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# Crossfire: postcolonial theory between Marxist and decolonial critiques

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## ABSTRACT

This article stages a confrontation between postcolonial theory and the decolonial option on the terrain of their respective engagements with Marxism. While prominent decolonial critics accuse postcolonial theory of relying too much on ‘Eurocentric’ theories, including Western Marxism, the article argues that this critique ignores what has been in fact a long-standing debate between postcolonial theory and its Marxist critics. Thus, the article questions this decolonial characterization and locates postcolonial theory itself in the crossfire of Marxist and decolonial critiques. First, it outlines the main objections that Marxist critics have formulated against postcolonial theory. Next, it discusses the decolonial critiques of postcolonial theory with an emphasis on the role played by Marxism in this confrontation. Finally, it proposes a ‘relinking’ between postcolonial theory and Marxism, understood not as a closure of the debate between these two theoretical formations but rather as an effort to hold that debate open. The article identifies the space of this open debate between postcolonial theory and its Marxist critics as a vantage point from which to articulate a critical response to the decolonial intervention.

## KEYWORDS

Postcolonial; decolonial; Marxism; delinking; colonial modernity

## Introduction

This article stages a confrontation between postcolonial theory and the decolonial option on the terrain of their respective engagements with Marxism. Prominent decolonial critics accuse postcolonial theory of relying too much on ‘Eurocentric’ theories, that is, French poststructuralism and Western Marxism. For example, in his account of the debates within the Latin American Subaltern Studies (LASS) collective in the 1990s, which contributed to the emergence of the decolonial project, Ramón Grosfoguel writes: “The Latin American Subaltern Studies Group ... gave epistemic privilege to what they called the “four horses of the apocalypse”, that is, Foucault, Derrida, Gramsci and Guha. ... By privileging Western thinkers as their central theoretical apparatus, they betrayed their goal to produce subaltern studies’.<sup>1</sup> From such accounts derives the idea that postcolonial theory itself must be decolonized. However, the relation

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between postcolonial theory and Marxism (as well as poststructuralism) is not so simple.<sup>2</sup> In fact, ever since the early 1990s, there has been an intense debate between postcolonial theory and its Marxist critics. So, in this article, I question the decolonial premise according to which postcolonial theory is *derivative* of European theories, including Western Marxism, by positioning postcolonial theory itself in the crossfire of Marxist and decolonial critiques.

Before I begin, a few words are needed on how I circumscribe the terrain of this discussion, for each of these theoretical formations is broad and diverse. As is well known, postcolonial theory emerged in the 1980s and two of its foundational moves were Edward W. Said's analysis of *Orientalism* and the formation of the Indian Subaltern Studies Group, immediately followed by field-defining interventions by Gayatri C. Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha.<sup>3</sup> Cutting across the disciplinary boundaries between comparative literatures, history and philosophy, these critics helped shape postcolonialism as a distinct theoretical orientation. In this article, I identify 'postcolonial theory' with these foundational figures, without discussing the larger and highly diversified field that 'postcolonial studies' has by now become. In turn, Marxist critics of postcolonial theory can be distinguished between those who locate themselves inside the field – as a critical materialist current within it – and those who criticize the field from the outside.<sup>4</sup> I discuss the critiques by Benita Parry and Neil Lazarus as instances of the former and Aijaz Ahmad's as an instance of the latter.

The contours of the decolonial field are harder to define, for 'decoloniality' – as a battle cry, buzzword or style of thought – has become hard currency circulating widely in contemporary debates. In its travels between the theoretical and political terrains and across disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields, the concept has gained multiple inflections. In this article, I do not attend to these travels.<sup>5</sup> I focus on the more circumscribed field of the Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality (MCD) group, within which the 'decolonial option' has been explicitly formulated as a critique of postcolonial theory. More specifically, I discuss the key figures of Enrique Dussel, Aníbal Quijano and Walter Dignolo, emphasizing the differences among them against other accounts (including their own) that downplay such differences in the effort to define a shared theoretical project.<sup>6</sup>

Based on this selection, I begin by outlining the main objections that Marxist critics have formulated against postcolonial theory. Hence, in the following sections, I discuss the decolonial critiques with an emphasis on the role played by Marxism in this confrontation. Finally, in the last section, I propose a 'relinking' between postcolonial theory and Marxism, understood not as a closure of the debate between these two theoretical formations but rather as an effort to hold that debate open. I identify the space of this open debate between postcolonial theory and its Marxist critics as a vantage point from which to articulate a critical response to the decolonial intervention.

### **Marxist critiques: the power of culture and the problem of totality**

Since the inception of the postcolonial field in the early 1980s, its main theorists have engaged with Marxist theory and concepts, especially the work of Italian communist Antonio Gramsci,<sup>7</sup> in order to develop their analyses of colonial and postcolonial cultures and social formations. In *Orientalism*, Edward W. Said brought Gramsci and Michel Foucault together to conceptualize the specific field of forces within which

Orientalism operates as a ‘discourse’.<sup>8</sup> Ranajit Guha and the Indian Subaltern Studies Group deployed key Gramscian concepts, such as hegemony and subalternity, to rewrite the social and political history of colonialism and decolonization in India from the standpoint of subaltern groups.<sup>9</sup> And Gayatri C. Spivak, through a deconstructive approach to the historical archive and to Marx and Gramsci themselves, famously reconceptualized the notion of subalternity away from the naming of particular social groups to what we may call a ‘limit concept’, which marks the limits of the postcolonial critic’s own enterprise.<sup>10</sup> Thus, postcolonial theory’s engagement with Marxism has been critical and often filtered through a simultaneous reception of French poststructuralism. Stuart Hall once employed the metaphor of ‘wrestling’ to describe his own relation with Marxist theory – a metaphor that might be extended to the field as a whole.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that since the early 1990s, postcolonial theory has attracted a number of vigorous critiques from Marxist scholars, both from within and outside the field.

Critics who position themselves outside the field, like Aijaz Ahmad and Arif Dirlik, typically adopt a dismissive tone, at times engaging in personalized attacks on postcolonial theorists themselves, who are framed as privileged practitioners of ‘theory’ in metropolitan centres.<sup>12</sup> Instead, critics such as Neil Lazarus and Benita Parry dissent with what they regard as the ‘mainstream’ of postcolonial theory but nonetheless identify their own work as contributing to a materialist current *within* the field.<sup>13</sup> Yet, despite this significant difference, all Marxist critics agree on a number of charges directed against postcolonial theory. In Parry’s words, at stake in this debate is ‘whether the imperial project is historicized within the determining instance of capitalism’s global trajectory, or uprooted from its material ground and resituated as a cultural phenomenon whose intelligibility and functioning can be recuperated from tendentious readings of texts’.<sup>14</sup> This observation condenses two distinct but interrelated arguments: a critique of postcolonial theory’s alleged textualism and culturalism, and a disagreement over how to conceptualize the relation between modernity, colonialism and capitalism.

