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WORLDS AND KNOWLEDGES OTHERWISE[1]

The Latin American modernity/coloniality research program

Introduction: *Cruzando Fronteras* and the borders of thought

Cruzando Fronteras, the timely organizing theme for the 2002 CEISAL Congress celebrated in Amsterdam on 3−6 July, sought to signal, and rethink, the ever increasing relevance of 'borders' to the construction of political, social, and cultural imaginaries from, and about, Latin America at the dawn of the new millennium. The present paper focuses on a 'border' that is gaining salience in recent years, particularly as a result of the work of an increasingly interconnected group of researchers in Latin America and the United States, with smaller branches elsewhere. I am referring to the concepts of 'border thinking' and 'border epistemologies' associated with a larger effort that I will call here 'the modernity/coloniality research program'. I am using the concept of research program loosely (not in a strict Lakatosian sense) to refer to what seems to be an emergent but already significantly cohesive perspective that is fueling a series of researches, meetings, publications, and so forth around a shared − even if course contested − set of concepts. In keeping with the spirit of the group, I would argue that this body of work, still relatively unknown in the English speaking world for reasons that go beyond language and that speak to the heart of the program, constitutes a novel perspective from Latin America but not only for Latin America but for the world of the social and human sciences as a whole. By this I do not mean that the work of this group is just *of interest* to allegedly universal social and human sciences, but that that the group seeks to make a decisive intervention into the very discursivity of the modern sciences in order to craft another space for the production of knowledge − an other way of thinking, *un paradigma otro*, the very possibility of talking about 'worlds and knowledges otherwise'. What this group suggests is that an other thought, an other knowledge (and another world, in the spirit of Porto Alegre's World Social Forum), are indeed possible.

A proper contextualization and genealogy of the modernity/coloniality research program (MC from now on) would have to await future studies. It suffices to say, for now, that there are a number of factors that could plausibly enter into the genealogy of this group's thinking, including: liberation theology from the 1960s and 1970s; debates in Latin American philosophy and social

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science around notions of liberation philosophy and autonomous social science (e.g., Enrique Dussel, Rodolfo Kusch, Orlando Fals Borda, Pablo Gonzales Casanova, Darcy Ribeiro); dependency theory; the debates on Latin American modernity and postmodernity in the 1980s, followed by discussions on hybridity in anthropology, communications and cultural studies in the 1990s; and, in the United States, the Latin American Subaltern Studies group. The modernity/coloniality group certainly finds inspiration in a number of sources, from European and North American critical theories of modernity and postmodernity to South Asian subaltern studies, Chicana feminist theory, postcolonial theory, and African philosophy; many of its members operate within a modified world systems perspective. Its main driving force, however, is a continued reflection on Latin American cultural and political reality, including the subaltern knowledge of exploited and oppressed social groups. If dependency theory, liberation theology, and participatory action research can be said to have been the most original contributions of Latin American critical thought in the twentieth century (with all the caveats that may apply to such originality), the MC research program emerges as heir to this tradition. As we shall see, however, there are significant differences. As Walter Mignolo puts it, MC should be seen as *un paradigma otro*. Rather than a new paradigm 'from Latin America' (as it could have been the case with dependency), the MC project does not fit into a linear history of paradigms or epistemes; to do so would mean to integrate it into the history of modern thought. On the contrary, the MC program should be seen as an other way of thinking that runs counter to the great modernist narratives (Christianity, liberalism, and Marxism); it locates its own inquiry in the very borders of systems of thought and reaches towards the possibility of non-eurocentric modes of thinking.

Part I of the paper presents an overview of the current MC landscape. I must emphasize that this is my own particular reading of this group's work, from my limited engagement with it and my equally limited understanding. This paper should be read as a 'report from the field', so to speak. Part II deals with open and unresolved questions facing the MC research program. Among these questions, I will highlight gender, nature, and the need to think about alternative economic imaginaries.

I The modernity/coloniality research program

Why, one may ask, do these group of Latin Americans and Latin Americanists feel that a new understanding of modernity is needed? To fully appreciate the importance of this question, it is instructive to begin by discussing the dominant tendencies in the study of modernity from what we can call 'intra-modern perspectives' (the term will become clear as we move along). I am very much aware that the view of modernity to be presented below is terribly partial and contestable. I am not presenting it with the goal of 'theorizing

modernity', but rather in order to highlight, by way of contrast, the stark difference that the MC program poses in relation to the dominant inquiries about modernity. In the last instance, the goal of this brief excursus into modernity is political. If, as most intra-modern discussion suggest, globalization entails the universalization and radicalization of modernity, then what are we left with? How can we think about social change? Does radical alterity become impossible? More generally, what is happening to development and modernity in times of globalization? Is modernity finally becoming universalized, or is it being left behind? The question is the more poignant because it can be argued that the present is a moment of transition: between a world defined in terms of modernity and its corollaries, development and modernization, and the certainty they instilled – a world that has operated largely under European hegemony over the past two hundred years if not more; and a new (global) reality which is still difficult to ascertain but which, at opposite ends, can be seen either as a deepening of modernity the world over or, on the contrary, as a deeply negotiated reality that encompasses many heterogeneous cultural formations – and of course, the many shades in between. This sense of a transition is well captured by the question: Is globalization the last stage of capitalist modernity, or the beginning of something new? As we shall see, intra-modern and MC perspectives on modernity give a very different answer to this set of questions.

Globalization as the radicalization of modernity. An intra-modern view of modernity

The idea of a relatively single globalization process emanating out of a few dominant centers remains prevalent. It is useful to review succinctly how this image arose in the most recent period and why it seems so difficult to dispel. From a philosophical and sociological perspective, the root of the idea of an increasingly overpowering globalization lies in a view of modernity as essentially an European phenomenon. Recent challenges to this view from peripheral locations have questioned the unexamined assumption – found in thinkers like Habermas, Giddens, Taylor, Touraine, Lyotard, Rorty, etc., as much as in Kant, Hegel, and the Frankfurt School philosophers before them – that modernity can be fully explained by reference to factors internal to Europe. The views of Habermas and Giddens have been particularly influential, having given rise to a veritable genre of books on modernity and globalization. From this perspective, modernity may be characterized as follows:

1   *Historically*, modernity has identifiable temporal and spatial origins: seventeenth century northern Europe (especially France, Germany, England), around the processes of Reformation, the Enlightenment, and the French Revolution. These processes crystallized at the end of the

eighteenth century (Foucault's modern episteme) and became consolidated with the Industrial Revolution.

2   *Sociologically*, modernity is characterized by certain institutions, particularly the nation state, and by some basic features, such as *self-reflexivity* (the continuous feedback of expert knowledge back into society, transforming it); the *dismembedding* of social life from local context and its increasing determination by translocal forces; and *space/time distantiation*, or the separation of space and place, since relations between 'absent others' become more important than face to face interaction (Giddens 1990).

3   *Culturally*, modernity can be further characterized in terms of the increasing appropriation of previously taken for granted cultural backgrounds by forms of expert knowledge linked to capital and state administrative apparatuses (Habermas 1973). Habermas (1987) describes this process as the increasing rationalization of the life-world, accompanied by universalization and individuation. Modernity brings about an order on the basis of the constructs of reason, the individual, expert knowledge, and administrative mechanisms linked to the state. Order and reason are seen as the foundation for equality and freedom, and enabled by the language of rights.

4   *Philosophically*, one may see modernity in terms of the emergence of the notion of 'Man' as the foundation for all knowledge and order of the world, separate from the natural and the divine (a pervasive anthropocentrism; Foucault 1973, Heidegger 1977, Panikkar 1993). On the other, modernity is seen in terms of the triumph of metaphysics, understood as a tendency − extending from Plato and some of the pre-Socratics to Descartes and the modern thinkers, and criticized by Nietzsche and Heidegger among others − that finds in logical truth the foundation for a rational theory of the world as made up of knowable (and hence controllable) things and beings (e.g., Vattimo 1991). For Vattimo, modernity is characterized by the idea of history and its corollary, progress and overcoming. Vattimo emphasizes the logic of development − the belief in perpetual betterment and overcoming − as crucial to the philosophical foundations of the modern order.

