

Interview - Walter D. Mignolo

Written by E-International Relations

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Walter D. Mignolo is William H. Wannamaker Professor and Director of the Center for Global Studies and the Humanities at Duke University. He is associated researcher at Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Quito, since 2002 and an Honorary Research Associate for CISA (Center for Indian Studies in South Africa), Wits University at Johannesburg. Among his books related to the topic are: *The Darker Side of the Renaissance. Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization* (1995, Chinese and Spanish translation 2015); *Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of Decoloniality* (2007, translated into German, Swedish, French, Rumanian and Spanish), *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking* (2000, translated into Spanish, Portuguese and Korean); *The Idea of Latin America* (2006, translated into Spanish, Korean and Italian) and *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (2011). Currently, Walter is working on two books, one co-edited with Catherine Walsh: *On Decoloniality: Analysis, Concepts, Praxis*, the other is entitled *Decolonial Politics*.

Where do you see the most exciting research happening in your field?

To start with, I am not sure how I would define my 'field.' Perhaps my field involves borders all over. Not as a 'field of study' but as places of dwelling. I do not dwell in every border but I know that there are billions of people on the planet that do. Billions of them are still repressed by territorial epistemologies, religious and secular, and by the virus of the nation-state that invaded the planet over the past two hundred years. If I had to identify myself, I would say that I am a decolonial thinker today. So, in the past 20 years, my 'field' has been the analytic of modernity/coloniality and exploring decolonial venues of thinking, doing, and living. That is not a 'field' in the traditional academic sense, though it certainly is a 'field' at large, where people inside and outside academia are searching for something the State, the corporations, the banks and, in some case, religious institutions cannot offer. Once people understand the universal fictions of modernity and the logic of coloniality enacted in order to advance the promises of modernity, the question of how to delink from that bubble becomes the main driving factor of decoloniality.

This delinking is not something that is done by the State, the banks, the corporation, or religious institutions, although it could be in some cases. Religion could be a liberating or a regulatory belief system. It has to be done by people taking their/our destinies into their/our own hands. This is by far the most exciting of activities rather than research in 'my field.' Research and knowledge are needed — decoloniality concerns those too — but not in the academic sense. Decoloniality is beyond academic research; it does not require grants from the Mellon or Volkswagen Foundations.

How has the way you understand the world changed over time and what (or who) prompted the most significant shifts in your thinking?

I would say that there have been four stages. During stage one, from the University of Cordoba to Paris, semiotics,

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discourses analysis and literary theory guided my intellectual pursuits. The second stage began in the United States, when I 'discovered' what being Hispano or Chicano meant. That sent me back to the sixteenth century and the conquest and colonization of the Americas. My book entitled *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization* (1995) came out of that research. It was a historical research project, theoretically articulated in search of myself, of understanding how I came to be who I was not as individual but in the frame of the Argentinian, French, and American societies that I inhabited. For this, border thinking was the necessary tool. Indeed, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* was influenced very much by Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987).

The third stage was initiated by the encounter with the concept of *coloniality* and the awareness that coloniality is constitutive of — i.e., not derivative of — modernity. That was one of my central theses in *Local Histories/Global Designs* (2000) that was extended to *The Idea of Latin America* (2005) in a more specific geo-historical mode of research. And the fourth stage emerged after the publication of these two books, as I devoted more time to thinking about the current profile of modernity/coloniality. This was the moment when my academic research and my activities in the public sphere became one. This is the moment when disciplinary boundaries became meaningless to me, in which you see the 'disciplines' as what the word itself says they are: something that disciplines you. Perhaps my article entitled 'Epistemic disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom' (2009a) offers the most concise formulation of this fourth stage. It involves many activities including directing a non-academic publication in Argentina devoted to promoting decolonial thinking, working with journalists also in Argentina, working with artists and curators in Colombia, the United States, and Europe (mainly in Berlin and Copenhagen), co-directing and teaching Summer Schools like the one in Middelburg (the Netherlands) and the Bremen-UNC-Duke Summer Institute, doing many interviews in Spanish and English, writing op-ed essays for online publications and newspapers, and running workshops in South America, Africa, Asia, and Europe. All of that is what motivates me rather than simply just being attentive to what researchers are doing in my field. Perhaps then, to come back to the first question, my fields are the social sciences and the humanities related to modernity/coloniality.