An incisive critique of postcolonial theory’s textualism was formulated by Parry herself in an early discussion of Bhabha and Spivak.<sup>15</sup> According to Parry, Bhabha and Spivak articulate almost opposite understandings of how texts function as discourses yet converge in producing an inflated notion of colonial discursive power, which leaves no room for an account of anticolonial resistance. On the one hand, for Parry, Spivak ignores resistance altogether as she grants colonial discourse the totalizing power of ‘constituting and disarticulating the native’.<sup>16</sup> Spivak’s deconstructive reading practice – from which her famous warning derives that ‘the subaltern cannot speak’<sup>17</sup> – is reframed by Parry as a wilful misreading of texts that allows Spivak to adopt a ‘deliberated deafness to the native voice’.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Bhabha argues that if colonial discourse is to engage in its ‘civilizing mission’ while keeping at bay the real possibility that the Other fully becomes the Self, the colonial Other must be constructed as ‘almost the same, but not quite’. As he puts it, the colonial text *must* be taken up by the native in broken English.<sup>19</sup> If for Spivak the subaltern cannot speak, for Bhabha the subaltern cannot *not* speak (if with an accent). However, Parry argues that Bhabha does not grant the native a voice so much as he neutralizes the moment of *negative antagonism* represented by anticolonial resistance, for in his account, the native’s accented voice is posited by colonial discourse itself as one of its conditions of possibility. Thus, Parry concludes that despite their different reading practices, Bhabha and Spivak are

equally guilty of abandoning a long tradition of militant anticolonial writing – chiefly represented by Frantz Fanon<sup>20</sup> – through an ‘exorbitation’ of the power of discourse.

Based on this reading, Parry draws a clear line between Bhabha and Spivak on one side and Said on the other. In her view, Said’s writings ‘can be seen to negotiate an alliance between metropolitan theory and the analyses developed by liberation movements, in the process producing elaborations which were not in either source’.<sup>21</sup> However, other Marxist critics have formulated objections against Said that closely resemble the ones Parry formulates against Bhabha and Spivak. For example, Aijaz Ahmad accuses Said of granting colonial discourse the totalizing power of fully constituting its ‘subjects’, hence reproducing the silencing of the Orient which Said himself laments in *Orientalism*.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, Ahmad criticizes the transhistoricity that Said attributes to Orientalism, tracing its formation as he does from ancient Greece through modern Europe to the present. Ahmad argues that this ‘raises the question of the relationship between Orientalism and colonialism. ... [C]olonialism begins to appear as a product of Orientalism itself.’<sup>23</sup> Here the critique of textualism develops into a critique of culturalism and ‘ideologism’. According to Ahmad, the transhistoricity of Orientalism as a discourse implies a reversal of the relation between colonialism as an economic, political and military project and Orientalism as its ideology – if Orientalism ‘came first’, Ahmad reasons, it must be the cause rather than the effect of colonialism.

Although Lazarus is less dismissive than Ahmad, he similarly criticizes Said’s notion of Orientalism as a transhistorical abstraction and locates this critique within a broader discussion of postcolonial accounts of colonial modernity.<sup>24</sup> In Lazarus’ view, Said’s transhistorical definition of Orientalism reflects a categorical error that lies at the core of postcolonial theory at large: a misreading of colonial modernity that fails to locate it as ‘part and parcel of a larger, unfolding historical dynamic, which is that of capitalism in its global trajectory’.<sup>25</sup> This translates, Lazarus argues, into civilizational accounts of modernity as essentially a ‘European’ or ‘Western’, rather than ‘capitalist’, formation. Elsewhere Lazarus makes the same argument while discussing subaltern studies. In his view, unlike Guha’s early work, which offered a solid account of the colonial trajectory of modern capitalism in India,<sup>26</sup> later work produced under the rubric of subaltern studies is characterized by ‘the idealist inclination to replace a concrete *ideological* specification (“bourgeois”, “capitalist”) with a pseudo-geographical one (“Europe”, “the West”)’.<sup>27</sup> Thus, commenting on Dipesh Chakrabarty’s call for ‘provincializing Europe’,<sup>28</sup> Lazarus states: ‘To propose the “provincializing” of “Europe” is both to dematerialize capitalist modernity and to misrecognize its world-historical significance’.<sup>29</sup>

This debate between postcolonial theory and its Marxist critics, which took place for the most part through the 1990s, was reignited more recently by the publication of Vivek Chibber’s *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*.<sup>30</sup> The book owes much of its visibility to its polemical tone and inflated title, which promises a take-down of postcolonial theory as a whole even though its circumscribed target is actually the Indian Subaltern Studies Group, particularly the work of Guha, Chakrabarty and Partha Chatterjee. Additionally, Chibber makes almost no reference to the earlier debate while reproducing several arguments made by Marxist critics before him. Thus, unsurprisingly, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* has attracted critical responses from both postcolonial theorists and fellow Marxists.<sup>31</sup> Nonetheless, at a historical moment marked by a return

of Marxism across the Humanities and the Social Sciences,<sup>32</sup> Chibber revived a core argument on which virtually all Marxist critics agree: modern colonialism must be understood as a pivotal moment in the expansion and universalization of capitalism and this is problematically obscured by the textualist and culturalist accounts that prevail in the postcolonial field. It follows that modernity cannot be reduced to a culturally specific ('European') and monolithic formation that can be embraced or refused (or 'provincialized') at will. Rather, modernity is a material formation ('capitalist') and a site of contradictions, whose complex nature also helps explain – without determining – the dialectical emergence of anticolonial struggle, most prominently in the form of nationalist movements.<sup>33</sup> This is part of what Lazarus calls modernity's world-historical significance.

These Marxist critiques have several merits. Parry's discussion of Bhabha illustrates the pitfalls of a postcolonial theory that evacuates antagonism from the violent colonial encounter and reduces the latter to a site of cultural negotiations. More generally, it is true that postcolonial theory tends to privilege the power of culture and discourse over an analysis of their 'enabling socio-economic and political institutions and other forms of social praxis'.<sup>34</sup> It is also true that in many postcolonial accounts, including Said's and Chakrabarty's, 'European' and 'Western' tend to replace 'capitalist' as primary qualifiers of colonial modernity. Taken together, these critiques suggest that by reifying cultural differences as well as 'culture' as a level of analysis, postcolonial theory loses sight of the social totality; that is, the totality of social relations and political institutions that make up colonial and postcolonial societies. But as we shall see, despite its merits, this argument entails a misrepresentation of postcolonial theory's more complex relation with totality thinking.

