

Theorizing from the Borders Shifting to Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge

Walter D. Mignolo

DUKE UNIVERSITY, NORTH CAROLINA, USA

Madina V. Tlostanova

PEOPLES' FRIENDSHIP UNIVERSITY OF RUSSIA, MOSCOW, RUSSIA

Abstract

'Borders' will be in the twenty-first century what 'frontiers' were in the nineteenth. Frontiers were conceived as the line indicating the last point in the relentless march of civilization. On the one side of the frontiers was civilization; on the other, nothing; just barbarism or emptiness. The march of civilization and the idea of the frontiers created a geographic and body-graphic divide. Certain areas of the planet were designated as the location of the barbarians, and since the eighteenth century, of the primitives. In one stroke, bodies were classified and assigned a given place on the planet. But who had the authority to enact such a classification, and what was the logic of that classification? Furthermore, the classification of the world by region, and the link established between regions and people inhabiting them, was parallel to the march of civilization and companions of it: on the other side of the epistemic frontiers, people do not think or theorize; hence, one of the reasons they were considered barbarians.

Key words

■ de-colonial thinking ■ epistemic shift ■ geo-body politics of knowledge ■ imperial/colonial epistemic differences ■ theo-ego politics of knowledge

The modern foundation of knowledge is territorial and imperial. By modern we mean the socio-historical organization and classification of the world founded on a macro-narrative and on a specific concept and principles of knowledge. The point of reference of modernity is the European Renaissance founded, as an idea and interpretation of a historical present, on two complementary moves: the colonization of time and the invention of the Middle Ages, and the colonization of space and the invention of America that became integrated into a Christian

tripartite geo-political order: Asia, Africa and Europe. It was from and in Europe that the classification of the world emerged and not in and from Asia, Africa or America – borders were created therein but of different kinds. The Middle Ages were integrated into the history of Europe, while the histories in Asia, Africa and America were denied as history. The world map drawn by Gerardus Mercator and Johannes Ortelius worked together with theology to create a zero point of observation and of knowledge: a perspective that denied all other perspectives (Castro-Gómez, 2002). Epistemological frontiers were set in place in that double move: frontiers that expelled to the outside the epistemic colonial differences (Arabic, Aymara, Hindi, Bengali, etc.). Epistemic frontiers were re-articulated in the eighteenth century with the displacement of theology and the theo-politics of knowledge by secular ego-logy and the ego-politics of knowledge. Epistemic frontiers were traced also by the creation of the imperial difference (with the Ottoman, the Chinese and the Russian empires) and the colonial difference (with Indians and Blacks in America). Both epistemic differences, colonial and imperial, were based on a racial classification of the population of the planet, a classificatory order in which those who made the classification put themselves at the top of Humanity. The Renaissance idea of Man was conceptualized based on the paradigmatic examples of Western Christianity, Europe, and white and male subjectivity (Kant, 1798; Las Casas, 1552). Thus, from the Renaissance all the way down, the rhetoric of modernity could not have been sustained without its darker and constitutive side: the logic of coloniality.

Border thinking or theorizing emerged from and as a response to the violence (frontiers) of imperial/territorial epistemology and the rhetoric of modernity (and globalization) of salvation that continues to be implemented on the assumption of the inferiority or devilish intentions of the Other and, therefore, continues to justify oppression and exploitation as well as eradication of the difference. Border thinking is the epistemology of the exteriority; that is, of the outside created from the inside; and as such, it is always a decolonial project. Recent immigration to the imperial sites of Europe and the USA – crossing the imperial and colonial differences – contributes to maintaining the conditions for border thinking that emerged from the very inception of modern imperial expansion. In this regard, critical border thinking displaces and subsumes Max Horkheimer's 'critical theory' which was and still is grounded in the experience of European internal history (Horkheimer, 1937). 'Critical border thinking' instead is grounded in the experiences of the colonies and subaltern empires. Consequently, it provides the epistemology that was denied by imperial expansion. 'Critical border thinking' also denies the epistemic privilege of the humanities and the social sciences – the privilege of an observer that makes the rest of the world an object of observation (from Orientalism to Area Studies). It also moves away from the post-colonial toward the de-colonial, shifting to the geo- and body-politics of knowledge.

Why do we need border thinking? Where is it taking us? To the de-colonial shift as a fracture of the epistemology of the zero point. Border thinking brings to the foreground different kinds of theoretical actors and principles of knowledge

that displace European modernity (which articulated the very concept of theory in the social sciences and the humanities) and empower those who have been epistemically disempowered by the theo- and ego-politics of knowledge. The decolonial epistemic shift is no longer grounded in Greek and Latin categories of thought that informed modern epistemology (since the Renaissance) in the six European imperial languages (Italian, Spanish and Portuguese for the Renaissance; French, English and German for the Enlightenment), but in the epistemic borders between European imperial categories and languages and categories that modern epistemology ruled out as epistemically non-sustainable (e.g. Mandarin, Japanese, Russian, Hindi, Urdu, Aymara, Nahuatl, Wolof, Arabic, etc.). The epistemology of the zero point is 'managerial' and it is today common to business, natural sciences, professional schools, and the social sciences. Border thinking is the epistemology of the future, without which another world will be impossible.