On the critical side, the disembeddedness of modernity is seen to cause what Paul Virilio (1999) calls global de-localization, including the marginalization of place (the here and now of social action) in the definition of social life. The underside of order and rationality is seen in various ways, from the domination and disenchantment that came about with secularization and the predominance of instrumental reason to the normalization of life and the disciplining of populations. As Foucault put it, 'the Enlightenment, which discovered the liberties, also invented the disciplines' (1979, p. 222). Finally, modernity's anthropocentrism is related to logocentrism and phallogocentrism, defined here simply as the cultural project of ordering the world according to

rational principles from the perspective of a male eurocentric consciousness – in other words, building an allegedly ordered, rational, and predictable world. Logocentrism has reached unprecedented levels with the extreme economization and technification of the world (Leff 2000). Modernity of course did not succeed in constituting a total reality, but enacted a totalizing project aimed at the purification of orders (separation between us and them, nature and culture), although inevitably only producing hybrids of these opposites along the way (thus Latour's dictum that 'we have never been modern', 1993).

Is there a logical necessity to believe that the order so sketchily characterized above is the only one capable of becoming global? For most theorists, on all sides of the political spectrum, this is exactly the case. Giddens (1990) has made the argument most forcefully: globalization entails the radicalization and universalization of modernity. No longer purely an affair of the West, however, since modernity is everywhere, the triumph of the modern lies precisely in its having become universal. This may be call 'the Giddens effect': *from now own, it's modernity all the way down, everywhere, until the end of times*. Not only is radical alterity expelled forever from the realm of possibilities, all world cultures and societies are reduced to being a manifestation of European history and culture. The 'Giddens effect' seems to be at play, directly or indirectly, in most works on modernity and globalization at present. No matter how variously qualified, a 'global modernity' is here to stay. Recent anthropological investigations of 'modernity at large' (Appadurai 1996) have shown modernity to be seen as de-territorialized, hybridized, contested, uneven, heterogenous, even multiple, or in terms of conversing with, engaging, playing with, or processing modernity; nevertheless, in the last instance these modernities end up being a reflection of a eurocentered social order, under the assumption that modernity is now everywhere, an ubiquitous and ineluctable social fact.[2]

Could it be, however, that the power of Eurocentered modernity – as a *particular local history* – lies in the fact that is has produced *particular global designs* in such a way that it has 'subalternized' other local histories and their corresponding designs? If this is the case, could one posit the hypothesis that radical alternatives to modernity are not a historically foreclosed possibility? If so, how can we articulate a project around this possibility? Could it be that it is possible to think about, and to think differently from, an 'exteriority' to the modern world system? That one may envision alternatives to the totality imputed to modernity, and adumbrate not a different totality leading to different global designs, but a network of local/global histories constructed from the perspective of a politically enriched alterity? This is precisely the possibility that may be gleaned from the work of a group of Latin American theorists that in refracting modernity through the lens of coloniality engage in a questioning of the spatial and temporal origins of modernity, thus unfreezing the radical potential for thinking from difference and towards the constitution

of alternative local and regional worlds. In what follows, I present succinctly some of the main arguments of these works.[3]

The modernity/coloniality research program

The conceptualization of modernity/coloniality is grounded in a series of operations that distinguish it from established theories of modernity. Succinctly put, these include the following: (1) an emphasis on locating the origins of modernity with the Conquest of America and the control of the Atlantic after 1492, rather than in the most commonly accepted landmarks such as the Enlightenment or the end of the eighteenth century;[4] (2) a persistent attention to colonialism and the making of the capitalist world system as constitutive of modernity; this includes a determination not to overlook the economy and its concomitant forms of exploitation; (3) consequently, the adoption of a world perspective in the explanation of modernity, in lieu of a view of modernity as an intra-European phenomenon; (4) the identification of the domination of others outside the European core as a necessary dimension of modernity, with the concomitant subalternization of the knowledge and cultures of these other groups; (5) a conception of eurocentrism as the knowledge form of modernity/coloniality − a hegemonic representation and mode of knowing that claims universality for itself, and that relies on 'a confusion between abstract universality and the concrete world hegemony derived from Europe's position as center' (Dussel 2000, p. 471, Quijano 2000, p. 549).

A number of alternative notions emerge from this set of positions: (a) a decentering of modernity from its alleged European origins, including a debunking of the linear sequence linking Greece, Rome, Christianity and modern Europe; (b) a new spatial and temporal conception of modernity in terms of the foundational role of Spain and Portugal (the so-called first modernity initiated with the Conquest) and its continuation in Northern Europe with the industrial revolution and the Enlightenment (the second modernity, in Dussel's terms); the second modernity does not replace the first, it overlaps with it, until the present; (c) a focus on the peripheralization of all other world regions by this 'modern Europe', with Latin America as the initial 'other side' of modernity (the dominated and concealed side); and (d) a re-reading of the 'myth of modernity', not in terms of a questioning of the emancipatory potential of modern reason, but of modernity's 'underside', namely, the imputation of the superiority of European civilization, coupled with the assumption that Europe's development must be followed unilaterally by every other culture, by force if necessary −what Dussel terms 'the developmentalist fallacy' (e.g., 1993, 2000). Some additional consequences include the re-valuing of landmark experiences of decolonization, from the Tupac Amaru rebellion and the 1804 Haitian revolution to the 1960s anti-colonial movements, as sources of visions for the future, as opposed to the

conventional sources such as the French and American revolutions; and, in general, the need to take seriously the epistemic force of local histories and to think theory through from the political praxis of subaltern groups.

The main conclusions are, first, that the proper analytical unit for the analysis of modernity is modernity/coloniality – in sum, there is no modernity without coloniality, with the latter being constitutive of the former (in Asia, Africa, Latin America/Caribbean). Second, the fact that 'the colonial difference' is a privileged epistemological and political space. The great majority of European theorists (particularly those 'defenders of the European patent on modernity', as Quijano mockingly calls them (2000, p. 543)) have been blind to the colonial difference and the subalternization of knowledge and cultures it entailed. A focus on the modern/colonial world system also makes visible, besides the internal conflicts (conflicts within powers with the same world view), those that take place at the exterior borders of the modern/colonial system – i.e., the conflicts with other cultures and world views.[5]

Key notions and themes of the modernity/coloniliaty research program

Some of the key notions that make up the conceptual corpus of this research program are thus: the *modern colonial world system* as the ensemble of processes and social formations that encompass modern colonialism and colonial modernities; although it is structurally heterogeneous, it articulates the main forms of power into a system. *Coloniality of power* (Quijano), a global hegemonic model of power in place since the Conquest that articulates race and labor, space and peoples, according to the needs of capital and to the benefit of white European peoples. *Colonial difference* and *global coloniality* (Mignolo) which refer to the knowledge and cultural dimensions of the subalternization processes effected by the coloniality of power; the colonial difference brings to the fore persistent cultural differences within global power structures. *Coloniality of being* (more recently suggested by Nelson Maldonado-Torres in group discussions) as the ontological dimension of colonialty, on both sides of the encounter; based on Levinas, Dussel and Fanon, it points at the 'ontological excess' that occurs when particular beings impose on others and, beyond that, the potential or actual effectivity of the discourses with which the other responds to the suppression as a result of the encounter (Maldonado-Torres 2003). *Eurocentrism,* as the knowledge model that represents the local European historical experience and which became globally hegemonic since the seventeenth century (Dussel, Quijano); hence the possibility of *non-eurocentric thinking* and epistemologies. Each of these notions are in themselves rooted in complex conceptualizations that represent decades of research; even thus, they are of course debatable. There are some other notions, more peculiar to specific authors but which are gaining currency within the group, that it is also important to introduce. These include Dussel's

notion of exteriority and transmodernity and Mignolo's concept of border thinking, pluritopic hermeneutics, and pluriversality.