First and foremost, Ahmad's critique of Said deliberately ignores the specific notion of 'culture' that operates in Said's work. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said defines culture as 'those practices, like the arts of description, communication, and representation, that have *relative autonomy* from the economic, social, and political realms'.<sup>35</sup> And already in *Orientalism*, Said had argued that Orientalism does not exist 'in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power'.<sup>36</sup> Contra Ahmad, the principle of the 'relative autonomy' of culture articulated in these passages allows for the possibility that already-existing cultural and ideological elements (such as the Orientalist elements that Said traces back to ancient Greece) enter new articulations under specific historical conditions (modern colonialism) without Orientalism having to be conceptualized as the *cause* of colonialism. It is true that Said shows little interest in the articulatory practices that connect culture to the other levels of the social totality. However, his work does not so much foreclose those articulations as brackets them, if implicitly, in order to focus on the internal regularities and contradictions that make up Orientalism as an extraordinarily effective discursive field.

Spivak and Chakrabarty take one more step in this direction, for their bracketing of the social totality is an explicit and deliberate challenge to Marxist protocols of totality thinking. Commenting on her use of the notion of subalternity, Spivak once said: 'The possibility of subalternity for me acts as a reminder ... it's really something that would destroy my generalizations'.<sup>37</sup> This also means that Parry's critique, which interprets subalternity as another name for the native whose agency Spivak allegedly ignores, is partly

misplaced. In Spivak's work, subalternity does not have such an easily locatable empirical referent, because it names neither an individual nor a collective subject.<sup>38</sup> Rather, subalternity marks the limits placed on the critic's own effort to engage in that naming, hence also the limits placed on any possibility of offering a transparent portrayal of the social totality.

Similarly, in *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty distinguishes between History 1, which is the history of capitalist modernity with its universalizing and totalizing tendencies, and History 2, which comprises all those elements (religion, ethnic ties, kinship and so on) that are preponderant in what he calls, drawing on Guha,<sup>39</sup> the domain of subaltern politics. Yet for Chakrabarty, History 2 is not just 'autonomous' from History 1 – as Guha had argued about the subaltern domain vis-à-vis the domain of elite politics in modern India – but also has the function of 'constantly interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1'.<sup>40</sup> This argument cannot be reduced to a vulgar reification of cultural differences, as some of his Marxist critics tend to do,<sup>41</sup> for Chakrabarty's bracketing of totality thinking is deliberate. In his view, postcolonial theory sets for itself 'a double task: acknowledge the "political" need to think in terms of totalities while all the time unsettling totalizing thought by putting into play nontotalizing categories'.<sup>42</sup> Not only 'History 2' but also Spivak's 'subalternity' – and the very notion of 'culture' in the best of postcolonial theory – operate as such nontotalizing categories.

Based on this reading, the debate between postcolonial theory and Marxism may be characterized in large part as a contention over the practice of totality thinking. In the last section, I will argue in favour of holding this debate open, as I identify the space of this open debate as a privileged vantage point from which to articulate a critical response to the decolonial intervention. But before doing so, in the next two sections, I turn to key decolonial critiques of postcolonial theory. As we shall see, while some of these decolonial interventions in fact significantly overlap with the debate discussed so far, others advocate a radical departure – or delinking – from both Marxism and postcolonial theory.

### **Decolonial interventions: modernity/coloniality and the horizon of transmodernity**

Like Marxist critics, key figures of the Modernity/Coloniality/Decoloniality (MCD) group take postcolonial theory to task for what they regard as its flawed account of colonial modernity. This decolonial critique is partly driven by historiographical and geopolitical concerns. Enrique Dussel distinguishes between two notions of modernity. In his view, the first notion is 'Eurocentric' and 'provincial': it originates in the eighteenth century in the context of the Enlightenment and posits modernity as an 'intra-European' phenomenon. The second notion, instead, 'takes into consideration a world perspective' and traces the emergence of modernity to the imperial expansion of Portugal and Spain in the sixteenth century.<sup>43</sup> This second notion recovers the centrality of Latin America to the emergence of modernity and understands the latter as a global formation from its inception, not a European formation that later expanded outwards. Thus, as Sara Castro-Klaren puts it, 'the inception of the modern/colonial as a world-system must be set back to the time of the Spanish conquest of Amerindian societies and ... one



cannot assume, as postcolonial theory does, the Enlightenment to be the origin of Janus-like modernity'.<sup>44</sup> Santiago Castro-Gómez agrees and argues, for instance, that Said's positing of French and British Orientalism as the quintessential colonial discourse 'ends up legitimizing the eighteenth-century (Eurocentric) imaginary of modernity denounced by Dussel'.<sup>45</sup>

But the broader notion of modernity advocated by decolonial critics does more than simply expand the historical and geopolitical reach of the concept; it also entails a reconceptualization of the relation between modernity, colonialism and capitalism. Indeed, by centring the conquest of America in the sixteenth century, this notion of modernity decentres advanced industrial capital as the primary agent of imperialism. Both modernity and capitalism are posited as the products – not the agents or the cause – of Europe's imperial expansion.<sup>46</sup> In order to name this reconfigured relation between modernity, colonialism and capitalism, Aníbal Quijano has introduced the conceptual pair 'modernity/coloniality'.<sup>47</sup> Quijano starts from the observation that the conquest and constitution of America marked the inception of modernity. In this process, he argues, a distinct form of control and appropriation of labour emerged which articulated various forms – slavery, serfdom, wage labour and so on – into a 'new, original, and singular structure of relations of production in the historical experience of the world: world capitalism'.<sup>48</sup> Importantly, in Quijano's view, none of the forms of labour articulated within this new formation can be considered to be residual of previous social formations (such as feudalism), for in America they were established and organized from the start 'to produce commodities for the world market'.<sup>49</sup>

While foregrounding the conquest of America as the inaugural moment for the formation of colonial modernity, Quijano identifies race as the organizing principle of that formation. For him, the construction of racial identities was central to the colonial articulation of different forms of labour, which involved the relegation of slavery and other unpaid forms of labour to racialized groups. Hence, he argues: 'A new technology of domination/exploitation, in this case race/labor, was articulated in such a way that the two elements appeared naturally associated'.<sup>50</sup> This articulation between race and labour is the defining element of what Quijano calls the 'coloniality of power': the form of domination and exploitation established on a global scale through the formation of colonial modernity, which must be analytically distinguished from colonialism in that it survives formal decolonization.<sup>51</sup> As Castro-Klaren puts it, Quijano conceptualizes the coloniality of power 'as the innermost chamber of capitalism, as an energy and a machine that transforms differences into values'.<sup>52</sup>

