a '*safe place, racial, ideological or religious*' (Mignolo, 2005a: 113–14, 141). Moreover, while Indigenism is something external (relating to intellectuals, states, NGOs, etc.) to indigenous people, although in defence of or alliance with them, espousing different ideological persuasions, Indianism is characterized by the belief that '*lo índio*' relates deeply to a pre-Columbian configuration – a belief in which both Amerindians and non-Amerindians could share. Zapatismo has gone beyond that (including the *Indianista* vindication of insurrectionary indigenous peoples) and established translation as border thinking (Mignolo, 2000a: 149). This is also a statement that correctly points to something beyond essentialism, although it may be asked whether Mignolo's position does not remain indeed a sort of avant-garde Indigenism.

The discussion must become, therefore, much more empirically oriented. We need to concretely assess projects in order to know what we are talking about, since their direction cannot be assumed a priori. It may be interesting to summon another, quite distinct assessment of Zapatismo by a former member of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group. For Saldaña-Portillo (2001: 402–11 ff.), what actually mattered in their struggle was the demand for autonomy and citizenship for the Indian *qua* Indian, beyond *mestizaje* (the official state ideology) and the attempt to mobilize *all* sectors of Mexican society and state for true democracy. That was where the government broke off negotiations in the mid-1990s. Mere autonomy would be much less problematic and has already been granted to other regions. In any case this had nothing to do with a 'naïve' return to pre-Columbian ways in the Zapatista conception, but rather with a combination of Western terms of political representation with 'heterogeneous traditions of Indianist representation', with women being especially interested in overcoming the male-dominated Maya political traditions. Thus, if ideas such as freedom, equality, dignity and justice already point to the horizon of modernity, as

Mignolo is well aware (trying to find a solution of his own to the issue), the notion of citizenship and the democratic modernization of the whole Mexican society may actually place the Zapatistas, with their own transformative inventions and contributions, firmly within modernity. The same may be suggested of García Linera's (2006a: esp. 82) views. Although he admits that there are different 'civilizations' in Bolivia today, he is adamant regarding the necessity of the country reaching a 'political modernity' starting from what it really is, hence bringing together 'modern institutions' and 'traditional institutions'. If problematic echoes of modernization theory appear in this formulation, his point seems to be very well-taken politically, as well as theoretically. That is precisely what he deemed, in a rather broad sense, the 'national-popular in action' (García Linera, 2006b).

While the emergence of indigenous peoples' movements and, to a lesser extent, black movements in several countries in the contemporary subcontinent is, appropriately enough, a key concern in Mignolo's work – and in that of Latin American postcolonial theorizing by and large – placing such movements outside modernity is, however, mistaken. I would like to suggest instead that they may carry out some changes in modern epistemic frameworks, but that this is done in close connection with episodic, contingent *modernizing* moves that build specific paths within modernity, mixing distinct 'spaces of experience' and 'horizons of expectation', which stem from distinct civilizational backgrounds. The interplay between memories and creativity, in an open-ended manner, is crucial therein. To deprive such social movements of an originary link with modernity ends up, however good the intention, performing a move similar to that made by those who have since colonial times, and especially after independence, attempted to disqualify them for participation in the modern polis. Actual democratization, stemming from a specific *modernizing move*, is only possible in some of those countries if this participation happens. But it has been achieved through other agents and means elsewhere in Latin America. Otherwise we are back to the dichotomy between tradition and modernity, to the mirrors in which we appear as exotic creatures, although this time the dichotomy may be self-inflicted and divide up Latin American countries into those with large indigenous populations and those that are 'deprived' of them.

The case of Bolivia is especially clear in this regard. Not only are those movements ethnically based, but they also have a strong class and national component, usually related to land rights, agriculture, small trade and inclusion in a more all-encompassing nation, seen also as autonomous in relation to external forces. Harking back to the 1950s, the heritage of social struggles of the middle classes and the powerful miners' movement – nationalist, democratic and socialist, once related to the nationalization of the mines too – is a great influence in the memories and programmes of indigenous peoples' movements, especially in the region of El Chapare. Many former miners have found a home there and become once again small producers of coca after the privatization of the mines and the shrinking of their labour force. Also the national thrust of much of the Movement Towards

Socialism (MAS – Morales' organization), which appears in the moves towards the nationalization of gas production, seen as key for the state budget and future development, expresses this mixed and complex perspective, rather than a narrow ethnic standpoint and programme. It is true that Katarismo, an autonomous indigenous movement of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as older cultural issues which point to autonomy and self-determination, must also be given pride of place in these new constructions. Aymara and Quéchua legacies, among others, live on too. This happens rather selectively, however, and in a rather modernized way, even with respect to the control of their ancient idiom and more so in what regards the imaginary and other social practices, which include a mixture of rural unionism and the older structures of the Ayllu.[10]