You often refer to the idea of 'border thinking' in your work. How would you define border thinking?

Indeed, the subtitle of *Local Histories/Global Design* is 'coloniality, subaltern knowledges and border thinking.' And as a matter of fact, this book is devoted to border thinking. What is this and why it is so prevalent in my argument? First of all, border thinking implies dwelling in the border, not crossing borders. That is, border thinking is not an impersonal algorithm, but a conceptualization of the experience of living in the border. One of the chapters of Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask* was translated into English as 'The fact of blackness,' but the original French title was 'L'expérience vécu des noirs' — the 'lived experience of black people.' Fanon theorized about this from his lived experience of being black (see Fanon 1952; 1967). I theorize border thinking from my experience of dwelling in the borders: as the son of immigrants in Argentina, as métèque in France, and as hispano/latino in the United States. It was Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderland/La Frontera* that made me realize that I was dwelling in the border without being aware of it. *Borderland/La Frontera* is border thinking in action. Anzaldúa is not 'studying' borderlands. She inhabits them.

Dwelling in the border brings a particular type of consciousness. Anzaldúa herself certainly makes this clear, but so does W. E. B. Du Bois with his idea of double consciousness, which also expresses the experience of inhabiting the border (Du Bois 1903). So does Frantz Fanon using the important concept of *sociogenesis* and its function for the consciousness of being seen as *a Negro*. The border here is between Fanon's self-consciousness and the moment he realized that although he *knew of course that his skin was black, he did not know he was a Negro*. He realizes that he is a Negro when he realizes that he is seen as a Negro. You will hardly find a trace of border-consciousness in Edmund Husserl's theory of consciousness, which is totally incompatible with how Anzaldúa conceives of a 'conciencia de la mestiza' as 'a new consciousness.' 'La conciencia de la mestiza' and 'double consciousness' emerge from the enactment of border thinking and not as a territorial description of something that is 'outside' the very act of conceiving it.

Not everyone inhabits the border, and it is not necessary to do so. Not everyone inhabits the territory; those who inhabit the borders do not. But borders (they called them 'frontiers' in the advance of civilization) were traced by

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actors inhabiting the territory and guarding it from 'foreign' forces. The problem is that modern Western epistemology is territorial, and territorial epistemology presupposes 'the frontier' rather than the border. On the other side of the frontier exists the void, namely space to be conquered or civilized. Territorial epistemology (modern and postmodern) cannot be decolonial; it is an imperial epistemology. Modern epistemology was built precisely to make sense of, justify, and legitimize coloniality. Post-modern epistemology is an in-family critique of modern epistemology but remains within the rules of the game. Decolonial thinking is always-already border thinking; although not all border thinking is always already decolonial thinking.^[1] Furthermore, decolonial border thinking implies epistemic disobedience and delinking from modern and post-modern epistemology, including Marxist post-modern versions.

In decolonial theories, the contemporary nation-state model of international relations is usually considered a product of European modernity that became globalized through colonialism and imperialism. Could you explain why that is the case and what decolonial alternatives to this model might look like?

We could certainly talk about 'decolonial theories,' but to avoid putting decoloniality in the box of 'modern theories' (and thus make border thinking one more modern 'us' when border thinking is in fact a delinking from a territorial 'us'), I prefer talking about border thinking and doing — for thinking is doing and doing is thinking. This formulation also allows me to delink from the pernicious distinction between theory and practice (another modern pre-judgment or prejudice).

Decolonially speaking (that is, thinking and doing), the nation-state was a powerful tool of Western expansion. The modern nation-state was, as we know, the form of governance created by the bourgeois ethno-class that took over the Church and the monarchies in Europe, after the Glorious Revolution in England and the French Revolution. It was powerful in two different ways. On the one hand, it emerged out of the ruins of such crumbling State formations as the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Sultanate after World War One. On the other hand, the nation-state was also the form of governance that emerged in Asia and Africa after decolonization. That is, geopolitical decolonization sent the colonizer home, but it also adapted and adopted their structure of governance: the nation-state. That is how the nation-state became globalized and encouraged not only the legal formation called the State but also the civil formation called the nation. Thus, if the State became the legal form of governance, the nation became the sensing, the feeling that connects people of the 'same nation,' the nationals, the citizens.