Epistemology is woven into language and, above all, into alphabetically written languages. And languages are not something human beings *have* but they are part of what human beings *are*. As such, languages are embedded in the body and in the memories (geo-historically located) of each person. A person formed in Aymara, Hindi or Russian who has to learn the rules and principles of knowledge mainly inscribed in the three imperial languages of the second modernity (French, English and German), would of necessity have to deal with a 'gap'; while a person formed in German or English who learns the rules and principles of knowledge inscribed in German or English is not subject to such a gap. But there is more, since the situation is not one that can be accounted for in terms of the universal history of human beings and society. Knowledge and subjectivities have been and continue to be shaped by the colonial and imperial differences that structured the modern/colonial world.

Consider, on the one hand, knowledge in the modern and imperial European languages and – on the other hand – Russian, Arabic and Mandarin. The difference here is imperial. However, they are not just different. In the modern/colonial unconscious, they belong to different epistemic ranks. 'Modern' science, philosophy, and the social sciences are not grounded in Russian, Chinese and Arabic languages. That of course does not mean that there is no thinking going on or knowledge produced in Russian, Chinese and Arabic. It means, on the contrary, that in the global distribution of intellectual and scientific labor, knowledge produced in English, French or German does not need to take into account knowledge in Russian, Chinese and Arabic. Furthermore, increasingly since the sixteenth century, knowledge in Russian, Chinese and Arabic cannot avoid intellectual production in English, French and German. Strictly speaking, societies in which Russian, Chinese and Arabic are spoken were not colonized in the way the Americas and South Asia were. Thus, any languages beyond the six imperial European ones, and their grounding in Greek and Latin, have been disqualified as languages with world-wide epistemic import. And of course, this impinges on subject formation: people who are not trusted in their thinking, are doubted in their rationality and wounded in their dignity. Border thinking then emerges

from the colonial and the imperial wound. If we consider, instead, Hindi or Aymara, the epistemic difference with modern European languages and epistemology will be colonial. In both cases, the coloniality of knowledge and of being goes hand in hand with modernity's rhetoric of salvation. The rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality are mutually constituted and are the two sides of the same coin. Today the shaping of subjectivity, the coloniality of being/knowledge is often described within the so-called globalization of culture, a phrase, which in the rhetoric of modernity reproduces the logic of coloniality of knowledge and of being.¹

Borders Not Only Geographic, but Epistemic

Accordingly, our first thesis is the following. 'Borders' are not only geographic but also political, subjective (e.g. cultural) and epistemic and, contrary to frontiers, the very concept of 'border' implies the existence of people, languages, religions and knowledge on both sides linked through relations established by the coloniality of power (e.g. structured by the imperial and colonial differences). Borders in this precise sense, are not a natural outcome of a natural or divine historical processes in human history, but were created in the very constitution of the modern/colonial world (i.e. in the imaginary of Western and Atlantic capitalist empires formed in the past five hundred years). If we limit our observations to the geographic, epistemic and subjective types of borders in the modern/colonial world (from the European Renaissance till today), we will see that they all have been created from the perspective of European imperial/colonial expansion: massive appropriation of land accompanied by the constitution of international law that justified the massive appropriation of land (Grovgui, 1996; Schmitt, 1952); control of knowledge (the epistemology of the zero point as representation of the real) by disqualifying non-European languages and epistemologies and control of subjectivities (by conversation, civilization, democratization) or, in today's language – by the globalization of culture.

Our second thesis is the following. 'Border thinking' (or border epistemology) emerges primarily from the people's anti-imperial epistemic responses to the colonial difference – the difference that hegemonic discourse endowed to 'other' people, classifying them as inferior and at the same time asserting its geo-historical and body-social configurations as superior and the models to be followed. These people refuse to be geographically caged, subjectively humiliated and denigrated and epistemically disregarded. For this reason, the de-colonial epistemic shift proposes to change the rule of the game – and not just the content – and the reason why knowledge is produced: de-colonization, instead of working toward the accumulation of knowledge and imperial management, works toward the empowerment and liberation of different layers (racial, sexual, gender, class, linguistic, epistemic, religious, etc.) from oppression, and toward the undermining of the assumption upon which imperial power is naturalized, enacted and corrupted. Second, border thinking could emerge also from the

imperial difference, i.e. the same mechanism of the colonial difference but applied to people in similar socio-economic conditions as the ones who are in a dominant position. Western (Christian and secular) discourses about Indians and Blacks (that is, Africans transported to the Americas) founded the colonial difference and the modern matrix of racism. During the same period, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Western Christian and secular discourse founded the imperial difference with the Ottoman and the Russian Empires. Turks and Russian, in other words, were obviously not Indians and Blacks in the Western hegemonic geo- and body-classification of the world. However, it was clear to everybody in the West that Turks and Russians might not be Blacks or Indians, but they were not European either. However, 'second-class' empires in the history of Western capitalist ones also had to deal with colonies. Empires like the Russian/Soviet (and also Japan, 1895–1945) and the Ottoman, before its demise, are all Janus-faced empires: one eye is pointing toward Western capitalist and dominant empires, while the other looks toward their own colonies (Tlostanova, 2003).