Quéchua, Mayas, Mapuches, Tarascans and many other ethnic groups in the Americas can indeed make a particular contribution to contemporary developments. Belonging in modernity and at the same time bringing to bear their own heritage, they may have a particularly critical angle in relation to contemporary epistemological and social processes. There are in any case many ways to criticize modernity and assume a modern identity. People may stress ethnicity or race, but may choose a different direction. If we turn to classes, the same is true. Modernity is intrinsically hierarchical in terms of its social relations and, since Marx, at least we know that the acceptance of ruling ideologies by workers is as much a possibility as is the development of a sort of critical thought. The Americas are traversed by such multiple border thinking perspectives, and it is from their actual plurality and mixture that social struggles are formed or at least informed. Political consequences stemming from this readily – and practically today – contradict the programme put forward by Mignolo, whose project is too narrow even for countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador and Mexico, whose transformative forces are not exclusively or not even mainly 'indigenous', let alone countries such as Brazil and Argentina, for instance, where the situation assumes a very distinct outlook.

To explore this further I would like to dwell a bit more on a specific conceptual discussion of the manifold and multidimensional features of modernity. Sociology will be decisive here in order to provide an alternative and renewed perspective of contemporary Latin America.[11]

Modernity and Social Change in Contemporary Latin America

I would like to start with the contention that we live today in a global modern civilization, which is now highly heterogeneous (Domingues, 2005). Modernity, in its expansion, has had such a powerful impulse that it showed itself capable of bringing within its orbit other civilizational elements and orienting and transforming them somehow under its hegemony. This is what has happened in the Americas. While modernity evolved, evolutionary complexification developed too, implying greater social pluralism, due to increasing social differentiation (which also affected processes of

de-differentiation – viz. citizenship as a universal status). This was finally coupled with a radicalization of globalization, implying also that other civilizational elements have become gradually more embedded in and important for modernity. Simultaneously, far-reaching processes of disembedding unfolded as modernity developed, derived from the expansion of capitalist markets, the nation-state's encompassing reach (which implied a demand for inclusion by those not fully recognized as proper citizens, especially due to racism) and intensifying processes of communication. Responses to this continuous modernization entwine memories and creative modernizing moves by collective subjectivities of all sorts, whose direction is contingent and depends in great measure on the moves of other social agents, in turn propelling once again new processes of modernization.

Changes have occurred, though, and a periodization of modernity makes this clear. This can be done in three phases, starting in the late 18th or 19th century, when a really modern imaginary and modern institutions are in place, at least minimally and as a contingent telos of development, in some parts of the globe.[12] The first phase was a liberal one, in Europe and the United States, even more restricted in Latin America than in the West, due to the pre-eminence of powerful landlords. The second was organized by the state – implying developmentalism and corporatism in many Latin American countries. The third, the present one, is a phase of greater complexity and pluralization of social life, in which neoliberalism has enjoyed, at least for the time being, great sway (see Domingues, 2008). Whereas the project of the first two phases of modernity was rooted in the idea of a homogenization of social life by the market and the state, the third phase – through especially its dominant collectivities: corporations, international organizations, some core states – has already relinquished this and concretely opted for a more heterogeneous and contingent framework for social life, since its actual complexity has turned that original project into at best a mirage, as well as being unable to sustain effective strategies of control. Nation-states and their homogenizing project have had to adapt to these changes and no longer seem capable of either imposing general identities without taking social pluralism into account, nor excluding those who do not conform to the patterns chosen by ruling collectivities (a white-Westernizing design in Latin America), especially since a 'molecular revolution', that is, a piecemeal but relentless process of social and political democratization, has been developing in the subcontinent. Intellectuals have reflected this and social movements have seen more space open for their affirmation of particularities. If what Walsh (2000, 2006) has called 'interculturality', that is, the absorption by the encompassing society of forms and content rooted in non-Western sources, then, beyond mere multicultural recognition, things tend to become conflictive and much more complicated. In turn, inasmuch as such particularities do not actually threaten the power of those powerful collectivities, they may be accommodated and accepted within this new, enlarged framework of contemporary modernity.

The opening of identities and the very emergence of ethnic movements, which the state can no longer prevent, is part and parcel of the third phase of modernity, as much as it is the result of a couple of decades of ethnic militancy. Formerly a peasant identity and working-class movements, along with a leftist as well as middle-class nationalism within the developmental framework, were the nodal points of identity formation. This does not mean that ethnic identities were not important: they just tended to be neither rationalized nor politicized as they often (though not always) are today. Social movements, in this regard, are now quite plural and depend on network mechanisms to organize themselves internally as well as to weave alliances (Domingues, 2007: ch. 5, 2008: ch. 3).

