



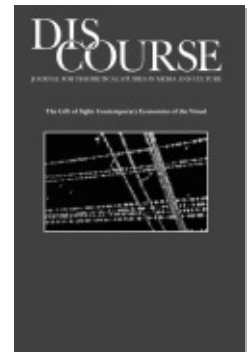
PROJECT MUSE®

Toward a De-Colonial Common Sense

Jorge E. Cuéllar

Discourse, Volume 35, Number 1, Winter 2013, pp. 124-127 (Review)

Published by Wayne State University Press



➔ For additional information about this article
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/527304>

Toward a De-Colonial Common Sense

Jorge E. Cuéllar

The Darker Side of Western Modernity, by Walter D. Mignolo. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011. 458 pages. \$94.95 hardback, \$27.95 paperback.

Since the 1970s, Latin Americanists such as Enrique Dussel, Aníbal Quijano, and Walter Mignolo have articulated de-colonial theory as a response to the historical crises resulting from the project of Western modernity in the global South. Contributing to cultural theory and to the concept of coloniality—the negative underside and constitutive component of modernity—de-colonial thinkers attempt to recuperate and reassert the power of subjugated knowledges that continue to resist and struggle against modernity’s onslaught of destructive effects (e.g., capitalism, colonialism, imperialism, globalization, neoliberalism, racism, classism, etc). By continuing to developing the themes present in his related work, Walter D. Mignolo’s *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* outlines a theoretical de-colonial project by mapping out the historical provenances of contemporary global social, cultural, political, and economic problems and contradictions (read: the afterlives of dependency and neocolonialism), providing frameworks and connections to comprehend and productively move beyond the constraints of the present toward a radical future through what he terms “de-linking,” or epistemic decolonization (122–23).

Mignolo provides different avenues, or options, for thinking

through de-coloniality as an antithetical method fundamentally opposed to Western modernity. In doing so, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* implores us to take into consideration once inhabited subjugated knowledges such as those of indigenous and marginalized social subgroups that continue to exist in the Americas long after the initial brutality of colonial contact and the incorporation of Latin America into the world system. In taking seriously the resistance efforts of indigenous peoples of the Americas and around the world by following their intellectual and cosmological insights, Mignolo indicates that Western modernity and its underlying structure, "the colonial matrix of power," will be problematized, disputed, and ultimately dismantled through sustained "epistemic disobedience" by the assertion and preservation of those ways of knowing that necessarily go against the reigning forms and institutions of modernity (143–44). These "ways of knowing" express themselves in many forms, such as body politics, geopolitics, and, following philosopher Enrique Dussel, through an ethics of liberation that posits a radical mode of thinking that challenges and disavows the central philosophies, values, and worldviews composing Western modernity as the dominant planetary logic.¹ Calling for an alternative to coloniality, Mignolo proposes that we reject Western universalisms that reflect and reproduce Eurocentrism in favor of what he calls "pluriversality," that is, a new common logic advancing "border thinking": a global "social solidarity and cultural identification beyond ethnic and regional boundaries" (293–94).

Composing a part of his larger theoretical system, Mignolo lays bare his chief problematic in *The Darker Side* through an interrogation of the globally shared capitalist economy that, following Aníbal Quijano, is described as "the colonial matrix of power." This matrix is at once created and controlled by Western imperial countries and disrupted by non-Western nation-states such as China, Russia, some Islamic countries, India, and select South American countries.² Describing the colonial matrix of power as the dependent, obscured, and constitutive component of Western modernity represented by Spain, Portugal, Holland, France, England, and the United States, Mignolo prompts us to begin thinking about this colonial matrix as being the principal terrain responsible for the current and future reconfiguration of economics, consciousness, and cognition (xvii). The concept of the colonial matrix allows Mignolo to theoretically understand the shifting, destruction, and syncretism of pre-Columbian modes of thought and ways of living that, while different from those implied in the project of Western modernity, maintain validity and persist within the present neoliberal moment. In addition to addressing state forms of control and

authority such as those established through religious institutions, governments, and corporations, Mignolo contributes many pages to Evo Morales's Bolivia and the Zapatista's Other Campaign and their impact on the ideological, cognitive, and physical contestation located within the global South. The Zapatistas, in particular, are shown to embody a subaltern coloniality hidden under the aegis of neoliberal capital (modernity). Expressing the problems affecting antisystemic communities, such as the Zapatistas or the indigenous peoples of the Andes, Mignolo analyses the Zapatistas' de-colonial "double movement," a theoretical maneuver that understands and works toward the pragmatic and local goals necessary for living under neoliberalism in Mexico while making ethico-political claims deeply rooted in Mayan cosmology and indigenous ways of knowing. Mignolo views the Zapatistas existing between Marxism and Mayan knowledges, challenging Westernization, and moving toward a new horizon, a de-colonial future. "There is no attempt to return to the past," he says, "but to reinscribe the past in the present toward the future. When those who have been the target of colonial and imperial subjugation and made 'others' and 'barbarians' assert themselves in fullness, their claim is not to be integrated into the Western proclaimed 'humanity of the same' but to delink and assert 'humanity in difference'" (49).

Mignolo's assertion that de-colonial thought is a method of resistance contributes to understanding the larger currents in the field regarding de-Westernization as related to contemporary media studies.³ The aim is, as Mignolo suggests in Fanonian fashion, to decolonize the mind and the imaginary of those systems of thought that have been colonized, imperialized, and co-opted by other forms of knowledge and being. Echoing the critiques of Solanas and Getino in their "Towards a Third Cinema" manifesto, Mignolo's proposes introducing nuance into the problem of parochial, Eurocentric, and colonized Western media theory by complicating its Western theoretical basis and assumptions by de-Westernizing media. Such acts, he contends, complicate the control of knowledge and the capacity to dominate public-sphere opinion.

Proposing temporalities (or "chrono-politics") subjectivities, and epistemic possibilities that can assist in comprehending and providing the critical language for the epochal condition of the modern/colonial present, Mignolo conceives the current moment as shaped by the *longue durée* of power asymmetries that continuously resonate along similar racial and gendered logics of oppression, subjugation, and violence. Ultimately, the utility of Mignolo's work is found in its elaboration of a critical lexicon toward a

commonsense understanding of de-coloniality in addition to its transatlantic and hemispheric spatial approaches. However, certain elements elude *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, such as the limitations of de-colonial theory to the particularities of social movement formation and the recognition of contingencies that may give rise to differential praxes in movements toward decolonization, creating in the process distinctive modalities that exist outside of colonized sociological or anthropological systematics. The de-colonial, as Mignolo advocates, asserts itself in projects for state building, in social movements against globalization, in artistic production such as cinema and media, in the interstices of identity, and so on, but what is increasingly clear throughout *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* is that de-coloniality is a torrent that continues below, that does not yet express itself completely, that exists and reproduces itself in the basement of the world.

Notes

¹ Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1985).

² Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 536.

³ See James Curran and Myung-Jin Park, eds., *De-Westernizing Media Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2000).