This account of the relation between modernity, colonialism and capitalism is framed by decolonial critics as an alternative to the distorted notion of modernity rooted in the Enlightenment, which postcolonial theory is accused of reproducing. However, this decolonial account is not incompatible with Marxist analyses outside and inside the postcolonial field. This is not entirely surprising, given that the heterogeneous theoretical currents that have eclectically combined within the MCD group include prominent currents of Latin American Marxism, such as dependency theory and liberation philosophy.<sup>53</sup> However, it does undermine the claim by key decolonial critics that the decolonial option parts ways with Marxism and postcolonial theory alike.<sup>54</sup>

For example, Quijano's foregrounding of race as a central element in the social organization of capitalism on a global scale might be met with scepticism by some Marxists –



such as Chibber, who criticizes a similar approach to racial formations in the work of Lisa Lowe and David R. Roediger<sup>55</sup> – but it is not necessarily at odds with Marxism. Importantly, Quijano does not posit the relation between race and labour as a structural necessity of capitalism but as a historical articulation. In the wake of the formation of world capitalism, he writes, ‘race and the division of labor remained structurally linked and mutually reinforcing, in spite of the fact that neither of them were necessarily dependent on the other in order to exist or change’.<sup>56</sup> This account resonates with a number of postcolonial analyses, such as Hall’s famous analysis of the articulation of race and class in postcolonial South Africa,<sup>57</sup> and with a larger body of work that draws on and revises Marxist theory (often in dialogue with postcolonial theory) to investigate formations of race and Indigeneity in relation to historical and contemporary modes of capital accumulation and labour exploitation.<sup>58</sup>

Additionally, the fact that for Dussel and Quijano modernity was colonial from its inception does not prevent them from highlighting its significance, also for those colonial and postcolonial subjects whom David Scott has aptly termed ‘conscripts of modernity’.<sup>59</sup> Quijano writes:

For those exploited by capital, and in general those dominated by the model of [the coloniality of] power, modernity generates a horizon of liberation for people of every relation, structure, or institution linked to domination and exploitation, but also the social conditions in order to advance toward the direction of that horizon. ... In this sense, every concept of modernity is necessarily ambiguous and contradictory.<sup>60</sup>

Dussel, who has theorized ‘transmodernity’ as a horizon of liberation and decolonization, is even more explicit in identifying the productive contradictions inherent in modernity. He states:

what is at stake here is not a *premodern* project that would consist of a folkloric affirmation of the past, nor is it an *antimodern* project of the kind put forward by conservative, right-wing, populist or fascist groups. Finally, it is not only a *postmodern* project that would deny modernity and would critique all reason, thus falling into a nihilist irrationalism or a pure affirmation of difference without commensurability. This is a *transmodern* project that would emerge by real subsumption of the rational emancipatory character of modernity and its denied alterity (the other of modernity).<sup>61</sup>

In this passage, Dussel proposes transmodernity as a concept that indeed registers modernity’s ‘world-historical significance’, as Lazarus puts it,<sup>62</sup> for it suggests that *subsuming the rational emancipatory character of modernity itself* forms part of the horizon within which those oppressed and even *negated* by modernity (its ‘others’) can aspire to liberation.

Dussel’s work on transmodernity and Quijano’s concept of modernity/coloniality, together with the demarginalization of Latin America in postcolonial theory and the consequent historical and geopolitical broadening of our understanding of colonial modernity, are genuinely valuable interventions. Yet, contrary to what is sometimes argued by the advocates of a decolonial turn, they are interventions *within* the postcolonial field – especially if one takes into account the long-standing debate between postcolonial theory and its Marxist critics, which addresses some of the very same issues raised by these decolonial critics. Instead, it is to Mignolo’s work that we need to turn if we are to identify what is truly distinctive about the ‘decolonial option’, as he calls it. As we shall see,

Mignolo's approach poses specific problems, for it brings decoloniality in very close proximity to what Dussel tries to keep at bay in the passage above: a mixture of premodern and antimodern tendencies.

### The option of delinking

In Mignolo's appropriation of the conceptual pair modernity/coloniality, two significant shifts take place. First of all, any acknowledgment of the contradictions and points of rupture inherent in modernity disappear. Secondly, the notion of the coloniality of power is inflected with a particular focus on the 'coloniality of knowledge'. This element was already present in the work of Quijano, who argues that the imperial constitution of America involved an articulation of diverse cultural and epistemological formations under European hegemony 'equivalent' to the articulation of different forms of labour under the hegemony of capital.<sup>63</sup> But Mignolo's decolonial option moves several steps further. For example, he and Madina Tlostanova write: 'To de-colonize means at the same time to de-modernize. And de-modernizing means de-linking from modern, Western epistemology'.<sup>64</sup> Here not only the problematic of epistemology takes centre stage but, most importantly, it goes hand in hand with an emphatic and wholesale rejection of modernity.

However, while Mignolo repeatedly states that the control of knowledge is 'the key and fundamental sphere that makes domination possible',<sup>65</sup> he offers no clear conceptualization of the relation between knowledge and power. Nor does he specify his own understanding of the relation between modernity, colonialism and capitalism. In his hands, the conceptual pair modernity/coloniality tends to obscure rather than clarify. In light of this, it is not surprising that the oppositional gesture he proposes against the coloniality of power is what he terms 'delinking'.<sup>66</sup> If the elements that make up modernity/coloniality and the relations among them are not specified, a refusal of the whole formation appears as the only option. Or, to put it differently, if one imagines delinking as the only meaningful oppositional gesture, there is no need to specify the articulations that make up the formation modernity/coloniality, as there appears to be no need to identify what points of contradiction and rupture *within* that hegemonic formation might work as points of support for the emergence of counter-hegemonies.