Today, the State form is crumbling and becoming unsustainable. The first step in thinking a decolonial alternative would have to be imagining *alternatives to the State form*, and thinking about the many and rich possibilities of *governance*. What I mean is that we must not confuse the State form with the variegated forms of governance that are open to people. What is unsustainable — and indeed an aberration — is the pyramidal form of the State that, on the one hand, in a capitalist economy, leads to corruption and to dynasties, and, on the other, leads to manipulation of the voting population through money being poured into the media and advertising.

One decolonial alternative to the State form of governance has been advanced by the Zapatistas. The creation of the Caracoles after the agreements of San Andrés (2003) — agreements that were not respected by the Mexican State — is one way into the future: a form of governance, based on indigenous past experiences and legacies, that consists in governing and obeying at the same time. In this form of governance there is no place for corruption, for dynastic formation, or for manipulation of the voters by the media and advertising.

Now, it is crucial here not to understand this according to modern/Western epistemology and political theory. If you attempt to understand what the Zapatistas are trying to do from the perspective of Western cosmology, you would not understand. It is necessary to approach what the Zapatistas are trying to do by bracketing Western and secular cosmology. It is crucial not to think that Zapatismo as it exists today constitutes a universal model. That expectation is very modern and provincial. Zapatismo is teaching two things: a) that people need to delink from the State form (secular and bourgeois, like in Germany, Mexico, France, or the United States) by organizing themselves; and, b) that a form of autonomy and self-governance by the people and delinking from the State form is possible. We may not see people organizing themselves and taking their destiny into their own hands any time soon, but the process has begun, and it is irreversible.

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Now, what we have to keep in mind is that the world order is already multipolar and increasingly so. Multipolarity refers to inter-State relations, not to the people of one or another nation. The question to be asked here is how do inter-State relations impinge on domestic lives. Take for example out-sourcing corporations, or immigration and refugees in Europe right now. These displacements are in a way 'forced' by inter-State relations and the differential of power between states.

You mentioned 'delinking' as one possible decolonial intervention against the current system of international relations. Could you elaborate on this concept? How is it useful for (border)thinking?

Delinking from the system of inter-State relations is one sphere of delinking. The other sphere is people/us delinking from the colonial matrix of power that includes our relations with the State. I have touched upon the idea of delinking from the State in talking about the Zapatistas. Delinking in the sphere of inter-State relations requires what I describe as dewesternization. Iran, China, Russia, and other BRICS-member States are currently the most imminent forces of dewesternization.

Delinking from the colonial matrix of power is what I call decoloniality, but this is not a task that States could enact. States are a fundamental dimension of the colonial matrix of power. Consequently, decolonizing the State (or democratizing the State as others would say) is non-sense because, as I said, the State is one domain — the domain of institutional politics — interconnected with the other domains (epistemic, economic, racial, sexual, aesthetics, religious, ethical, and subjective) of the colonial matrix. Decolonial delinking starts from knowledge and being, that is, delinking from the ways of knowing and the ways of being that trap us into the promises of modernity and the tentacles of coloniality.

Suppose that you are Zapatista or a decolonial Muslim or decolonial South African or a Maori or belong to one of the First Nations in Canada. You have recourse to other languages, memories, histories, sensibilities, and so on, that modernity told you to despise. So you are in between the experiences that shaped you when you came into this world and that came to you through non-European languages, non-European memories, non-European religions and, on the other hand, the presence in your local of European memories, European languages, European religions. You are in between those; you dwell in the border. You cannot become European even if you wished to do so. You can pretend and you can be successful in passing as European. Or you can decide to affirm yourself in the memories, languages, and ways of being that European modernity told you to abandon should you want to become modern. If your choice is the second option, you are dwelling in the border and engaged in border thinking, doing, and being. You are in the process of delinking from Western modernity and European cosmology.

Post- and decolonial writing has shifted the focus of the analysis of power from geopolitical territories to populations and infrastructure, in the process rethinking 'borders' between separate entities into 'borderlands' of hybrid interbeing. How would a decolonial reading of territories and populations explain contemporary border-crises such as those on the European continent as seen, for instance, in Ukraine?