Zero point epistemology configured by the theo- and ego-politics of knowledge has shaped Western imperial expansion throughout five centuries. Border thinking is configured by the geo- and body-politics of knowledge. What are the relations between geo-historical locations and epistemology, on the one hand, and between identity and epistemology, on the other? These questions have not been asked by theological and egological epistemologies.² The array of possibilities for border thinking is indeed vast but they all have one thing in common: how do people in the world deal with Western economic, political and epistemic expansion if they do not want to assimilate but choose to imagine a future that is their own invention and not the invention of the empires, hegemonic or subaltern? Someone born and raised in British India does not have much in common with someone born and raised in Latin America; the languages and religions are different, the histories are incommensurable. However, they have a common history: the imperial/colonial history of Western capitalist and Christian empires – Spain and England. From the imperial perspective – either of the dominant empires (England, America) or the subaltern empires (Russia, China, the Ottoman Empire of the past), border thinking is almost an impossibility (one would have to give up the epistemic privilege of Western modernity and admit that knowledge and understanding are generated beyond institutional norms and control) and, from the colonial perspective, border thinking is straightforwardly a necessity. The next question is whether border thinking could emerge from the perspective of subaltern empires or its chances for emergence are better in the colonies and what kind of colonies at that – the (ex-)colonies of a subaltern empire (e.g., Uzbekistan, Ukraine) or a hegemonic empire (e.g., India during the British rule; Iraq under US imperial moves; Bolivia and Ecuador in the history of the Spanish empire and the present of US domination in Latin America; or South Africa in its past and present)?³ Border thinking and the de-colonial shift cannot be reduced to an abstract universal (e.g. critical theory, semiotics of culture, or nomadology for everyone on the planet) that will account for all

experiences and geo-historical violence and memories. Pluriversality, and not universality, is the major claim made by border thinking and the justification for the de-colonial shift. Once again, there is no pluri-versality from the perspective of theo- and ego-politics of knowledge. Pluri-versality is only possible from border thinking, that is, from shifting the geography of reason to geo- and body-politics of knowledge.

While imperial epistemology is based on theological and egological principles, the shift to geo- and body-political principles is indeed a de-colonial move. Geo- and body-politics are the 'displaced inversion' of theo- and ego-politics of knowledge. It is an 'inversion' because it is assumed that John Locke's 'secondary qualities' cannot be bracketed in the process of knowing and understanding. And in a world order in which the imperial and colonial differences establish all hierarchies, from economy to knowledge, 'secondary qualities' that matter are colonial local histories (geo-politics) subordinated to imperial local histories, on the one hand, and colonial subjectivities (e.g. what Frantz Fanon described as 'the wretched of the earth'), on the other. Colonial subjectivities are the consequences of racialized bodies, the inferiority that imperial classification assigned to every body that does not comply with the criteria of knowledge established by white, European, Christian and secular men. Thus, 'displaced inversion' means that it is not just a change in the content but fundamentally in the terms of the conversation: the geo- and body-political perspectives de-link from the imperial and totalitarian bent of theo- and ego-logical principles. It is hardly enough to question the secularity of the social sciences from the perspective of theology, as John Milbank does. It is of the essence to move away from inversions internal to imperial epistemology and to shift the geo-graphy and the bio-graphy of reason.

These positions are hard to reconcile, which is clearly seen in any juxtaposition of Western and radical non-Western theorizing of borders. From the perspective of the imperial difference, the conditions and possibilities of border thinking and de-colonization are not only different but also more difficult. If in the history of borders marked by colonial differences the opposition to the empire is clear and loud; in the history of borders marked by imperial differences, the *assimilation* (e.g. Peter and Catherine in Russia) and desire to become the West, or *competition* (the Soviet Union confronting Western capitalist empires) takes precedence over *decolonization* (which would be a sort of de-imperialization), as we see in case of Russia today. China offers still another example of border thinking through the imperial difference: *adaptation* without *assimilation*. Overall, the conditions for de-colonization seem to be more promising in the colonies and ex-colonies; or in empires that had been reduced to colonies (e.g. the Islamic empire, which by the nineteenth century, was already subdivided and found itself at the mercy of the new imperialism of England and France). The ex-second world, or better yet, the world marked by the imperial more than colonial differences, lives on/in the border, and yet instead of border thinking we find there blurred, smudged, in-between models (the Ottoman Empire, Russia/USSR, Central and South-Eastern Europe).⁴ Their differences with the West are also of a blurred and unstable nature and this makes it difficult to conceptualize

such locales and epistemic and existential configurations from the viewpoints of both West and radical non-West, as well as from the viewpoint of these very people who were colonized by Western thinking, infected with secondary Eurocentrism and not able to analyse their own split subjectivity (their *double consciousness*, the necessary condition for border thinking), because it is always easier to analyze binary polar structures than soft and blurred difference – same but not quite, different, but too similar. Geo- and body-politics of knowledge as well as border thinking implies the awareness of the double consciousness.