The question of whether there is an 'exteriority' to the modern/colonial world system is somewhat peculiar to this group, and easily misunderstood. It was originally proposed and carefully elaborated by Dussel in his classic work on liberation philosophy (1976) and reworked in recent years. In no way should this exteriority be thought about as a pure outside, untouched by the modern. The notion of exteriority does not entail an ontological outside; it refers to an outside that is precisely constituted as difference by a hegemonic discourse. This notion of exteriority arises chiefly by thinking about the Other from the ethical and epistemological perspective of a liberation philosophy framework: the Other as oppressed, as woman, as racially marked, as excluded, as poor, as nature. By appealing from the exteriority in which s/he is located, the Other becomes the original source of an ethical discourse vis à vis a hegemonic totality. This interpellation of the Other comes from outside or beyond the system's institutional and normative frame, as an ethical challenge. This challenge might only be 'quasi-intelligible' at first (Dussel 1996, p. 25), given the difficulties in establishing meaningful interpellation that exploited peoples have with respect to a hegemonic system (contra Habermas' notion of a communication free of domination). There are degrees of exteriority; in the last instance, the greater challenge comes from

> the interpellation which the majority of the population of the planet, located in the South, raises, demanding their right to live, their right to develop their own culture, economy, politics, etc. . . . There is no liberation without rationality; but there is no *critical* rationality without accepting the interpellation of the excluded, or this would inadvertently be only the rationality of *domination*. . . . From this negated Other departs the praxis of liberation as 'affirmation' of the Exteriority and as origin of the movement of negation of the negation'.
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> (Dussel 1996, pp. 31, 36, 54)[6]

This is precisely what most European and Euro-American theorists seem unwilling to consider: that it is impossible to think about transcending or overcoming modernity without approaching it from the perspective of the colonial difference. Both Mignolo and Dussel see here a strict limit to deconstruction and to the various eurocentered critiques of eurocentrism – in short, these continue to be thought about from within eurocentric categories (of, say, liberalism, Marxism, poststructuralism), not from the border thinking enabled by the colonial difference. . . . Critiques of modernity, in short, are blind to the (epistemic and cultural) colonial difference that becomes the focus of modernity/coloniality.

Dussel's notion of *transmodernity* signals the possibility of a non-eurocentric and critical dialogue with alterity, one that fully enables 'the negation of the negation' to which the subaltern others have been subjected, and one that does not see critical discourse as intrinsically European. Integral to this effort is the rescuing of non-hegemonic and silenced counter-discourses, of the alterity that is constitutive of modernity itself. This is the ethical principle of liberation of the negated Other, for which Dussel coins the term, 'trans-modernity', defined as a project for overcoming modernity not simply by negating it but by thinking about it from its underside, from the perspective of the excluded other. Trans-modernity is a future-oriented project that seeks the liberation of all humanity (1996, p. 14, Ch. 7), 'a worldwide ethical liberation project in which alterity, which was part and parcel of modernity, would be able to ful- fill itself' (2000, p. 473), 'in which both modernity and its negated alterity (the victims) co-realize themselves in a process of mutual fertilization' (1993, p. 76). In short, trans-modernity cannot be brought about from within modernity, but requires of the action − and the incorporative solidarity − of the subalternized groups, the objects of modernity's constitutive violence embedded in, among other features, the developmentalist fallacy. Rather than the rational project of a discursive ethics, transmodernity becomes the expression of an ethics of liberation.

Mignolo's notions of *border thinking*, *border epistemology*, and *pluritopic hermeneutics* are important in this regard. They point at the need 'for a kind of thinking that moves along the diversity of historical processes' (Mignolo 2001, p. 9). There are, to be sure, no original thinking traditions to which one can go back. Rather than reproducing Western abstract universals, however, the alternative is a kind of border thinking that 'engages the colonialism of Western epistemology (from the left and from the right) from the perspective of epistemic forces that have been turned into subaltern (traditional, folkloric, religious, emotional, etc.) forms of knowledge' (2001, p. 11). Resituating Anzaldúa's metaphor of the border into the domain of coloniality, Mignolo adumbrates the possibility of ''thinking otherwise', from the interior exteriority of the border. That is, to engage in border thinking is to move beyond the categories created an imposed by Western epistemology' (p. 11). This is not just a question of changing the contents but the very terms of the conversation. It is not a question of replacing existing epistemologies either; these will certainly continue to exist and as such will remain viable as spaces of, and for, critique. Instead, what he claims 'is the space for an epistemology that comes from the border and aims toward political and ethical transforma- tions' (p. 11). Finally, while Mignolo acknowledges the continued importance of the monotopic critique of modernity by Western critical discourse (critique from a single, unified space), he suggests that this has to be put into dialogue with the critique(s) arising from the colonial difference, which constitutes border thinking. The result is a 'pluritopic hermeneutics' (a term he seemingly

adapts from Pannikar's 'diatopic hermeneutics'), a possibility of thinking from different spaces which finally breaks away from eurocentrism as sole epistemological perspective. This is the double critique of modernity from the perspective of coloniality, from the exterior of the modern/colonial world system. Let it be clear, however, that border thinking entails both 'displacement and departure' (2000, p. 308), double critique and positive affirmation of an alternative ordering of the real. To sum up,

> Border thinking points towards a different kind of hegemony, a multiple one. As a universal project, diversity allows us to imagine alternatives to universalism (we could say that the alternative to universalism in this view is not particularism but multiplicity). 'The 'West and the rest' in Huntington's phrase provides the model to overcome, as the 'rest' becomes the sites where border thinking emerges in its diversity, where 'mundialización' creates new local histories remaking and readapting Western global designs . . . and transforming local (European) histories from where such designs emerged . . . . 'Interdependence' may be the word that summarizes the break away from the idea of *totality* and brings about the idea of *networks* whose articulation will require epistemological principles I called in this book 'border thinking' and 'border gnosis', as a rearticulation of the colonial difference: 'diversality as a universal project', which means that people and communities have the right to be different precisely because 'we' are all equals
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> (2000, pp. 310, 311).

'There is no question', writes Mignolo (2000), p. 59), 'that Quijano, Dussel and I are reacting not only to the force of a historical imaginary but also to the actuality of this imaginary today'. The corollary is the need to build narratives from the perspective of modernity/coloniality 'geared towards the search for a different logic' (p. 22). This project has to do with the rearticulation of global designs by and from local histories; with the articulation between subaltern and hegemonic knowledge from the perspective of the subaltern; and with the remapping of colonial difference towards a worldly culture – such as in the Zapatista project, that remaps Marxism, thirdworldism, and indigenism, without being either of them, in an excellent example of border thinking. While 'there is nothing outside of totality . . . totality is always projected from a given local history', it becomes possible to think of 'other local histories producing either alternative totalities or an alternative to totality' (p. 329). These alternatives would not play on the 'globalization/civilization' couplet inherent to modernity/coloniality; they would rather build on a '*mundialización*/culture' relation centered on the local histories in which colonial global designs are necessarily transformed, thus transforming also the local histories that created them. Unlike globalization, *mundialización* brings to the fore the

manifold local histories that, in questioning global designs (e.g., neo-liberal globalization), aim at forms of globality that arise out of 'cultures of transience' that go against the cultural homogeneity fostered by such designs. The diversity of *mundialización* is contrasted here with the homogeneity of globalization, aiming at multiple and diverse social orders.

In short, the perspective of modernity/coloniality provides an alternative framework for debates on modernity, globalization and development; it is not just a change in the description of events, it is an epistemic change of perspective. By speaking of the colonial difference, this framework brings to the fore the power dimension that is often lost in relativistic discussions of cultural difference. More recent debates on interculturality, for instance in Ecuador's current political and cultural scene, deepens some of these insights (Walsh 2003). In short, the MC research program is a framework constructed from the Latin American periphery of the modern colonial world system; it helps explain the dynamics of eurocentrism in the making of modernity and attempts to transcend it. If it reveals the dark sides of modernity, it does not do it from an intra-epistemic perspective, as in the critical European discourses, but from the perspective of the receivers of the alleged benefits of the modern world. Modernity/coloniality also shows that the perspective of modernity is limited and exhausted in its pretended universality. By the same token, it shows the shortcomings of the language of alternative modernities in that this latter incorporates the projects of the non-moderns into a single project, losing the subaltern perspectives and subordinating them, for even in their hybridity subaltern perspectives are not about being only modern but are heteroglossic, networked, plural. In highlighting the developmentalist fallacy, lastly, modernity/coloniality not only re-focuses our attention on the overall fact of development, it provides a context for interpreting the various challenges to development and modernity as so many projects that are potentially complementary and mutually reinforcing. Beyond Latin America, one may say, with Mignolo (2000), p. 309), that this approach 'is certainly a theory *from/of* the Third World, *but not only for the Third World*.... Third World theorizing is also *for* the First World in the sense that critical theory is subsumed and incorporated in a new geocultural and epistemological location'.[7]

Finally, there are some consequences of this group's work for Latin American Studies in the US, Europe, and elsewhere. The MC perspective moves away from viewing 'Latin America' as an object of study (in relation to which US-based Latin American Studies would be the 'knowing subject'), towards an understanding of Latin America as a geo-historical location with and within a distinct critical genealogy of thought. Modernity/Coloniality suggests that globalization must be understood from a geo-historical and critical Latin American perspective. With this the MC approach proposes an alternative to the genealogy of the modern social sciences that are still the foundation of Latin American Studies in the US. In this way, *Latin American*

Studies in, say, North America and Europe, and *Critical Social Thought* in Latin America (which offers the epistemic grounding for the MC group) emerge as two *complementary but distinct* paradigms.[8] This also means that, as an epistemic perspective, the MC research program is not associated with particular nationalities or geographical locations. To occupy the locus of enunciation crafted by the MC project, in other words, one does not need to be a Latin American nor live in the continent. 'Latin America' itself becomes a perspective that can be practiced from many spaces, if it is done from counter-hegemonic perspectives that challenge the very assumption of Latin America as fully constituted object of study, previous to, and outside of, the often imperialistic discourses that construct it.