Thus, Mignolo's work is replete with calls to delink: from modernity first and foremost, but also from Marxism and postcolonial theory. On the one hand, he argues that 'Marxism doesn't provide the tools to think in exteriority. Marxism is a modern European invention'.<sup>67</sup> Based on this claim, he often frames the decolonial option as a 'third way' beyond liberalism and Marxism.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, a similar fate is reserved for postcolonial theory. While his engagement with postcolonial theorists has not been univocal – oscillating, throughout his work, between appreciation and dismissal – in a relatively recent text he draws the defining line: 'Post-coloniality (post-colonial theory or critique) was born in the trap of (post) modernity. ... Today, decolonial thinking ... also de-links (in a friendly manner) from postcolonial critique'.<sup>69</sup> In other words, since postcolonial theory critically engages with both Marxism and poststructuralism to elaborate its critiques of colonial and postcolonial modernity, its enterprise remains – from Mignolo's decolonial standpoint – a Eurocentric critique of modernity.

But what does the decolonial option have to offer if one accepts these calls to delink? Mignolo writes:

once you delink, where do you go? You have to go to the reservoir of the ways of life and modes of thinking that have been disqualified by Christian theology since the Renaissance and which continue expanding through secular philosophy and the sciences, for you cannot find your way out in the reservoir of modernity.<sup>70</sup>

Two of Mignolo's most recurrent references are the Zapatista political project (of which he emphasizes the epistemological impact)<sup>71</sup> and the work of seventeenth-century Indigenous author Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala.<sup>72</sup> Mignolo interprets Guamán Poma's proposal for a 'good government' as an intercultural 'space of coexistence and of the overcoming of colonial difference', conceptualized within a larger framework of coexistence with nature and 'good living' (*buen vivir*).<sup>73</sup> Mignolo argues that this proposal was an early articulation of the decolonial option, and that Guamán Poma's original move 'has been also understood by social movements like the Zapatista's in their relentless process of de-linking, from their theoretical revolution to their political and economic implementation in the Caracoles'.<sup>74</sup> These readings suggest that two key elements of decoloniality, in Mignolo's view, are an ontology that refuses to set the human apart from the rest of nature and a political theory disentangled from the state.

A detailed discussion of Mignolo's interpretations of Guamán Poma or the Zapatista political project exceeds the scope of this article.<sup>75</sup> Suffice it to say that critiques of anthropocentrism and of the state form have multiple genealogies also within modern (and postmodern) political theory and praxis, including Marxism, yet Mignolo forecloses these potential alliances because his goal is to emphasize the radical exteriority of the decolonial option, which must root itself exclusively in non-modern 'ways of life and modes of thinking'. This appeal to cultural and social formations disqualified by colonialism as points of support for anticolonial critique, or even anticolonial struggle, has a long genealogy as well. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon famously argued that the colonial aggression on native culture acquires a dialectical significance when such culture is *reconstructed* in the context of anticolonial struggle.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, yet in the context of postcolonial globalization, Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd argue that "culture" obtains a "political" force when a cultural formation comes into contradiction with economic or political logics that try to refunction it for exploitation or domination'.<sup>77</sup> However, while Mignolo's turn to modes of thinking disqualified by colonialism may seem to echo these anticolonial and postcolonial conceptualizations of culture as a terrain of struggle, his decolonial option offers a far less dynamic account of culture, in fact coming closer to Samuel Huntington's infamous theory of the clash of civilizations.<sup>78</sup>

It is Mignolo himself who repeatedly establishes this proximity with Huntington. In the opening of *Local Histories/Global Designs*, he commends Huntington for having 'recognized that people from "other" civilizations and with "other" forms of knowledge are claiming a *gnoseology* that they have been taught to despise'.<sup>79</sup> So, at the end of the book, he states: 'The position I have been articulating throughout this book ... almost naturally moves toward a conceptualization of the world order close to the one painted by Samuel P. Huntington'.<sup>80</sup> In the later book *The Idea of Latin America*, Mignolo slightly corrects his judgment:

What Huntington doesn't see, or doesn't want to see, is that the 'challenge' is not just that of the Hispanic crowd invading the Anglo yard. Likewise, in the case of Islam, the challenge is not just from terrorism that threatens 'American' lives. The real challenge is that ... there are Muslims and Latinos/as changing the geopolitics of knowledge.<sup>81</sup>

Here Mignolo abandons his previous unqualified endorsement of Huntington's work, positioning Huntington as the guardian of the 'West' and himself as a partisan of 'Hispanic' and 'Muslim' civilizations. Additionally, he reprimands Huntington for not having understood the depth of the *epistemological* level at which nonetheless such civilizations, he maintains, *do clash*. Thus, while Mignolo in this later text distances himself from Huntington politically, he insists on partly subscribing to his epistemological (civilizational) framework.

To be sure, Mignolo should not be held accountable for Huntington's reactionary politics.<sup>82</sup> Yet the epistemological convergence between the two – first openly embraced, and later only partially disavowed by Mignolo – signals that a decolonial option invested in a radical break with Western modernity might end up recuperating, somewhat paradoxically, some of its most reactionary elements. This is no coincidence, for despite his claims to the contrary, Mignolo's option of delinking does not break with modernity so much as it renders unintelligible the anti-imperialist struggles born within the cracks of the world-reshaping project of modern colonialism. As Priyamvada Gopal points out in her work on the linkages between metropole and colonies that presided over the emergence of anticolonial insurgency across the British Empire, Mignolo's 'disproportionate emphasis on radically different "categories of thought" obscures the extent to which many "liberation" struggles were committed to universalism. ... This often entailed working with the "logic of modernity", decolonizing rather than repudiating it, teasing out its revolutionary promises'.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, in her sharp critique of the MCD project as a whole, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui argues that anti-modern theories of decoloniality are complicit today with the liberal multicultural relegation of Indigenous peoples, as 'original people', to a static past that 'excludes them from the struggles of modernity'.<sup>84</sup> For Cusicanqui, this move amounts to a 'recuperation of indigenous demands and the neutralization of the decolonizing impulse',<sup>85</sup> against which she affirms an anticolonial 'Indian commitment to modernity'.<sup>86</sup> Taken together, Mignolo's epistemological convergence with Huntington's theory of the clash of civilizations and the incapacity of his decolonial option to account for imperialism and anti-imperialism, past and present, throw into question the theoretical value and political implications of his option of delinking.

### Relinking: a postcolonial response

In the face of the decolonial call to delink from both Marxism and postcolonial theory, in this last section I defend a relinking between these two theoretical formations, yet one that does not try to close the debate between them. Indeed, it is in the *open space* of the ongoing debate between postcolonial theory and its Marxist critics that I locate a critical vantage point from which to respond to the decolonial option. In other words, rather than responding to the decolonial intervention from *either* a postcolonial *or* a Marxist perspective, I propose to do so from the conflictual space of the ongoing debate between them.