Modernity is, moreover, a two-pronged phenomenon; this is why we must maintain an ambivalent relation towards it. It has at its core some entrenched systems of domination: capitalism, the bureaucratic state and patriarchy, as well as racism. While the two former are intrinsic to modernity, the latter may entertain a more contingent relation to it, regardless of how close-knit they have been since its inception. But modernity also has some key imaginary elements – emancipatory – which have furnished its horizon of expectations across the planet: freedom, equality and solidarity, with responsibility playing a more discreet though rather important part (Domingues, 2006). It is quite likely, as Marx argued in his immanent critique, that they cannot be realized in modernity, and therefore need a different type of society in which they would be sublated, including of course 'coloniality', a historical feature of the birth and expansion of modernity, however that is conceptualized. It may be also that perspectives that bring into contemporary modern discussions elements from other civilizational sources can provide new elements of criticism – for instance by insisting on the *community* moment of democracy, such as is the case in Bolivia today. In any case, an opening of citizenship and to some extent its transformation as well as a re-structuration of the nation stands at the core of all these movements and their 'epistemic' proposals.

New principles of thinking and systematic theorizing can be proposed by 'border thinking' constructions rooted in indigenous peoples' movements, reaching maturation in various forms of (hopefully not dichotomous) 'another thinking'. But other movements and their own brand of 'border thinking' – race-oriented movements, workers', women's and environmental movements or whatever – stand on an equal footing with ethnically based social movements, especially in countries in which those are by far the minority. We are far beyond the days when working-class movements could demand an absolutely central position in social change. It is not reasonable that we should expect other partial movements to take their place. This is certainly *not* the Zapatistas' perspective. Such movements become really threatening when they weave broad alliances and when more encompassing issues – such as the traditional left banner of nationalization or the more recent one, taken up again, though transformed and democratically radicalized, of citizenship – are pursued to their completion. Such *modernizing moves*,

which take different directions, will inevitably develop through modernity, albeit not necessarily within it should radical social change come about. While neoliberalism reiterates modern systems of domination (especially capitalism and bureaucratic state power, with low-intensity democracy), those democratic moves may remain within modernity (although widening its democratic horizons, at the imaginary level and institutionally) or point beyond it, in any case being informed by and having to engage with it – even if their constitution as collective subjectivities centrally includes other civilizational elements. This is in some part happening right now, when some of those movements take the telos contained in the horizon of expectations of modernity and lend new specificities to older traditions stemming from liberal and socialist thought, creatively transforming them to a large extent, while the same is happening to indigenous traditions, which have by now been radically modernized themselves.

Doubtless a view in which a single rationale presides over the historical process, implying a very closed and tight totality, is no longer tenable, beyond ideological delusions and power projects. This is radically distinct from not recognizing that a unification of history through the constitution and expansion of modernity has come about, leading to a deepening of globalization. The emerging totality, however, does not do away with local space-time specificities – they are the very stuff of global history, i.e. global space-time, which includes hegemonic sites and projects as well as resistances and oppositional projects, as well as accommodations. A heterogeneous totality, with contradictory and multifarious historical developments, must be therefore acknowledged (cf. Quijano, 2000, whose view is quite appropriate here). 'Pluriversality' is and may become a stronger feature of the contemporary world, but will develop necessarily within a dialogue with universality/modernity, pointing to a more open totality than that postulated by Hegel and similar perspectives.

A more thorough analysis of the connection between modernity and coloniality needs to be carried out, however, so that these issues can be more precisely addressed; and the same process should take place with the definitions and connections between colonialism, 'coloniality' and also the rather problematic notion of 'internal colonialism'. But then sociology will have to be mobilized again, since it has been the discipline within which – whatever its biases and shortcomings – modernity has been theorized, although, indeed, it still needs to reach out to its global dimension in a more concretely and empirically, as well as theoretically oriented, manner than it has done thus far.

Final Words

Far-reaching transformations have characterized the last decades in Latin America, expressing the specific development of what I have defined as the third phase of the global modern civilization. Thus far there are few attempts at a general theorization of this process. The postcolonial approach dwelt upon here, mainly Walter Mignolo's work, aims at overcoming this lack of

overarching thinking. I have found it wanting in a number of aspects, however, especially his simple inversion of the polarities of modernization theory, his wholesale dismissal of modernity and his overvaluation of the ethnic question. In any event, the addition of ideas such as 'decolonial shift' has not taken Mignolo very far in overcoming the problems his main works evince, insofar as those basic assumptions are not confronted and effectively solved. I have proposed a more sociological theorization that has pointed to the increasing complexity of modernity, loaded with oppressive features but also fraught with possibilities of emancipation. These are in particular expressed in the subcontinent's contemporary social movements, which have a myriad of expressions. I believe that living and theorizing from the periphery or the semi-periphery must lead to changes in concepts and to a different perspective on modernity, according to the very social dynamics such societies evince, and that a 'colonial' mentality must be politically and theoretically avoided by the researcher. There may be a lot to learn from indigenous ways of thought, but the contribution of the social sciences for the understanding of that process cannot be waived.