II Some trends, open questions, and tasks ahead

So far I have presented some of the main lines of inquiry and concepts of the loose collective I have referred to as the MC research program. I also focused on the commonly agreed upon main intellectual sources of the group – chiefly, Enrique Dussel, Aníbal Quijano, and Walter Mignolo. My purpose has been to provide an overview of the shared ground on which the group has been constituted. This story, of course, leaves out much that is of interest to the project, including valuable contributions by other participants, as well as the most collective aspects of the current phase of joint inquiry. There are certainly disagreements and tensions among the group, which makes for lively exchanges and debates, but an 'ethnography' of this 'community of argumentation' (as Brazilian anthropologist Gustavo Lins Ribeiro would call it) will have to await for another opportunity. For now, a further brief characterization of the group might suffice; this will be followed by a sketch of what I believe are some open questions, trends, and promising tensions.

The modernity/coloniality group

The MC research program group can be tentatively characterized as follows (note: this characterization is a more a straightforward sociology of knowledge exercise than, say, an analysis of the discursive formation being mapped by MC):

1   It is largely interdisciplinary or, rather, transdisciplinary. Although philosophy, political economy, and literary theory have been salient, disciplines such as history, sociology and anthropology are increasingly important. Other fields, such as feminist theory and political ecology, already begin to make inroads into the program. It is transdisciplinary to the extent that disciplinary inquiries are set into dialogue with those of other fields, sometimes by the same author, leading to new forms of inquiry. There is an explicit attempt at 'un-disciplining' the social sciences

(*indisciplinar las ciencias sociales*; see Walsh *et al.* 2002) and at building *teorías sin disciplina* (Castro-Gómez & Mendieta 1998).

2   While firmly anchored in 'Latin America', the group cannot be said to be of the geographical Latin America, but rather made up of a network of sites, some of which are most stabilized by particular practices than others (e.g, the sites mentioned in Quito, Bogotá, Durham-Chapel Hill, México City and more recently Berkeley). This goes with the suggestion that Latin America be understood more as a 'perspective' or epistemic space than as a region. It is an approach that, again, while it can be said to have roots in the Latin American experience, finds sustenance globally; hence the appeal to many critical theories, especially those emerging from similar subaltern epistemic locations. This differentiates it sharply from earlier 'Latin American paradigms', such as dependency and liberation theology (even if these also had a transnational dimension).

3   The group can be said to be a community of argumentation that works collectively on concepts and strategies; up to a certain point, it can be said to practice the critical border thinking it proposes; hence the emphasis on questions of knowledge. In other words, there is an explicit collective dimension to the conceptual work that, although around a set of formative concepts, is significantly open ended. This sense of collectivity is strengthened by the feeling of the radical potential of the project − the fact that what is at stake is 'not only to change the content but the very terms of the conversation' (Mignolo). The goal is to craft new forms of analysis, not to contribute to already established (eurocentric) systems of thought, no matter how critical these might be. This could be related to what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2003) has called 'epistemologies of the South' in his analysis of the World Social Forum.

4   The group's participants tend to share a political position that is seemingly consistent with this radical emphasis, even if their practice continues to have a primary (if not exclusive) site in the academy (see discussion below). At this level, there can be said to be three privileged sites and agents of radical change: subaltern social actors and movements (and to this extent the political practice of the group's members is seen as aligned with subaltern actors); intellectual-activists in mixed spaces, from NGOs to the state; and the universities themselves, to the extent that, taken to their logical conclusions, the MC approach is bound to constitute a challenge to normative academic practices and canons.

Open-ended questions, sites of tension

To end, I would like to briefly sketch out three areas the importance that have remained largely outside the purview of the project, but which are of great relevance to the very experiences that the project theorizes. The first, and

perhaps most pressing, is gender; the second nature and the environment; the third the need to construct new economic imaginaries capable of supporting concrete struggles against neo-liberalism and designs for alternative economies. If the group's efforts can be said to have remained largely academic (or academic-intellectual), and to this extent largely at the level of disembodied abstract discourse, these dimensions are likely to add 'flesh and blood', so to speak, into it (the flesh and blood of women's bodies, nature, and place-based economies, for instance), and to contribute to ward off the risks of logocentrism. This should also be of consequence for the strategies of dissemination of this work into particular political arenas.[9] In other words, an engagement with feminism and environmentalism would be fruitful in terms of thinking the non-discursive side of social action (Flórez 2003). It would be equally important to theorize further notions that are central to the group and to feminist theory alike, such as epistemology, power, identity, subjectivity, agency, and everyday life.

A final area of potential work would be ethnographies of modernity/coloniality. Conceived within the framework presented here, these ethnographies would avoid the epistemological traps of the studies of modernity reviewed in the first part of the paper. They would also be useful to ascertaining instances of the colonial difference and border thinking from the ground up, so to speak, for instance by engaging with gender, ecological, or economic difference as explained below. This is, however, an epistemological and methodological issue, and as such it will not be elaborated upon further here.

Engendering modernity/coloniality

It is clear that the treatment of gender by the MC group so far has been inadequate in the best of cases. Dussel was among the very few male Latin American thinkers to discuss at length the issue of women early on, as one of the important categories of excluded others. Mignolo has paid attention to some of the works by Chicana feminists, particularly the notion of borderlands/*la frontera*. These efforts, however, hardly get at the potential contributions of feminist theory to the MC framework. The Finnish theologian and feminist theorist Elina Vuola has pioneered the identification of this silence, particularly in connection with Dussel's work as a liberation theology scholar and other liberation theology frameworks (Vuola 2000, 2002, 2003, in press). Vuola (2002) finds hopeful Dussel's move to defining the object of liberation as the 'Other' (more than just the poor, and thus going beyond class), but she finds less encouraging the theologians' inability to identify the race and gender position of their theorizing and to respond to the challenges that arise when the objects become subjects in their own right. The Other, in other words, is subsumed in a new kind of totality, a male-centered one, thus denying the existence of women in their alterity and difference.

In a more recent text, and building on post-colonial and feminist theory, Vuola (2003) renews her call for taking seriously the heterogeneity and multiplicity of the subject of liberation (theology and philosophy), namely 'the poor' – and, one may add, the subaltern, in the MC project. In other words, she is calling for a politics of representation of the poor and the subaltern that fully acknowledges this multiplicity; in the case of women, this means addressing themes that have been absent from the discussion, such as violence against women, reproductive rights and sexuality, and giving complete visibility to the agency of women. In other words, the subject of the colonial difference is not an undifferentiated, gender-neutral subject (or differentiated only in terms of race and class); there are differences in the way subaltern groups are objects of power and subjects of agency. To acknowledge this might change, to paraphrase, not only the contents but also the terms of the conversation. That women are other in relation to men – and certainly treated as such by phallogocentric social and human sciences – certainly should have consequences for a perspective centered precisely on exteriority and difference. What Vuola points at is the fact that whereas the discourse of the (mostly male still) MC group is illuminating and radical in so many ways, and as such taken seriously by feminists, *it largely excludes women and women's theoretical and political concerns.* There seems to be a conflict here between discourse and practice as far as women is concerned. Finally, the feminist deconstruction of religious fundamentalism, something that is not well known in either feminist social science or the MC project, is also of relevance to the engendering of the MC project. As a broad political movement, transnational feminism(s) is developing new approaches to formulating inter-cultural criteria for human rights, especially women's rights, and for analyzing the truth claims on which these are based (Vuola 2002). New works on transnational feminism deal with race, gender and culture issues in ways that resonate with the concerns of the MC project (see e.g, Shohat 1998, Bahavani *et al.* 2003).