Based on the critiques discussed earlier in this article, Marxist critics have taken different positions on the question of how Marxism should relate to the postcolonial field. All of them agree that postcolonial theory is ill-equipped to theorize imperialism in its past and present incarnations, and even less suitable to the task of orienting a politics against it. This is so because, according to these critics, postcolonial theory's reluctance to engage in totality thinking translates into a reification of culture and cultural differences that uproots them from their enabling material history and socio-economic practices. But Marxist critics who position themselves *outside* the postcolonial field push this critique one step further. They argue that not only does postcolonial theory deploy a flawed understanding of culture but, in so doing, it actively contributes to reproducing a partial and distorted consciousness of the present, in fact aligning itself with conservative forces. For example, Arif Dirlik writes:

The complicity of postcolonial in hegemony lies in postcolonialism's diversion of attention from contemporary problems of social, political, and cultural domination, and in its obfuscation of its own relationship to what is but a condition of its emergence, that is, to a global capitalism that, however fragmented in appearance, serves as a structuring principle of global relations.<sup>87</sup>

In this account, postcolonial theory is accused of sanctioning and reinforcing the politico-ideological conjuncture within which it emerged in the 1980s, marked by the decline of anticolonial internationalism and the global ascendancy of neoliberalism. On these grounds, critics like Dirlik and Ahmad – and Chibber more recently – dismiss the field altogether. A slightly more generous assessment is offered by Vasant Kaiwar, who argues that 'to the extent that postcolonial studies has the ability or ambition to enrich Marxism, it must perforce become an aspect of Marxism'.<sup>88</sup> Here postcolonial theory is equally dismissed *as a field*, yet Kaiwar grants it at least the potential to expand Marxist theory.

A truly alternative positioning, instead, is the one articulated by Marxist critics who locate their intervention *within* the postcolonial field. For these critics, a Marxist engagement with postcolonial theory should be grounded, as Crystal Bartolovich puts it, on a 'balanced consideration of the field's genuine intellectual (and ideological) achievements'.<sup>89</sup> Among these, Bartolovich mentions 'the extension of the discussion of subalternity and political representation in the non-metropolitan context' and the questioning of the unreflexive universalism of nationalist and internationalist 'master narratives'.<sup>90</sup> This point is key because Bartolovich credits postcolonial theory not just with theoretical but also *ideological* achievements.

Thus, even if these Marxist critics agree with Dirlik that postcolonial theory emerged in conjunction with the rise of neoliberalism on a global scale, they resist drawing the conclusion that the field is just symptomatic or, worse, complicit with that politico-ideological conjuncture. For example, Parry unequivocally states that the charge of 'political quietism' is misplaced because postcolonial theorists 'overtly ally their writings with the victims of imperialism's violence'.<sup>91</sup> Elaborating further, Lazarus argues that postcolonial theory has been 'a creature *of and against* its time': on the one hand, it has participated in the 'rationalization' of the demise of Marxism and of the end of anticolonial insurgency; on the other hand, it has also taken explicit distance from the anti-liberationist and reactionary ideologies of its time.<sup>92</sup> Thus, for Lazarus, postcolonial theory might be better

described as a form of ‘anti-anti-liberationism’, problematically predicated on a disavowal of anticolonial ideologies of liberation yet not aligned with the new reactionary consensus.<sup>93</sup>

Based on this assessment, critics such as Parry and Lazarus position themselves within and against postcolonial theory. As Lazarus puts it, for the Marxist critic whose work is located within the field, the starting point is to recognize ‘the authentic insights and advances that have been generated’ by postcolonial theory while ‘committing himself or herself never to fall behind these’.<sup>94</sup> The task that such critics set for themselves is neither to dismiss nor simply to criticize but to *reorient* the field. In Lazarus’ view, Marxist critics must ‘engage postcolonial studies on its own ground’ and, through the force of the most convincing arguments, ‘oblige the field to tilt in the direction they favor’.<sup>95</sup> This position significantly differs from the wholesale dismissal of postcolonial theory advocated by Dirlík and Ahmad, as well as its selective absorption into Marxist theory suggested by Kaiwar. Where the three positions converge, however, is on their shared assessment of postcolonial theory as ill-equipped, on its own, to address core theoretical and political questions. The postcolonial bracketing of totality thinking remains a major bone of contention for all Marxist critics.

As mentioned earlier, this debate took place mostly through the 1990s but was recently reignited by the publication of Chibber’s *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*. Thus, one of the book’s most important and unintended merits is to have reopened a collective reflection on ‘what’s left of the debate’, as reads the title of a symposium published in the wake of Chibber’s intervention. In the introduction to that symposium, Subir Sinha and Rashmi Varma argue that, while Chibber’s book ‘appeared on the scene as having unequivocally won the debate for Marxism over postcolonial theory’, the engagements it reactivated between the two fields, taken together, work as ‘an invitation to continue conversation rather than to close it down’.<sup>96</sup> Starting from this observation, I propose to articulate one last critical response to the decolonial intervention from the vantage point of this open debate between postcolonial theory and Marxism.

While postcolonial theory deploys nontotalizing categories such as ‘subalternity’, ‘History 2’ and ‘culture’ itself, decolonial critics – like Marxist critics – insist on the need to preserve a theoretical grasp on the social totality. For example, Quijano argues that the conceptions of totality elaborated in modern European thought were in fact partial, as they posited the social totality as an organic whole by disavowing the heterogeneous ordering of the world instituted by colonialism. For Quijano, it follows that a critical perspective on modern European totality thinking should not reject the aspiration to totality but elaborate a better version of it.<sup>97</sup> Similarly, Mignolo states: ‘The overarching, and necessary, concept of coloniality/modernity implies the need, indeed, the strong need, for building macronarratives from the perspective of coloniality’.<sup>98</sup> In a more sober tone, and with implicit reference to the contrast between postcolonial subaltern studies and the Latin American decolonial option, Fernando Coronil puts it as follows: ‘While from an Asian perspective it has become necessary to “provincialize” European thought ... from a Latin American perspective it has become indispensable to globalize the periphery’.<sup>99</sup>

However, while Coronil maps the contrast between totality and nontotality thinking onto the difference between decolonial and postcolonial perspectives, totality thinking



appears in different guises also *within* the decolonial field. As I have argued, Quijano's conceptualization of the coloniality of power and Dussel's proposal of transmodernity do not fundamentally depart from the larger debate between postcolonial theory and Marxism. What characterizes the decolonial option as a distinct intervention, instead, is Mignolo's approach. But Mignolo neither engages in a form of historical materialist totality thinking (such as Marxism) nor deploys culture as a relatively autonomous or nontotalizing category (like postcolonial theory, at its best, does). Instead, his decolonial option totalizes a reified notion of cultural differences. His goal is to offer 'delinking' as an alternative to both Marxism and postcolonial theory, yet the result is a theory of decoloniality that stands in close proximity to Huntington's reactionary theory of the clash of civilizations and, most importantly, one that cannot account for the emergence of anti-imperialism from within the cracks of colonial modernity. Thus, a relinking between postcolonial theory and Marxism – understood as an effort to hold the two theoretical formations in productive tension with one another – casts a critical light on the decolonial intervention, for the latter can either be productively absorbed into that open debate or, in the shape of Mignolo's decolonial option, it has little to offer to a critical understanding of imperialism and anti-imperialism, past and present.