Postcolonial or decolonial approaches of the kind we have analysed here may certainly make their own contribution to this endeavour, but will need to revise some of their key assumptions so as to be more theoretically productive and politically encompassing. A more systematic dialogue with the social sciences is surely also required. At the same time, Latin American sociology must come to grips with general theorizations, beyond mere description, case studies and a loosely defined 'critical' stance. Thereby it can resume its great tradition, embodied by people such Florestan Fernandes, Pablo Gonzalez Casanova and Gino Germani, and contribute its share to current and future processes of emancipation in the subcontinent as well as at a global level.

Notes

I would like to thank Frédéric Vandenberghe and Manuela Boatca for careful readings of former versions of this article, the latter despite holding quite different views, and especially for making available papers that are otherwise difficult to gather.

1. As for Dussel, suffice it to note here that, although he speaks of the 'metaphysical alterity' and the radical freedom of that which is constituted by its exteriority to the system, he also stresses that exteriority should be thought of as inner 'trancendentality' in relation to the totality. Moreover, he does not at all reduce exteriority and social change to originally pre-Colombian ethnic groups (see Dussel, 1996 [1977]: esp. 55–64).

2. At the very end of *Local Histories/Global Designs*, Mignolo (2000a: 338) notes that 'inside and outside', 'center and periphery', are basically 'double metaphors' rather than elements of an ontology of reality: what matters is their loci of enunciation. But this does not really correspond to the very substantive arguments put forward in his work, unless we take them as merely rhetorical and rather arbitrary, idiosyncratic constructions.

3. The Valladolid debates and the school of Salamanca were crucial in this period,

although later on they were overshadowed by the 'black legend'. The splendour of redefining man was Spanish, but much of its misery befell them – a concept of humanity based on racial criteria (Mignolo, 2003 [1995]: 429–32).

4. Although he states that he had already put forward critical theses, it is only in the course of a critical discussion of Huntington's later book, *Who Are We?*, that Mignolo (2005b) actually changes his view and distances himself from him. He may have realized that his former position was untenable and dangerously open to charges similar to the ones related to Huntington's conservatism.

5. He quotes Singapore's dictator, Kuan Yew, apparently to justify an anti-Eurocentric agenda, later on lumping together people like Sayyid Qutb, Ali Shariati, Ayatollah Komeini and the Latin American liberation philosophers, who all thought of 'liberation' in the 1970s: a strange bunch indeed (cf. Mignolo, 2002: 270, 2007b: 457).

6. However problematic his tripartite definition of knowledges and their underlying interests, as well as his creeping neo-Kantism, Habermas' (1968 [1965]) discussion of emancipation as underpinning critical theory cannot be dismissed out of hand. Nor should we just caricature his view of modernity on a global plane, once again, despite the shortcomings of his Eurocentrism. Others, such as Santos (2001), closer to postcolonial studies, celebrate the reinvention of emancipation and *mestizaje*, through recourse to Cuba's late 19th-century revolutionary hero, José Martí – a line of reasoning and an author which, for obvious reasons, Mignolo cannot explore.

7. It is worth noting that this is in any case a problem for Quijano (1993): against coloniality and Eurocentrism, he bets on a more encompassing and democratic nation-state.

8. See Feres Jr (2005) for a detailed analysis of modernization theory with regard to Latin America.

9. See Wade (1997) for an overview of black movements in the subcontinent.

10. For a good overview of the Bolivian process, see Monasterios et al. (2007). I draw here also upon Alice Guimarães' PhD thesis, soon to de presented to Rio de Janeiro University Research Institute (IUPERJ).

11. McLennan (2003) and Costa (2006) note that it is not clear what exactly sociology can learn from postcolonial studies. I am not sure that I have advanced in this regard, especially vis-à-vis its Latin American expressions, but I hope I am building some bridges.

12. I here disagree, of course, with Wallerstein's (1974, 1980, 1989) Braudelian perspective and his dating of capitalism's onset already in the 16th century. It is not only production oriented to trade and profit, whatever forms of labour provide it, but a whole set of specific institutions (including capitalist relations of production) and a specific imaginary (though it started to emerge in the different Renaissances) that, in my view, characterize modernity.

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José Maurício Domingues holds a PhD in Sociology from the London School of Economic and Political Science, is professor at the Rio de Janeiro University Research Institute, and is the author of, among others, the following books: *Sociological Theory and Collective Subjectivity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan/New York: St Martin's Press, 1995); *Social Creativity, Collective Subjectivity and Contemporary Modernity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan/New York: St Martin's Press, 2000); *Modernity Reconstructed* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006); *Latin America and Contemporary Modernity*: *A Sociological Interpretation* (New York and London: Routledge, 2008).