There are, actually, many points of actual or potential convergence between feminism and the theory of MC (this discussion is by no means exhaustive, but intended to show some possible points of connection). First, they both share the radical suspicion of universalist discourse; at this level, what needs to be understood is that modern discourse is also a masculinist discourse, as feminist philosophers and political theorist have shown since at least the late 1980s (see, e.g., the well-known collection by Nicholson (1990)). There is convergence also at the level of the situated character of all knowledge; yet in the feminist theory version (e.g., Haraway's famous 1988 article) the situated knowledge comes with the realization of the necessarily partial character of all perspectives – MC included. In other words, the critical subject position of the modernity/coloniality scholar is not beyond the scholar's gender. In refusing to locate himself/herself within feminism, the scholar is also missing the chance to engage in an other thought, another

subjectivity, or subjectivity otherwise. To paraphrase Ranajit Guha, the scholar would be reducing women's agency to another history with another (male) subject; he would then be complicit with the prose of counter-insurgency. As Vuola puts it, in speaking of Walter Mignolo's notions of pluritopic hermeneutics and pluriversality as goals to be embraced, 'it is easy to see how this project has been present in liberation theology from its beginning ... however, it is less clear how liberation theologians have been able to conceptualize and differentiate that *from where* ... One should always be willing to look at one's own truth claims and positions with the critical eyes of others' (2003, p. 7). Beyond liberation theology, what would 'opting for women' bring to the MC research program? Of course, it should be clear that talking about women is only part of the story. A gender perspective demands situating this talk in contexts of power, particularly power relations between women and men, including power relations within the academy. Given the relationality of gender, it has to be recognized that the subject of the colonial difference is not autonomous but relational. This pertains as much to women as to men.

At stake here is the possibility of deepening the MC project's concern with epistemology through an engagement with the sophisticated and politically-minded debate on feminist epistemology and positionality (e.g., Alcoff 1988, 1991). The notion of women's positionality suggests that women utilize their subject positions for the construction of meaning in ways that cannot be fully ascertained from another perspective. The emphasis on epistemology and positionality is of course linked to a reflection on gender inequality − an aspect that, again, is fully consistent with MC theory. Feminist ethnography has taken on these challenges in an interesting direction by articulating the analysis of women's dis/empowerment with tactics of voicing, writing, and representation (see, e.g, Behar & Gordon 1995). Besides and beyond the more established modes of academic writing (which are necessarily entangled with logocentric practices?), can one write differently about the subjects whose non-eurocentric perspectives one expects to contribute bringing into light? And how do we put our writings into circulation in those very spaces where the colonial difference is being re-worked daily through social practices? In doing so, feminist ethnography has taken clues from post-structuralism and also from writings by women of color in the US and elsewhere, particularly the work of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga. *This Bridge We Call Home*, the recent volume in this tradition (Anzaldúa & Keating 2003), poses new challenges for feminist theory and MC theory alike. Moving from victimhood to agency, and recognizing the persistent condition of living *entremundos* (hence the need for bridge building which is also a home building and community building), the *nepantleras* in this volume are border thinkers that make connections for social change; they do so out of an act of will and an act of love, and as 'a promise to be present with the pain of others without losing

themselves in it' (Anzaldúa 2003, p. 4). Their 'technologies of crossing' are technologies for recognizing power and for going beyond, for shifting to other modes of consciousness and being, for a new hermeneutics of love (Sandoval 2003). Strategies of knowledge, writing and representation are again central to this internationalist feminist project now focused on agency, connection, and re/construction of social, cultural and natural worlds.[10]

Besides issues of power and epistemology, feminist theory's concerns with subjectivity and identity would be crucial areas of engagement. No contemporary theory has radicalized these concepts as much as queer theory; this theory has eloquently shown that the constituent elements of gender and sexual identities are never monolithic, but more the result of weavings, overlaps, dissonances, gaps and possibilities. 'Queer' names the radical contestation of the norm – and here I am suggesting the norm of heterosexism, patriarchy, modernity, and coloniality. It can be said that 'queer' signals the identity without essence par excellence, and it thus becomes the site of both historical analysis and future imaginings. If not necessarily always in a position of subversive exteriority, the queer subject shows that the borders (in this case the heterosexual norm) can be redrawn so that it becomes possible to envision identities and knowledges otherwise (e.g, Halperin 1995). The de-essentializatioon of identity means taking all identities seriously. Feminist identities, as some theorists emphasize, are also constructed through pleasure and desire, and here lies another possibility for a critique of 'Man the Modern', to use Donna Haraway's happy (and devastating) expression – the Man that constructs himself as both object and subject of all knowledge. There is no autonomous subject of knowledge; all knowledge has a relational dimension and a materiality. Who is the subject of knowledge, and how is s/he enabled in her everydayness? Who can be a 'critical border thinker, and how? Who can afford to be in a border position and a position of resistance, and what is the sexual and political economy that authorizes this privilege? Finally, the researcher too is a subject of desire, and this too needs to be acknowledged (Flórez 2003).[11]

To speak about Latin America: The very fact that sexism continues to be one of the most pervasive, and seemingly intractable, problems in Latin American societies should be reason enough to engage with feminism. Latin American feminists have pointed at the fact that women are also the Other of modernity. Beyond discussions of divisions of labor and epistemology, this has visible consequences for the analysis of key processes of coloniality, including nation building, race, and eurocentric patriarchal formations (see, e.g., Rojas 2001). It is fitting to end this section with a brief mention of the speech by Comandante Ester, delivered before Congress in Mexico City at the end of *La Marcha del Color de la Tierra* in March 2001. It was expected that Sub-comandante Marcos would deliver the speech; instead, it was an Indian woman, the comandante Ester. After initial hesitancy and difficulties in incorporating the voices and demands of women so that women were still

constructed as supplements (Belaustiguigoitia 1998), it seemed that the Zapatista had finally arrived at the recognition of the central place of indigenous women in both society and the struggle. A few days earlier, in Juchitán, Comandante Ester had already referred to the triple discrimination confronted by Indian women – as Indian, woman, and poor. Engaging in a double critique in her México City speech, Comandante Ester discussed the *Leyes Revolucionarias de la Mujer*, intended to eliminate all discriminatory practices form within and from without. She spoke at length of the forms of discrimination of women in daily life arising from booth the communities and the nation, as well as of the indigenou cultural practices that need to be preserved. In this way, 'the march made visible the invisible, and representable the unrepresentable: Indian women speaking and demanding 'before the law' . . . . Is it possible for the law to hear them? In which language, through which discourse do they have to make clear what they want: to be Indian, to be women and to be Mexican?' (Belausteguigoitia 2002, p. 52). There are, again, clear implications from this call for the modernity/coloniality research program. The crucial question is: can the subaltern woman speak through MC theorizing? If not, what is the cost of this silence? What sort of translations and mediations are at stake?

Some of the questions raised here could easily emerge from the MC framework. To this extent, it would be important for feminists to think about the contributions that the MC project could make to theorizing gender and difference. It is true that after the critiques by women of color and third world women in the 1980s allegedly universal feminisms have been more aware of the race and culture dimensions in the dynamic of gender; however, varieties of eurocentrism continue to be pervasive in a number of feminist positions. The language of 'colonial difference' brings this issue into new light. It complicates, for instance, assumptions about gender that are still informed by Eurocentric notions of liberation and equality; it might help explain subaltern coalitions that do not necessarily embrace gender demands or follow a logic of solidarity among women (above say, class and ethnic solidarity). Looking forward, one may say that MC contributes to establish conversations between class, gender and race/ethnicity in Latin America that could be of great interest to feminists that do not speak from this position. This promise is already shown by the few works within the MC group that are already conceived from this perspective (particularly Freya Schiwy's work on race and gender in Bolivia), and by the interpellation of some feminists, such as those reviewed here.

Nature and the colonial difference

Like feminism, ecology and environmentalism present the MC project with similar challenges and possibilities. Ecology and environmentalism imply

different ways of thinking (necessarily relational, situated and historical); ways of reading modernity; an acute concern with epistemology (particularly a critique of reductionist science and logocentric discourse); and an articulation of the question of difference (ecological and cultural difference) that can easily be linked to coloniality, and vice versa. All of these are potential points of convergence with the MC project, and some members of the group have begun to broach these questions (e.g., Coronil 1997, Escobar 1999, Lander 2002). Environmentalism's orientation towards social movements can also be seen as a shared aspect with the MC project. More is yet to be done, however.