Double consciousness, as conceptualized by the African-American sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois (see note 2) lies at the very foundation of border thinking. Double consciousness is border thinking and border thinking is double consciousness. There cannot be border thinking without double consciousness. Imperial consciousness is always territorial and monotopic; border thinking is always pluri-topic and engendered by the violence of the colonial and imperial differences. Internal imperial critique (be that of Bartolomé de las Casas or Karl Marx) is territorial and monotopic and assumes the ‘truth’ of abstract universals (peaceful Christianization by conversion, free market, international revolution of the proletarians, etc.). Double consciousness emerges from the experiences of being someone (black, inscribed in the memory and histories of the slave trade in the Atlantic economy) who was classified by the imperial-national gaze (the European imperial frame of mind, the emerging US imperial nationalism at the turn of the twentieth century). Thus, the problem of identity and of identity politics is a direct consequence of imperial knowledges making all the inhabitants of the New World Indians and Blacks and all of Asia the Yellow Race. If border thinking is the unavoidable condition of imperial/colonial domination, critical border thinking is the imperial/condition transformed into epistemic and political projects of de-colonization. For that reason, de-colonial thinking is always already critical, it is border thinking and it is double consciousness border thinking and double consciousness. Hegel, Kant and Marx – to name just three European luminaries – denied internal others, be they Slavic people or Turks, a place in the universal history, in the march of modernity, in the unfolding of global proletarian revolution, etc. Their dis-incorporated epistemology and their belief in universal parameters blinded them to the subjectivity of otherness and more so to internal others. It was beyond their scope to understand why a Russian feels himself to be a cockroach in Europe (Yerofeyev, 2000), while a Turk buying a coat from a French store is in fact buying a European dream (Pamuk, 2000).⁵

The reaction of the internal others to this rejection has been that of an unconscious border, divided between the first and third worlds, wanting to see itself as part of a center. The border’s painful division is being masked and at once reinforced when in Istanbul they change the alphabet to Latin or make slightly crooked, but recognizably Parisian boulevards; when in Moscow they speak only French or destroy their own economy in order to please the IMF. Today the split configuration of internal others is expressed in the continuing hierarchy of othering: the ex-second world, on the one hand, plays the role of unwanted and

threatening immigrant in the West; on the other hand, the West guards its own borders (including epistemic borders) against the unwanted immigration from the ex-Soviet republics and ex-third world. However, when border thinking does not emerge, the alternatives are competition, assimilation, or resistance without a vision of the future.

For instance, when the European imperial/colonial model was replicated and transformed in subaltern empires or empires-colonies, such as Russia or the Ottoman Empire (which became mirror reflections of each other, one a quasi-Western and the other a quasi-Islamic empire), it led to ideological and intellectual dependency on the West and the epistemic colonization by the West which resulted in the phenomenon of two cultures – the culture of a European-oriented imperial/national elite with secondary Eurocentric inferiority complexes, and the impenetrable culture of people, that the elite is either ashamed of or attracted to, in the importing of the Western discourses of nationalism, cosmopolitanism, liberalism, socialism, modernization, progress, etc. (Tlostanova, 2004).

The imperial and colonial epistemic differences create the condition for border thinking, but do not determine it. In the hierarchical structure of the modern/colonial world, four main types of dependency relations can be identified: (1) the oppositional attitude consisting of total rejection of Western epistemology and subjectivity based on fundamentalist defense of languages, religions, knowledges, etc.; (2) the assimilating attitude, consisting in wanting to become like the superior other and, therefore, yielding to the imperial language, knowledge and subjectivity at the high price of alienating oneself into the imperial Other (this is the case of the trickster empire Turkey, making its own subaltern status work for its benefit – through transcultural and trans-religious mediation of Western ideologies and establishing of new alliances based not on abstract principles of democracy and freedom, but on religious, linguistic, indigenously economic and cultural expansionism and soft penetration, which today turns out to be more effective than many European and American strategies (Griffiths and Özdemir, 2004; Özbudun and Keyman, 2002); (3) competition within the capitalist rules of the game or adaptation without assimilation (e.g. China or modern defeated Russia, to some extent, which is still grounding itself in the doomed imperial myths of grandeur and dominance, finding solace in understanding the border as an aggressive expansionistic ‘third way’ and reviving the dusty ideology of Eurasianism); and (4) border thinking and critical border thinking, consisting in the incorporation of Western contributions in different domains of life and knowledge into an epistemic and political project that affirms the difference, colonial and/or imperial to which most of the population of the world has been subjected throughout the five hundred years of economic, religious, epistemic imperial expansion and its consequences in the formation of split subjectivities.