## Conclusion

By way of a conclusion, let me highlight what happened to the triangulation of postcolonial theory, Marxist critique and the decolonial option in the course of my argument. I began with the stated goal of confronting postcolonial theory and the decolonial option on the terrain of their respective engagements with Marxism. My point of departure was the decolonial critique according to which postcolonial theory is derivative of Eurocentric theories, including Western Marxism. Yet this argument ignores the long-standing debate between postcolonial theory and its Marxist critics. Thus, as a first response to the decolonial intervention, I shifted the initial proposition – which positioned postcolonial and decolonial perspectives in a symmetrical relation to Marxism – and located postcolonial theory itself in the crossfire of Marxist and decolonial critiques. In the last section, as a response to the decolonial call to delink from both Marxism and postcolonial theory, I proposed yet another shift and identified the very debate between postcolonial theory and its Marxist critics as a vantage point from which to respond to the decolonial option.

Each of these arrangements of the triangle between postcolonial theory, Marxist critique and the decolonial option must be considered as a variation on the same problematic, for each shift took place as a critical response to the decolonial intervention. Ultimately, this series of shifts led to the conclusion that key elements of the decolonial intervention – such as the concepts of the 'coloniality of power' and 'transmodernity' – in fact fully belong to the ongoing debate between postcolonial theory and Marxism, for they help further conceptualize the relation between modernity, colonialism and capitalism. Additionally, they intervene in the epistemological field opened up by that debate, at whose core lies a productive tension between the practice of totality thinking and the deployment of nontotalizing categories. That field is deserted, instead, by the decolonial



option of delinking, which totalizes a reified understanding of cultural differences in order to recast decolonization as de-modernization.

## Notes

1. Ramón Grosfoguel, 'The Epistemic Decolonial Turn: Beyond Political-Economy Paradigms', *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3), 2007, p 211. For a more complex reconstruction of the debates that led to the demise of the LASS collective, and their relation to the emergence of the decolonial project, see Olimpia E. Rosenthal's contribution in this special issue.
2. While I focus on Marxism, the contributions in this special issue by Olimpia E. Rosenthal, Josias Tembo and Katrine Smiet include discussions of the relation between postcolonial theory and poststructuralism in light of the same decolonial critique.
3. See Robert J C Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990; Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics*, London: Verso, 1997.
4. See Crystal Bartolovich, 'Introduction: Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies', in Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus (eds), *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp 1–17.
5. See the introduction to this special issue for a sketch of some of these travels.
6. See Arturo Escobar, 'Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise', *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3), 2007, pp 179–210; Walter D Mignolo, 'The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference', in Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel and Carlos A Jáuregui (eds), *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008, pp 225–258.
7. For a recent volume illustrating the impact of Gramsci's thought on postcolonial studies, see Neelam Srivastava and Baidik Bhattacharya (eds), *The Postcolonial Gramsci*, New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2012.
8. Edward W Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.
9. Ranajit Guha (ed), *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982.
10. Gayatri C Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp 271–313; Gayatri C Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography', in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri C Spivak (eds), *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988, pp 3–32.
11. Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies', in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula A Treichler (eds), *Cultural Studies*, London and New York: Routledge, pp 277–294. Here, Hall addresses his relation with Marxism in the context of the formation of Cultural Studies, not postcolonial theory. However, the two fields are conjuncturally and theoretically closely related and his point holds for postcolonial theory as well.
12. Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, London and New York: Verso, 1992; Arif Dirlik, 'The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism', *Critical Inquiry*, 20(2), 1994, pp 328–356.
13. Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999; Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004; Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus (eds), *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
14. Benita Parry, 'Beginning, Affiliations, Disavowals', in *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004, p 8.
15. Benita Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', in *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*, London and New York: Routledge, 2004, pp 13–36.

16. Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories', p 19.
17. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'.
18. Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories', p 23.
19. Homi K Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse', in *The Location of Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, pp 85–92.
20. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Press, 1961.
21. Parry, 'Beginning, Affiliations, Disavowals', p 6.
22. Ahmad, *In Theory*, pp 172–173.
23. Ahmad, *In Theory*, p 181.
24. Neil Lazarus, 'What Postcolonial Theory Doesn't Say', *Race & Class*, 53(3), 2011, p 15.
25. Lazarus, 'What Postcolonial Theory Doesn't Say', p 7.
26. See Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983; Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.
27. Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice*, pp 25–28.
28. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000.
29. Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice*, p 29.
30. Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, London and New York: Verso, 2013.
31. See, among others, Partha Chatterjee, 'Subaltern Studies and "Capital"', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48(37), 2013, pp 69–75; Gayatri C Spivak, 'Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital', *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 27(1), 2014, pp 184–203; Bruce Robbins, 'Subaltern-speak', *N+1*, 18, 2014; Neil Lazarus, 'Vivek Chibber and the Spectre of Postcolonial Theory', *Race & Class*, 57(3), 2016, pp 88–106.
32. See Sara R Farris (ed), *Returns of Marxism: Marxist Theory in a Time of Crisis*, Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2016.
33. Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice*, pp 128–133.
34. Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories', p 26.
35. Edward W Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, New York: Vintage Books, 1994, p xii (emphasis added).
36. Said, *Orientalism*, p 12.
37. Gayatri C Spivak, 'Subaltern Talk: Interview with the Editors', in Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (eds), *The Spivak Reader*, New York and London: Routledge, 1996, p 293.
38. On the difficulty of 'locating' subalternity, see Sara de Jong and Jamila M H Mascat, 'Relocating Subalternity: Scattered Speculations on the Conundrum of a Concept', *Cultural Studies*, 30(5), 2016, pp 717–729.
39. Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India', in Ranajit Guha (ed), *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982, pp 1–7.
40. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p 66.
41. For a critical engagement with Chakrabarty's work that does not engage in this misreading and highlights, instead, its potential contribution to Marxism, see Sandro Mezzadra, 'How Many Histories of Labour? Towards a Theory of Postcolonial Capitalism', *Postcolonial Studies*, 14(2), 2011, 151–170.
42. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, pp 21–22.
43. Enrique Dussel, 'Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism', *Nepantla*, 1(3), 2000, pp 469–470.
44. Sara Castro-Klaren, 'Posting Letters: Writing in the Andes and the Paradoxes of the Postcolonial Debate', in Moraña, Dussel and. Jáuregui (eds), *Coloniality at Large*, p 133.
45. Santiago Castro-Gómez, '(Post)Coloniality for Dummies: Latin American Perspectives on Modernity, Coloniality, and the Geopolitics of Knowledge', in Moraña, Dussel and Jáuregui (eds), *Coloniality at Large*, p 277.

46. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel and Carlos A Jáuregui, 'Colonialism and Its Replicants', in Moraña, Dussel and Jáuregui (eds), *Coloniality at Large*, p 6.
47. Aníbal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America', *Nepantla*, 1(3), 2000, pp 533–580.
48. Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power', pp 535–536.
49. Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power', p 535.
50. Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power', p 537.
51. For a discussion of María Lugones' notion of the 'coloniality of gender', which builds on Quijano while criticizing his unexamined reproduction of a naturalized sex/gender distinction, see Luciana Ballestrin's contribution in this special issue.
52. Castro-Klaren, 'Posting Letters', p 132.
53. See Fernando Coronil, 'Elephants in the Americas? Latin American Postcolonial Studies and Global Decolonization', in Moraña, Dussel and Jáuregui (eds), *Coloniality at Large*, pp. 396–416.
54. See Grosfoguel, 'The Epistemic Decolonial Turn'; Walter D Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto', *Transmodernity*, Fall 2011, p 52.
55. Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory*, pp 132–134. For the targets of Chibber's critique, see Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*, Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1996; David R Roediger, *How Race Survived U.S. History: From Settlement and Slavery to the Obama Phenomenon*, London: Verso, 2008.
56. Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power', p 536.
57. Stuart Hall, 'Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance', in UNESCO (ed), *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*, Paris: UNESCO, 1980, pp 305–345.
58. See, among others, Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, London: Zed Press, 1983; Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts*; Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004; Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, Or, the Multiplication of Labor*, Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2013; Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.
59. David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*, Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004.
60. Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power', p 548.
61. Dussel, 'Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism', p 474 (emphasis added).
62. Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice*, p 29.
63. Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power', p 540.
64. Madina V Tlostanova and Walter D Mignolo, 'Global Coloniality and the Decolonial Option', *Kult*, 6, Fall 2009, p 143.
65. Tlostanova and Mignolo, 'Global Coloniality and the Decolonial Option', p 135.
66. Walter D Mignolo, 'Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality', *Cultural Studies*, 21(2–3), 2007, pp 449–514.
67. Walter D Mignolo, 'Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)Coloniality, Border Thinking, and Epistemic Disobedience', *Confero*, 1(1), 2013, p 147.
68. See Walter D Mignolo, 'Neither Capitalism Nor Communism, but Decolonization', *Critical Legal Thinking*, 2012, available at: <https://criticallegalthinking.com/2012/03/21/neither-capitalism-nor-communism-but-decolonization-an-interview-with-walter-mignolo/> (accessed 10 April 2020).
69. Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience', p 52.
70. Mignolo, 'Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing', p 133.
71. See Walter Mignolo, 'The Zapatistas's Theoretical Revolution: Its Historical, Ethical, and Political Consequences', *Review*, 25(3), pp 245–275.
72. Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, *The First New Chronicle and Good Government*, Roland Hamilton (trans. and ed.), Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009.

73. Mignolo, 'Epistemic Disobedience', pp 56–57.
74. Mignolo, 'Delinking', p 461.
75. For a critical discussion of Mignolo's interpretation of Guamán Poma, see Olimpia E Rosenthal, 'Guamán Poma and the Genealogy of Decolonial Thought', *Journal of Commonwealth and Postcolonial Studies*, 6(1), 2018, pp 64–85. For his reading of the Zapatista project, see Abraham Acosta, *Thresholds of Illiteracy: Theory, Latin America, and the Crisis of Resistance*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2014, pp 180–187.
76. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, pp 206–248.
77. Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd, 'Introduction', in Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd (eds), *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997, p 1.
78. Jeff Browitt points this out in 'La teoría decolonial: Buscando la identidad en el mercado académico', *Cuadernos de literatura*, 18(36), 2014, p 35. For Huntington's account of the clash of civilizations, see his classic *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Touchstone, 1996.
79. Walter D Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000, p 4 (emphasis in original). Here Mignolo uses 'gnoseology' as a synonym for 'epistemology'.
80. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, p 307.
81. Walter D Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p 130.
82. Indeed, the shift in Mignolo's characterization of Huntington might very well be politically driven, for the two books under discussion – published in 2000 and 2005, respectively – are separated by 9/11 and the subsequent US 'war on terror'. Thus, Mignolo's change of tone from one book to the other may be understood as his deliberate effort to distance himself from Huntington's politics and, more broadly, from the political implications of his theory.
83. Priyamvada Gopal, *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent*, London and New York: Verso, 2019, p 26.
84. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, 'Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: A Reflection on the Practices and Discourses of Decolonization', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 111(1), 2012, p 99.
85. Cusicanqui, 'Ch'ixinakax utxiwa', p 99.
86. Cusicanqui, 'Ch'ixinakax utxiwa', p 106.
87. Dirlik, 'The Postcolonial Aura', p 331.
88. Vasant Kaiwar, *The Postcolonial Orient: The Politics of Difference and the Project of Provincialising Europe*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014, p xviii.
89. Bartolovich, 'Introduction', p 10.
90. Bartolovich, 'Introduction', p 11.
91. Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories', p 17.
92. Lazarus, 'What Postcolonial Theory Doesn't Say', pp 4–5.
93. Lazarus's formulation echoes Ella Shohat's earlier suggestion that postcolonial theory would be more precise if articulated as 'post-anti-colonial critique', in Ella Shohat, 'Notes on the "Post-Colonial"', *Social Text*, 31–32, 1992, p 108.
94. Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice*, p 15.
95. Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice*, p 15 (emphasis in original).
96. Subir Sinha and Rashmi Varma, 'Marxism and Postcolonial Theory: What's Left of the Debate?', *Critical Sociology*, 43(4–5), 2017, pp 545–546.
97. Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', *Cultural Studies*, 21(2), 2007, pp 174–177.
98. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, p 22.
99. Fernando Coronil, 'Elephants in the Americas?', p 414.

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### Notes on contributor

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