There is, actually, an ongoing effort at developing a Latin American political ecology framework that similarly purports to develop a unique geopolitical perspective on the question of nature; the brief comments below are purposely written from this vantage point.[12] To begin with, political ecology underscores the civilizational character of the current environmental crisis; this crisis is, bluntly put, is a crisis of modernity, to the extent that modernity has failed to enable sustainable worlds. It is also a *crisis of thought*, to the extent that logocentric thought has fueled the ecologically destructive practices of modernity (Leff 2000, Boff 2002). (As some feminists convincingly argue, the domination of women and nature are at the basis of the modern patriarchal project enacted by fallogocentric thought.) It is difficult for those not accustomed to thinking in ecological terms to realize that today's environmental crisis is not only a generalized crisis but perhaps the central contradiction and limit to capital today. More readily accepted is the idea that modernity is structured around the split between nature and culture, even if it is rarely acknowledged that this split might be equally formative of modernity than the civilized/other (us/them) binary. Nature then appears at the other side of the colonial difference, with certain natures (colonial/third world natures, women's bodies, dark bodies) located in the exteriority to the Totality of the male eurocentric world. The environmental crisis thus signals the limits of modern, instrumental rationality; it reflects modernity's failure to articulate biology and history save through the capitalization of nature and labor. What ensued was a regime of capitalist nature that subalternized all other articulations of biology and history, of nature and society, particularly those that enact − through their local models and practices of the natural − a culturally-established continuity (as opposed to a separation) between the natural, human, and supernatural worlds. These local models of the natural are at the basis of environmental struggles today. In this way, these struggle need to be seen as *struggles for the defense of cultural, ecological, and economic difference* (Leff 2000, Escobar 1999). Ethno-ecological social movements are very clear about this. Here lies another type of critical border thinking that needs to be taken into account.

In a more prospective way, the Latin American political ecology effort attempts to construct an ethics and culture of sustainability; this entails the

rethinking of production towards a new environmental rationality; and a dialogue among forms of knowledge towards the construction of novel environmental rationalities. This ecology's ethical perspective on nature, life, and the planet entails a questioning of modernity and development, indeed an irrefutable indictment of the developmentalist fallacy. By privileging subaltern knowledges of the natural, this political ecology articulates in unique ways the questions of diversity, difference, and inter-culturality − with nature, of course, occupying a role as actor and agent. At stake here is a cultural politics of difference that goes beyond the deconstruction of anthropo-logocentrism; it aims at the cultural re-appropriation of nature through political strategies such as those of social movements. According to this group, there is an emergent Latin American environmental thought that builds on the struggles and knowledges of indigenous, peasants, ethnic and other subaltern groups to envision other ways of being with a multiplicity of living and non-living beings, human and not. Respecting the specificity of place-based cultures and peoples, it aims at thinking about the re/construction of local and regional worlds in more sustainable ways.

Rethinking the economy, in the concrete

The combined processes of modernity and coloniality can be seen as projects for the radical reconversion of human and biophysical ecologies world wide. One may speak about a systematic project of cultural, ecological, and economic reconversion along eurocentric lines. Conversely, one may consider the need to build on *practices of cultural, ecological, and economic difference* for concrete projects of world transformation − for worlds and knowledges otherwise. This helps give flesh and blood to the colonial difference and global coloniality. While these processes have to be advanced at the same time, there seems to be a pressing need to come up with new economic imaginaries, imaginaries that enable effective and practical resistance to the seemingly overpowering imaginary of the market sanctified by neo-liberal globalization (Hinkelamert's age of the total market). Ethnographically, we can follow in the wake of ecological anthro-pologists documenting practices of ecological difference, which, coupled with the political-intellectual strategies of social movements, could feed into concrete projects of alternative eco-cultural designs and world construction. Theoreti-cally, we are ill equipped for the task. Part of the answer lies in the fact that political economy analyses have made invisible practices of economic difference, given the totalizing and capitalocentric tendencies of their discourses; these analyses have, in short, tended to reduce all economic forms to the terms of the Same, namely, capital itself (Gibson-Graham 1996).

   That ecology and the body are ineluctably attached to place (even if not place-bound) seems easy to accept. Less clear is that thinking about economic

difference and alternative economic imaginaries should also have a place-based dimension. Let us see why, in a way that enables us to introduce a place-based dimension to the coloniality of power and the colonial difference. Place, after all, is the site of the subaltern par excellence, the excluded dimension of modernity's concern with space, universality, movement, and the like. It would then make sense to 'emplace' the MC project in more than a metaphorical way. This point is driven home by a project on Women and the Politics of Place that brings together gender, ecology and economy into one theoretical-political framework.[13] In writing about this project, Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson introduce the notion of economic difference and the idea of emplacement, building on the decentered and disorganized (but globally emplaced) political imaginary of second wave feminism, in the following way:

> Women and the Politics of Place (Harcourt & Escobar 2002) builds on that ground [of feminist politics], extending the idea of a politics of ubiquity by emphasizing its ontological substrate: a vast set of disarticulated 'places' – households, social communities, ecosystems, workplaces, organizations, bodies, public arenas, urban spaces, diasporas, regions, occupations – related analogically rather than organically and connected through webs of signification. If *women* are everywhere, *a woman* is always somewhere, and those somewheres are what the project is interested in: places being created, strengthened, defended, augmented, transformed by women. It is as though the identity category, woman, were to be addressed through contextualization or emplacement, and the feminist question had become 'What might a politics of the emplacement be?' Not a politics of the category, or of identity per se, but a politics of the production of subjects and places. A politics of becoming in place.
>
> (Gibson-Graham 2003).

From an MC perspective, it can be said that 'place' here serves as an epistemic perspective that can be occupied by many subjects. The Women and the Politics of Place project indeed aims at asserting a logic of difference and possibility against the homogenizing tendencies of globalization and political economy; it seeks to make visible a landscape of cultural, ecological and economic differences; to this extent, there is certain convergence here between the projects of feminism, ecology, and alternative economies and this convergence is articulated around the politics of place. I am not arguing that this is the only space of convergence for projects of feminist, economic, and ecological futures. I am arguing for a dialogue between the MC project and projects such as those reviewed in this section. The notion of place-based (although, again, not place-bound) practices of identity, nature, and economy allows us to go beyond a view of subaltern places as just subsumed in a global logic or as a site in a global network, unable to ground any significant

resistance, let alone an alternative construction. At the level of the economy, one may realize that places are never fully capitalist, but are inhabited by economic difference, with the potential for becoming something other, an other economy. It is about rethinking difference from the perspective of the economy, and the economy from the perspective of difference. By emplacing the MC project, one might thus be able to link global coloniality to projects that have potential for concrete, real transformations. These may take place in conjunction with social movements. This revaluing of local politics might be one of most important contributions we can make at present, in a moment when nobody seems to give any credence to local actions.

Conclusion

In his retrospective look at critical discourses on identity in Latin American philosophy and social sciences since the end of the nineteenth century to the present, *Crítica de la Razón Latinoamericana*, Santiago Castro-Gómez (1996) concludes that all such discourses of identity – from Alberdi to Martí and Rodó and to Zea and Roig – have been complicit with a modernist logic of alterization, and have thus amounted to counter-modernist proposals in the best of cases. In other words, most accounts of identity in liberation discourses in philosophy and other fields have relied on postulating a foundational alterity and a transcendental subject that would constitute a radical alternative in relation to an equally homogenized modern/European/North American Other. Whether appealing to Latin American indigenous, mestizo, catholic, primordialist, anti-imperialist, or vitalist identities – in contradistinction to white, protestant, instrumental, disenchanted, individualist, patriarchal, etc. Euro/American identity – these strategies of alterization, in Castro-Gómez archaeological analysis, are doomed to failure. To acknowledge the partial, historical, and heterogeneous character of all identities is to begin to correct this flaw, and to begin the journey towards views of identity that emerge from an *episteme posilustrada*, or post-Enlightment episteme. To the counter-modernist logic of alterization, Castro-Gómez opposes a logic of the historical production of difference.

It remains to be seen whether the MC project will fully bypass the modernist logic of alterization insightfully analyzed by Castro-Gómez. Conceived as an epistemic decolonization, this project would certainly seem to go beyond a politics of representation based on identifying an exclusive space of enunciation 'of one's own' that is blind to its own constructedness; it would also avoid comprehensive allegations of inclusion under a single umbrella (all 'Latin Americans'), and would resist the idea that those included would be fully outside the colonialist totality. Such dreams are in the process of being abandoned. The notion of border thinking (or 'critical border positioning', as Catherine Walsh has recently called it, 2003) seems to provide, by itself, some insurance against the older logic. As we have seen,

engaging with gender, environment and economy might afford further guarantees that the important insights of this group will not run into the traps described by Castro-Gómez. No longer an 'absolute other' in relation to modernity, and so no longer condemned to the perpetual solitude of which Octavio Paz and García Márquez were so enamored, the Latin America that emerges from the project so sketchily reviewed here would however continue to enact a politics of difference, precisely because it has become newly aware of the constitutive difference that inhabits it and the history that has produced it. Perhaps it is indeed the case that an other Latin America(s) is possible.