Dependency relations are established, through the imperial and colonial differences, with the exteriority of Europe. But these dependency relations with the colonies revert back to its internal others like the Jews, the immigrants and the states, the ex-Soviet colonies, now joining the European Union. Aimé Césaire

clearly saw, in the 1950s, that the colonial matrix of power set up and implemented through 450 years of colonization had been implemented by the Nazi regime in Germany and by the communist regime in the Soviet Union (Césaire, 1955). These are all different historical conditions from which border positions could be developed as active de-colonizing projects, both epistemic and political from the lived experiences (e.g. subjectivity) of diverse communities. Geo- and body-politics of knowledge would be of the essence to disengage from the epistemology of the zero point in which the geo- and the body-politics has been repressed. The epistemology of the zero point that privileges political economy and political theory continues to repress the geo-historical and body-graphic politic of knowledge in which critical border thinking is founded. The interconnections between geo-historical locations (in the modern/colonial order of things) and epistemology, on the one hand, and body-racial and gender epistemic configurations on the other, sustain 'the inverted displacement' we describe here as geo-politics and body-politics of knowledge. If, say, René Descartes or Immanuel Kant suppressed (in their theo- and ego-political epistemic foundations) the geo- and body-political component of their thinking, Frantz Fanon (1952) and Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) (Saldívar-Hull, 2000) brought both (geo- and body-politics) wide and loud into the open.

Border thinking needs its own genealogy and its own history; a history and a genealogy that emerge in the very act of performing border thinking. Without it, border thinking will remain either an appendix of modern Western imperial epistemology and the variants of canonical history of Western civilization told from the imperial perspective (from the Renaissance, to Hegel, to Marx); or an object of study for the social sciences (like the savage mind for earlier anthropologists). If border thinking is to emerge and prosper in the ex-second world today, it would have to happen in the colonial and ex-colonial locales of the subaltern empires, among the people who were multi-marginalized and denied their voice by Western modernity – directly and through subaltern imperial mediation. It is the Caucasus and Central Asia (with regard to Russia), the Kurds, the Greeks and the Armenians (with regard to the Ottoman Empire), the Yugoslavian bundle of contradictions in the Balkans, etc. But these voices are never heard and will hardly be heard soon. These mutes colonized by the subaltern empires are split between the original of Western culture (now also accessible to them) and its bad subaltern empire copies, the ex-mediators of civilization, plus their own native ethnic traditions continue to play their part in the process of the already split selves being shattered into even smaller pieces. That's why the manifestation of the 'multitude' (in Georgia, the Ukraine or Kirgizstan) is mobilized more by a desire to assimilate to the West than to engage in imagining a possible future beyond the options offered by communism and its aftermath, and liberalism and its aftermath.

Thinking from the Borders

Our third thesis is the following. Borders could be 'studied' from the perspective of territorial epistemology (e.g. Western social sciences, see Horkheimer's traditional theory) but the 'problem' of the twenty-first century will be not so much to study the life and deeds of the borders, but to *think from the borders themselves*. That is, dwelling in the borders means re-writing geographic frontiers, imperial/colonial subjectivities and territorial epistemologies. Paraphrasing African-American sociologist W.E.B. Dubois (1904), we can say that the problem of the twenty-first century will be – next to that of the color line announced by Dubois – the problem of the 'epistemic line' (Bogues, 2003). However, the epistemic line does not replace or displace the color line. The color and epistemic lines belong to different realms of reality, since epistemology is not supposed to have color, gender or sexuality. In terms of social class, the problems are easier to deal with because it was assumed that epistemology belonged to a division of labor in which the 'intellectual workers' do not belong to the same class as the 'proletarians'. However, intellectual workers, even if they are not proletarians, do have color, gender and sexuality. Thus, the 'borders' between the color (and gender and sexuality) line and the epistemic line are precisely where the 'problem' appears and the solutions are being played out. For there is a shift at work at the moment when the epistemic line is interrogated from the perspective of the color (gender and sexuality) line. It is at this very moment that border thinking or border epistemology emerges: it emerges *in* the crack and it emerges *as* an epistemic shift. It is a shift from theo- and ego- to geo- and body-politics of knowledge.

The question commonly asked is: how do you perform border thinking and how do you enact the de-colonial shift? What is the method? Interestingly enough, the question is most often asked by predominantly white and North Atlantic scholars and intellectuals. It is impossible to imagine Dubois asking that question because he prompted it with his own thinking, dwelling in what he called *double consciousness*. The question is interesting because it acts like a boomerang and returns to the person who asked the question. Why is he or she asking that question? Where is he or she dwelling, in a *single consciousness*? Why was it an African-American like Dubois and not a German like Habermas who came up with a concept such as double consciousness? Furthermore, double consciousness would not admit the thesis that promotes the 'inclusion of the other' (Habermas, 1998). Double consciousness and the inclusion of the other confront each other across the colonial difference. The question is not being asked because modern epistemology (theologically and ego-logically based), separated the geo- and corporal location of the thinker. The hubris of the zero point – by eliminating perspectives – prevents the possibility of asking: how can I inhabit at once both the zero point and that place which the zero point negates? Asking that question, 'feeling' that modern epistemology is totalitarian (that negates all other alternatives to the zero point), is the first step to border thinking. And it is also a dwelling that is no longer the House of the Spirit – i.e. the dwelling of modern European philosophy and science.