Notes

1   This paper is revised from a version presented at the Tercer Congreso Internacional de Latinoamericanistas en Europa, Amsterdam, 3−6 July 2002. It was previously published in *Cuadernos del CEDLA* 16, pp. 31−67, in 2003. The title, 'Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise', comes from a discussion at the meeting of the editorial collective of the journal *Nepantla Views from South* (Duke University, 4 April 2003). This journal has published a number of articles by the authors featured in this text. As the journal moves from a printed to an electronic format, the journal's character has changed somewhat; the new subtitle (this paper's title) reflects the new orientation. I would like to thank Annelies Zoomers for her initial invitation to the Congress and for her generous interest in the paper. I would also like to thank Walter Mignolo, Eduardo Restrepo, Juliana Flórez, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres for our engaging conversations over the 2002−03 academic year, and Santiago Castro-Gómez, Elina Vuola, Freya Schiwy, Catherine Walsh and Edizon León for their stimulating participation and ideas in our Spring workshops, all in Chapel Hill and Duke.

2   Although I have not done an exhaustive search, I believe a *eurocentered* view of modernity is present in most conceptualizations of modernity and globalization in philosophy, geography, anthropology, and communications, and on all sides of the political spectrum. Many of these works, to be sure, are important contributions to the understanding of modernity, yet their eurocentrism has theoretical and political consequences. Some of these works explicitly engage with Giddens' work and develop an elegant and coherent conceptualization of globalization from this perspective (e.g., Tomlinson 1999); others follow a more ethnographic orientation (e.g., Englund and Leach 2000, and Kahn 2001 for reviews; Appadurai 1996, plus the works inspired by this author's work), or a cultural-historical orientation (e.g., Gaonkar, ed. 2001). Some assert the plurality of globalization (i.e., globalizations) yet go on to explain such plurality in political and economic terms, taking for granted a dominant cultural matrix (see the special issue of *International Sociology* on 'Globalizations', Vol. 15, Number 2, June 2000; e.g., Wallerstein 2000). A eurocentered and eurocentric notion of modernity is also at play in most of the works on the Left, such as Hardt

and Negri (2000). These authors' reinterpretation of the European history of sovereignty in light of current bio-political structures of rule, as well as their elaboration of resistance in the Western philosophy of immanence, are novel element for rethinking modernity. However, their eurocentrism becomes particularly problematic in their identification of the potential sources for radical action, and in their belief that there is no outside to modernity (again, a la Giddens). To the view that 'there is no outside' the MC perspective counter-poses a notion of exteriority to modernity/coloniality not entertained by any of the authors that follow in the tradition of Eurocentered modernity.

Recent anthropological reflection on modernity has also seen major changes. In the United States, anthropology of modernity has focused again on both 'modernity abroad', and on people's (largely non-experts) engagement with it. This approach has been important in grounding the understanding of modernity in ethnographic cases. As Kahn (2001) put it in a recent review, taken as a whole these works have pluralized the accepted understanding of modernity as a homogenous process. The various ways in which modernity is 'pluralized', however, need to be taken into account. Most discuss 'alternative modernities' (with 'hybrid', 'multiple', 'local', etc. as other qualifiers) as emerging from the dynamic encounter of dominant (usually Western) and non-dominant (e.g., local, non-Western, regional) forms (e.g., Pred & Watts 1992, Gupta 1998, Sivaramakrishnan & Agrawal c. 1999, Arce & Long 2000). There is no unified conception in these works, however, on what exactly constitutes modernity. References range from Baudelaire to Kant, Weber, Giddens, and Habermas. Kahn is right in saying that stating that modernity is plural, and then showing ethnographically the ways in which it is localized, has limitations in terms of theory. However, his appeal for an anthropology of modernity based on the theories of, say, Hegel, Weber, and Habermas compounds the problem, given the eurocentrism of most of these thinkers (see Dussel 1993 for an analysis of the deep ethnocentrism of Hegel and Habermas, whose works 'take on something of the sonority of Wagner's trumpets' (p. 71)). As Ribeiro says in his commentary to Kahn, 'modernity is subject to indigenization, but this does not amount to saying that it is a native category' (2001, p. 669). What is lost in these debates, it seems to me, is the very notion of difference as both a primary object of anthropology and an anchoring point for theoretical construction and political action. In the last instance, the limits of pluralizing modernity lie in the fact that it ends up reducing all social practice to being a manifestation of a European experience and will, no matter how qualified. Englund and Leach (2000) make a related argument in their critique of the ethnographic accounts of multiple modernities; they argue, correctly in my mind, that these works re-introduce a metanarrative of modernity in the analysis, be it 'the dialectic', a (European) core that remains invariant, or a self-serving appeal to 'wider context' or 'larger scale perspective'. The result is a weak relativism and a

pluralization of modernities that reflects the ethnographer's own assump-
tions. Englund and Leach's call is for a renewed attention to ethnographic
knowledge as a domain for ascertaining the very contexts that are relevant to
investigation, before such a context is imputed to this or that version of
modernity. From this perspective, a question remains: *What other kinds of
theoretical and political claims can we possibly make with the insights of the
ethnographies of modernity,* that are not considered by their authors? In short,
it seems to me that in many recent anthropological works modernity is, first,
redefined in a way that dissolves it and deprives it of any semblance of
historical coherence, let alone unitary, social and cultural logic and then,
second, found ethnographically everywhere, always plural, changing and
contested. A new balance seems necessary. After all, *why are we so ready still
to ascribe to capitalism powerful and systematic effects*, with a coherent and for
many a totalizing logic, *while denying modernity any significant connection with a
coherent cultural logic, let alone a project of domination*?

3   This is a very sketchy presentation of this group's ideas in the best of cases.
Broadly speaking, this group is associated with the work a few central
figures, chiefly, the Argentinean/Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel, the
Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano and, more recently, the Argentinean/
US semiotician and cultural theorist Walter Mignolo. There are, however, a
growing number of scholars associated with the group (e.g., Edgardo Lander
in Venezuela; Santiago Castro-Gómez, Oscar Guardiola and Eduardo
Restrepo in Colombia; Catherine Walsh in Quito; Zulma Palermo in
Argentina; Jorge Sanjinés in Bolivia; Freya Schiwy, Fernando Coronil,
Ramón Grosfogel, Jorge Saldivar, Ana Margarita Cervantes-Rodríguez,
Agustín Lao Montes, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and myself in the United
States. More loosely associated with members of the group are: Linda Alcoff
and Eduardo Mendieta (associated with Dussel); Elina Vuola (Institute of
Development Studies, Helsinki); Marisa Belausteguigoitia in Mexico City;
Cristina Rojas (Canada/Colombia). A number of PhD students are now
working within the MC program at various universities in Quito, Mexico,
and Duke/UNC. My first contact with some of the members of this group
took place in Caracas in 1991 at a seminar on critical theory, where I met
Lander and Quijano. This was followed by a joint session on 'Alternatives to
Eurocentrism' at the 1998 World Congress of Sociology in Montreal, which
resulted in a collective volume (Lander 2000). In more recent years, the
group has gathered around several projects and places: the PhD Program on
Estudios de la Cultura at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolivar in Quito,
headed by Catherine Walsh; the doctoral Program on *Pensamianto Crítico en
América* Latina at the new Universidad de la Ciudad de México in Mexico
City; the geopolitics of knowledge project shared by Instituto Pensar
(Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá), the Universidad Andina (Quito), and Duke
University and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the USA; and
the Ethnic Studies department at Berkeley. For the main ideas presented
here, see Dussel ([1975] 1983, 1992, 1993, 1996, 2000), Quijano (1988,

1993, 2000), Quijano & Wallerstein 1992), Mignolo (2000, 2001a,b), Lander (2000), Castro-Gómez (1996), Coronil (1996, 1997), Rojas (2001). Little of these debates have been translated into English. See Beverly and Oviedo, eds. (1993) for some of these authors' works in English. A volume in this language has been recently devoted to Dussel's work under the apposite title, *Thinking from the Underside of History* (Alcoff & Mendieta 2000). The journal *Nepantla. Views from South*, recently founded at Duke University, has a partial focus on the works of this group. See especially the Vol. 1, No. 3 issue of 2000, with contributions by Dussel and Quijano among others. Other collective volumes already produced by the group include: Castro-Gómez & Mendieta (1998), Castro-Gómez (2002), Mignolo (2001), Walsh *et al.* (2002). Another volume in English, by Grosfogel and Saldívar, is in preparation.