To answer the previous question, let's look again at the Janus-faced empires of Russia/Soviet Union and think about how border thinking could emerge out of the imperial difference of Russia today, dwelling in the memories of subaltern empires, on the one hand, and how could it emerge in the colonies or ex-colonies, on the other? How could border thinking and de-colonization of knowledge and of being (i.e. the de-colonial shift) be thought out and enacted from the histories and perspectives of those locales? And how could it flourish? The blurred spaces of internal otherness and imperial difference in this case once again link knowledge production and race (accepting as a natural the idea that modern epistemology is and should be White). However, no matter how hard 'the other' tries to imitate or adapt European or – today – American epistemological hegemony, for the West, these internal others continue to play the part of culture-producing and not knowledge-generating regions of the earth, never really changing their a-historical status assigned to them by Hegel. This scenario is particularly clear in case of Russia and its imperial/colonial interdependence with its colonies in Asia and Central Europe. Russia did not have its own theology in the Western sense of the word; philosophy and science were shaped there following the Western model and borrowed from Europe in their already secularized variants, while later on there emerged a double alterity from the old traditionalist Russia and from Europe that failed to fulfill its universalist promises. Epistemology, philosophy and science were born in Russia at the time when European modernity had already managed to naturalize its dominance and erase everything inauspicious for itself – the histories and epistemic traditions (such as the Islamic one), while considerably altering and correcting others (such as Antiquity) to its benefit. Russia discovered epistemology as such at this very moment and has never since seriously questioned its basic Eurocentric principles, consequently classifying the rest of the world, including its own non-European colonies, according to the Western European racist colonial matrix of power.

The most interesting and promising case for border thinking is to be found in Islamic (ex-)colonies of Russia that have managed to preserve their epistemic link with the Islamic tradition and centers of thought, philosophy and science. That is why the logical step of the Soviet Empire was to erase completely and effectively all traces of this link, to deprive these people of the past, epistemology and culture, to rewrite history in such a way that their antiquity would be negated, to ban the previous (mostly Arabic) alphabetic systems and make them start anew with the Cyrillic. Border thinking, in other words, could not be acknowledged by the territorial epistemology of the state without losing its imperial control of knowledge and subjectivity. It is also symptomatic that virtually all instances of border thinking in Eurasia appear in fictional or semi-fictional forms, especially in the post-Soviet period. That is, border thinking presupposes the transgression of genre and disciplinary boundaries. Here border thinking creates border or transcultural aesthetics with specific narrative viewpoints, discourse and optics (Orhan Pamuk in Turkey, Milorad Pavić in Serbia, Andrey Volos in Russia).

Let us explore a different local history. In North Africa, a Moroccan philosopher Mohammed Al-Jabri asked an interesting question: Muslim philosophers

of the past as well as Christian philosophers of the Middle Age, founded their philosophy on Aristotle's *Physics*. Following that line of thought, Descartes built his own philosophy on Galilean physics that, in its turn, was built on Aristotle's. What then happened during the time span between Ibn-Rushd (1128–1198) who brought Muslim thought to its most rationalistic point and René Descartes? Living in Spain, in Seville, and making remarkable contributions to philosophy, logic, medicine, music and jurisprudence, he wrote his major philosophic work *Tuhafut al-Tuhafut* (The incoherence of the philosophers) in response to Al-Ghazali (1058–1111), who was born and died in Tus, Iran, and had a profound influence on what would become known as European thought, at least until the beginning of modern philosophy and experimental science. So, then, why from Descartes onwards did the epistemic line erase Muslim contributions to human thought?

This is not the place to trace a history of Muslim and Christian epistemologies. But it is good to say a few words about how Western Christians won the epistemic battle against Muslim philosophy. It will suffice to remember, as an anchor before René Descartes, the name and the works of Desiderio Erasmus – a Dutch humanist (1466–1536, born in Rotterdam and died in England) with a remarkable influence in Spain, during the Kingdom of Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire (Bataillon, 1950). Metaphorically, Erasmus was one of the main agents in pushing Ibn Rushd out of the memory of a reconstituting Christian Spain, shortly after the final defeat of the Moors in 1492. And the point here is that there is a straight line between Erasmus' theology and Descartes' secular philosophy; while there is a profound gap between Erasmus and Descartes, on the one hand, and Al-Ghazali and Ibn-Rushd, on the other. A historical and epistemic gap was converted into a mirage and translated into a natural and logical historical continuity. The mirage is that it appears as if 'universal history and history of thought' follows an ascending temporal line and, therefore, it is natural that René Descartes continued and took advantage of an accumulation of meaning that had been taking place in a genealogy that went from the Central-Asian philosopher and physician Ibn Sina (born in a village named Afshana near the ancient Central Asian cultural center of Bukhara, modern Uzbekistan), to the Iranian Al-Ghazali to the Spanish Moroccan Ibn-Rushd. But that, as we all know, is not the way the history was told. Ibn-Rushd was eradicated from the universal march of human thought and Descartes – after Bacon – inscribed a genealogy of thought that was grounded in Galileo and in Aristotle; while Kant followed suit by replacing Galileo with Newton. To redress this history and to contribute to a pluriversal world in which many worlds can co-exist is one of the tasks of the border thinking and the de-colonial shift.

The conditions for border thinking illustrated in the three previous configurations and the potentials to make the de-colonial shift are certainly there. Yet, the dominance and hegemony of Western Christianity (in its diversity) and secular Liberalism (in its diversity), managed to engender both assimilation and apartheid, which is illustrated by Muslim fundamentalism. During the existence of the Soviet Union and its aftermath, Communism, as an alternative to

Christianity (including its Orthodox variant) within the modern/colonial world, enacted the same logic of coloniality of Western empires toward the Soviet colonies. But, on the other hand, in the domain of the imperial difference, the Soviet Union remained a second-class empire that implemented the same logic of Western coloniality, but altered its content.

Border thinking and the de-colonial shift allows one to imagine the ways out of the confrontation between Western promotion of its global designs and the Russian-Soviet Empire and colonies, on the one hand, and the Islamic-Ottoman legacies in the Middle East, on the other. It has yet to find a way in which 'either-or' is a deadlock, which seems to be maintained by the success of capitalism in wearing different masks (liberal, Islamic, etc.). In Russia, however, there are no attempts to create any alternative mediating bordering models and the two dominant ones in this respect remain the word-for-word repetition of the Western discourses, rapidly going out of fashion today, and the return to the mixture of Russian and Soviet ideology of the besieged camp and a doomed idea of survival on its own in the globalized world. As a result, we see today the full swing division of the ex-Russian 'property' between the more powerful rivals as witnessed in several minor revolutions going on in the ex-colonies of Soviet Union – Georgia, the Ukraine, Moldova, Kirgizia, Uzbekistan, etc. What happens here is the redistribution of borders that are exchanging one master for another. In contrast with Japan, China or the Islamic world, where the ancient and elaborate native epistemic, cultural and religious traditions did not allow western modernization to destroy this basis completely, in such unstable, in-between and blurred border spaces marked with incomplete/partial difference as Russia, Central Europe and the Ottoman Empire; the forceful insertion of Western epistemology easily pushed their own problematic roots, which were not very deeply ingrained in the first place, completely out.

Border Thinking at the Crossroads of Local Histories and Global Designs

One of the common views about modernity and globalization (e.g. a later stage of modernity) is to conceive of the former in contradistinction with alternative modernities and the latter in contradistinction with the local. Local histories/alternative modernities are dependent and surrogate components of the triumphal march of global history/modernity. The assumed reality in both cases is that globalization 'moves' to the periphery and it is in the peripheries where alternative modernities take place as well. Our three theses are an exercise in border thinking (or thinking from the borders) and they contest both the held view of the global/local and of modernity/alternative modernities.

Regarding the first, the distinction global/local is based on a territorial, not a border epistemology that assumes the global emanating from Western Europe and the USA to the rest of the world, where the local dwells. In that regard, globalization is seen as a set of processes that engender responses and reactions

by those who defend the 'authentic cultures' or political sovereignty threatened by global forces. Our theses assume, on the contrary, that local histories are everywhere, in the USA and the European Union, as well as in Tanzania, Bolivia, China or MERCOSUR. But the question is that not every local history is in a position to devise and enact global designs; the majority of local histories in the planet have had to deal, in the past five hundred years, with an increasing spread of *imperial* global designs of all kinds: religious, political, economic, linguistic and epistemic, and cultural.

The coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of being, i.e. the spread of global designs from local histories where they emerged to local histories to which they are alien, create the conditions for border thinking (instead of authenticity), for the de-colonial epistemic shift aiming at the decolonization of knowledge and of being. And it is in the precise sense of the imperial/colonial conflicts between global designs that spread forms of knowledges and subjectivities from the local histories, where they emerge to local histories to which they are alien, that the de-colonial epistemic shift is geo- and body-politically oriented in confrontation with the theo- and ego-politics that sustained and continues to sustain, the global imperial designs.

Hence, our second conclusion, our response to the emergence of the idea of 'alternative modernities' that is grounded in the territorial epistemology of modernity. In other words, the very idea of alternative modernities only makes sense from an epistemological Euro-centered perspective that looks at the world as if the epistemic gaze was independent of any geo-historical and body-graphic locations. That is, precisely, the epistemology of the zero point that, historically, has the name of theology and egology. From the perspective of border thinking and the de-colonial shift, the idea of alternative modernities is, as just said, already embedded in the Euro-centered idea of modernity. There is no modernity, in other words, beyond the macro-narratives, invented since the Renaissance by means of which Europe was invented as geo-historically occupying the center of space and the present in time. From a border epistemology, the idea of alternative modernities is unsound and what is needed instead are 'alternatives *TO* modernity', i.e. alternatives to the naturalized idea that the past five hundred years of European history are the point of arrival (or the end of history) of the human race and, as Anthony Giddens has it, it will be modernity all the way down. If that is the case, then, it will be coloniality all the way down because from a border epistemology perspective, coloniality is constitutive (and not derivative) of modernity.