4   The choice of origin point is not a simple matter of preference. The conquest and colonization of America is the formative moment in the creation of Europe's Other; the point of origin of the capitalist world system, enabled by gold and silver from America; the origin of Europe's own concept of modernity (and of the first, Iberian, modernity, later eclipsed with the apogée of the second modernity); the initiation point of Occidentalism as the overarching imaginary and self-definition of the modern/colonial world system (which subalternized peripheral knowledge and created, in the eighteenth century, Orientalism as Other). The sixteenth century also saw crucial debates on 'the rights of the people', especially the legal-theological debates in Salamanca, later suppressed with the discourse of the 'rights of man' in the eighteenth century. Finally, with the Conquest and colonization, Latin America and the Caribbean emerged as 'the first periphery' of European modernity.

5   Different authors emphasize different factors in the making and functioning of modernity/coloniality. For Quijano, for instance, the key process in its constitution is the colonial classification and domination in terms of race. Coloniality is at the crux of modernity precisely because of the persistence of the idea of race. The second key process is the constitution of a structure of control of labor and resources. Dussel emphasizes the original violence created by modernity/coloniality (see also Rojas 2001), the importance of the first (Iberian) modernity for the structure of coloniality, and of course the concealment of the non-European (the negation of its alterity), particularly Latin America as modernity's first periphery. Mignolo also appeals to sources outside Iberian-America for his conceptualization of 'border thinking', the kind of thinking that brings about the de-subalternization of knowledge and rationality. Mignolo's project is that of conducting a genealogy of local histories leading to global designs, so as to enable other designs from other local histories to emerge from border thinking and the colonial difference. Some of these differences are explained by somewhat different frameworks, emphases and aims – political economy for Quijano, a philosophy of liberation for Dussel, literature and

epistemology for Mignolo. For most of these authors, however, Marxism and the question of the economy remain paramount.

6   Dussel's notion of exteriory has several sources, chiefly Levinas' concept of the contradiction Totality-Exteriority caused by the ethical interpellation of the Other (say, as poor). It also finds inspiration in Marx's notion of living labor as radical Other with respect to capital. Dussel spells out his views through the use of the theory of speech acts and communication (especially Apel's but also Habermas and Searle). Above all, Dussel introduces the concepts of Exteriority and Alterity as essential to his liberation philosophy; Exteriority becomes a negativity from which the domination of the Other can be discovered. There is a clear political bent to Dussel's intervention, which can thus be seen as an original theory and a radicalization of the work of Levinas and others. For Mignolo, as for Quijano', the modern world system looks different from its exteriority' (2000, p. 55). Mignolo builds on Dussel and also on other sources, from Fanon and W.E.B. Du Bois to Anzaldúa and writers from the Caribbean and the Maghreb such as Glissant, Béji, and Khatibi. Theories of 'double consciousness', double critique, an other thinking, crealization, and cultures of transience become equivalent to his own notion of border thinking. Mignolo's theory of exteriority is related to Dussel's but has a different emphasis. Mignolo differentiates between the 'interior borders' of the modern/colonial world system (imperial conflicts, say, between Spain and England) and its 'exterior borders' (imperial conflicts with cultures being colonized, e.g., between Spain and the Islamic world, between Spain and the Aztecs, or between the Britain and the India in the nineteenth century). The colonial difference becomes visible only from the exterior of the universal history of the modern world system; it makes possible breaking away from eurocentrism as epistemological perspective. Without this exteriority in which subaltern knowledges dwell, 'the only alternative left is a constant reading of the great thinkers of the West in search of new ways to imagine the future' (2000, p. 302).

Mignolo develops his notion of border thinking as 'thinking from another place, imagining an other language, arguing from another logic' (p. 313). It is a subaltern knowledge conceived from the borders of the colonial/modern world system that strives to break away from the dominance of eurocentrism. Border thinking refers to 'the moments in which the imaginary of the world system cracks' (2000, p. 23), 'an epistemology of and from the border' (p. 52), a kind of 'double critique' (Khatibi) that is critical of both Occidentalism/eurocentrism and of the excluded traditions themselves; this ability stems from its location in the borderlands (Anzaldúa). Border thinking is an ethical way of thinking because, in its marginality, it has no ethnocidal dimension. Its aim is not to correct lies and tell the truth, but 'to think otherwise, to move toward 'an other logic' – in sum to change the terms, not just the content of the conversation' (p. 70). Border thinking enables a new view of the diversity and alterity of the world, one that does not fall into the traps of a culturalist (essentialist) rhetoric but rather highlight the irreducible

differences that cannot be appropriated by the monotopic critique of modernity (the radical critique of Western logocentrism understood as a universal category), and that does not conceive of difference as antithesis in search of revanchism. Border thinking is complementary to deconstruction (and to all critical discourses of modernity); it sees decolonization as a particular kind of deconstruction but moves towards a fragmented, plural project instead of reproducing the abstract universals of modernity (including democracy and rights). Border thinking, finally, is an attempt to move beyond eurocentrism by revealing the coloniality of power embedded in the geopolitics of knowledge – a necessary step in order to 'undo the subalternization of knowledge and to look for ways of thinking beyond the categories of Western thought' (p. 326).

7　Elsewhere I have introduced the notion of *alternatives to modernity* to refer imagine an explicit cultural-political project of transformation from the perspective of modernity/coloniality – more specifically, an alternative construction of the world from the perspective of the colonial difference. The dimension of alternatives to modernity contributes to a weakening of modernity as logocentrism, as some of the philosophers of end of modernity would have it (e.g., Vattimo 1991), but from a different position. We should be clear also about what this concept is not: It does not point towards a *real* pristine future where development or modernity no longer exist; it is intended rather to intuit the possibility of *imagining* an era where development and modernity cease to be the central organizing principles of social life – a moment when social life is no longer so permeated by the constructs of economy, individual, rationality, order, and so forth that are characteristic of Eurocentered modernity. Alternatives to modernity is a reflection of a political desire, a desire of the critical utopian imagination, not a statement about the real, present or future. Operating in the cracks of modernity/coloniality, it gives content to the Porto Alegre Global Social Forum slogan, *another world is possible*. Alternative development, alternative modernities, and alternatives to modernity are partially conflicting but potentially complementary projects. One may lead to creating conditions for the others.

8　This perspective is at the heart of the Andean Studies Working Group: Development, Modernity and Coloniality, that Walter Mignolo and I co-facilite within the UNC-Duke Latin American Studies Consortium.

9　I am indebted to Juliana Flórez (Department of Social Psychology, Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona; Visiting Scholar at Chapel Hill for Spring 2003) for this point, and for comments below on some of the contributions from the sociology of knowledge and from feminist theory in social psychology, particularly in the work of Margot Pujal. Some of the ideas also come from discussions at a meeting of the some of the group's members in Chapel Hill and Duke in February 2000, facilitated particularly by Freya Schiwy's presentation and the discussion on liberation theology, and by discussions at LASA Congress (Dallas, March 2003).

10   I thank Nelson Maldonado for bringing this important book to our attention
        and speaking enthusiastically about it in one of our recent meetings in
        Chapel Hill and Duke.
11   These issues also emerged in conversations with Juliana Flórez concerning
        the work of feminist theory in social psychology (Chapel Hill, April 2003).
12   I am referring to the collective work of the Grupo de Trabajo de Ecología
        Políica established by CLACSO, and coordinated by Hector Alimonda. Of
        particular interest here are the *Manifesto. Por Una Etica de la Sustentabilidad*
        (PNUMA, 2002), at www.rolac.unep.mx, and the recent draft for discusión
        by Enrique Leff (2003).
          It should be mentioned that this important initiative is also still to be
        'engendered'.
13   See the Women and the Politics of Place Project at www.sidint.org and
        the special issue of *Development* devoted to the project, 45(1), March 2002).
        I have co-organized this project with Wendy Harcourt, Society for Inter-
        national Development. See also Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson's
        project web page, www.communityeconomies.org.

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