Border thinking is indeed a way to move toward the de-colonial shift; and the de-colonial shift, in the last analysis, consists in 'delinking' ('desprenderse' is the word employed by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano) of theo- and ego-logical epistemic tyranny of the modern world and its epistemic and cultural (e.g. formation of subjectivities) consequences: the coloniality of knowledge and of being. But to delink is not to abandon, to ignore. No one could abandon or ignore the deposit and sedimentation of imperial languages and categories of thought. Border thinking proposes how to deal with that imperial sedimentation

while at the same time breaking free of the spell and the enchantment of imperial modernity. The de-colonial epistemic shift, grounded in border thinking, aims at processes of de-colonizing of knowledge and being. De-colonizing being and knowledge is a way toward the idea that 'another world is possible' (and not alternative modernities). That world, as the Zapatistas had it, will be 'a world in which many worlds will co-exist' (and not a world in which 'globalization' or the imposition of global designs and 'authenticity' or fundamentalist responses to imperial global designs will reproduce an unending war against the enemies of imperial abstract universals). A world in which many worlds will co-exist cannot be imagined and predicated on the basis of the 'good abstract universal valid for all' but, instead, on pluri-versality as a universal project. Critical border thinking and the de-colonial shift are one road toward that possible future. Ours was an effort at theorizing *in* the borders and contributing to changing the geo- and body-politics of knowledge.

Notes

- 1 The logic of coloniality is one side (the hidden and darker side) of imperial governance. Imperial governance was and continues to be predicated on the rhetoric of modernity (reluctant imperialism, light imperialism, e.g. justification for the invasion of Iraq). The rhetoric of modernity is a rhetoric of salvation (conversion, civilization, development, market democracy) while the logic of coloniality is the logic of land appropriation, exploitation of labour, control of gender and sexuality, of knowledge and subjectivity.
- 2 For example, John Milbank's (1993) theological critique of the social sciences reverses the order of the secular and the sacred in epistemology, but the geo-historical location of his thought as well as the unspoken male, white and Christian identity of his discourse are grounded in Greek and Latin categories of thought and articulated in English language. On the other hand, when Harvard Black sociologist W.E.B. Dubois asks 'how can one be American and Black at the same time', he established the foundation of a 'double consciousness' as an epistemic foundation grounded on the racial colonial difference (Dubois 1904).
- 3 'Third World nationalism' (e.g. India or Algeria) reproduced in the ex-colonies the model of 'Imperial nationalism' (e.g. England or France), and all ended up in the impasse we all know about. 'Internal colonialism' was the end result, since the first post-colonial nation-states, in the modern/colonial world, that emerged in the Americas at the end of the eighteenth and first decades of the nineteenth centuries. Bolivia is going now through an interesting process of border thinking and constitutional de-colonization. And we may see a similar experience in Iraq. 'Third World nationalism' furthermore remained within the monotopic and exclusionary imperial logic, just in the hands of the 'locals or natives'. Frantz Fanon, instead, opened up the possibility and the need for a double consciousness and border thinking of and from the experience of *Les damnés de la terre*. His thoughts were far removed from national fundamentalisms.
- 4 In Eurasian space, there also existed instances of border thinking, created by people who experienced double and multiple marginalization and discrimination by several

empires and powers at once, but these histories remained undocumented; the views of these people (if ever they were put on paper) were erased by the empires and by Western modernity (e.g. a nineteenth-century Caucasus anti-colonial movement activist and Cherkess Prince called Saferbi Zan, a late nineteenth-century Muslim intellectual, and a Tartar enlightener and journalist, Ismail Bey Gasprinskii, etc.), or had to make a compromise with the dominant power by choosing the assimilative position of Ariels (Suleimenov, 1974).

- 5 See, for instance, Kant's description of Russian and Turkish national characters in his *Anthropology From a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798).

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■ **Walter D. Mignolo** is William H. Wannamaker Professor at Duke University, North Carolina, USA. Among his recent publications are: *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (2000) and *The Idea of Latin America* (2005). Address: Department of Romance Studies, Duke University, 224 John Hope Franklin Center, Durham, NC 27708, USA. [email: waltermignolo@aol.com] ■

■ **Madina V. Tlostanova** is a Professor in the Department of Theory and History of Culture Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, at the People's Friendship University of Russia, Moscow. Among her recent publications are: *The Janus-Faced Empire* (2003) and *The Sublime of Globalization? Sketches on Transcultural Subjectivity and Aesthetics* (2005). Address: The Department of Theory and History of Culture Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, People's Friendship University of Russia, Miklukho-Maklaya Street 6, 117198 Moscow, Russian Federation. [email: madinatlost@mtu-net.ru] ■