Decolonial interpretations of current events or processes are based on the analytic of the colonial matrix of power (or the analytic of coloniality of power for short). International law emerged in the sixteenth century to regulate appropriation and expropriation of land and territorial control. Carl Schmitt's work is very helpful on this. But his story of 'global linear thinking' from the sixteenth to the mid-twentieth century, when he finished writing *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, is only half of the story (see Schmitt 2003[1950]). The reason for this is that, as he clearly states, international law was a Euro-centred legal technology; according to Schmitt, it was created with Europe's interests in mind. So his story does not provide — and he certainly did not have to provide — any information about those non-European people and territories who were subjugated to the power of the movement of 'linear thinking' and who responded to it. And of course there were such responses! But up until recently, global linear thinking and international law was created, changed, managed, and controlled by Western European imperial states and, lately, the United States. To illustrate what I am saying, I could refer to several studies in the twentieth and beginning of twenty-first centuries on decolonizing international law. Decolonizing international law means to show that it is neither neutral nor democratic, but that it is a legalization of imperial delinquency. One example of someone who tells the missing half of the story is Siba N. Grovogui (2006) in 'Regimes of Sovereignty'.

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What does that imply for a decolonial reading of the border conflict in Ukraine? Following the analytic of coloniality, interstate law was created and managed by actors and institutions promoting, defending, and advancing imperial interests. Ukraine was and remains a very strategic location for the United States, with European Union support, in terms of advancing territorial control beyond the line traced by Samuel Huntington in his article on 'The Clash of Civilizations' before he published the book by that name (see Huntington 1993; 1996).^[2] So, the United States supported the Ukrainian extreme right to debunk an elected President allied with Russia — President Viktor Yanukovich. Vladimir Putin knew, as did the leaders of the United States and the European Union, that there was more to the Ukrainian uprising than a call for democracy, and whatever may have been an honest concern of the Ukrainian people was taken up in the long lasting struggle for control of the 'line.' Advancing the line was justified in the nineteenth century in the name of civilization. Now it is justified in the name of democracy, so you depose an elected President that is allied with a strong State (Russia) that you would like to 'contain' (in order to advance NATO to the new line that is Ukraine). You resort to the rhetoric of modernity to advance, and hide, coloniality. If myself and others like me, who do not have access to inside information, understood this dimension of inter-State containment in the 'popular' uprisings, how would it be possible for Vladimir Putin not have seen that they were part of a re-westernization process?

Some political and social theorists argue that the Market is replacing the State as the plane from which bio-political governance emerges. This has long been a tenet of decolonial thinking concerning the role of the slave trade and its aftermath in the formation of capitalism and racism, which you have engaged with in your work on dispensable and bare lives (Mignolo 2009b). How do you see this relation between the State, the Market, and the (trans)formation of race developing in the near future?

I can tell you how we (the modernity/coloniality collective) could respond to your question based on the history of formation, transformation, and management of the colonial matrix of power since the sixteenth century.

First, let's start with two basic assumptions in the formation of the colonial matrix of power: (a) there is no world system before the invention (some said discovery) of America understood as the integration of America to the political, economic, and cultural European imaginary starting at the end of the fifteenth century. This is obvious, nobody knew (except God) that there were two masses of land disconnected until that moment. And, (b) the Americas were not integrated to an already existing capitalist economy. There could not have been a capitalist economy without the Americas. Assumptions (a) and (b) imply that there is no capitalist economy without a world system. And the world system goes hand in hand with the triumphal narratives of modernity.

Second, there is no economic theory until the mid-eighteenth century with the physiocrats in France and Adam Smith in Scotland. There is no antecedent in the political theory of Greece or Rome. Why? Because political economy needed an interconnected world led by Atlantic European monarchies first and secular nation-states later, even if economic practices and relations always existed. As we all know, markets were all over the planet since at least the axial age,^[3] but 'capitalist' markets were not.

Third, from the formation of the world-system economy of accumulation until World War Two, the economy had always been one dimension of society or, if you wish, of the colonial matrix of power. For the British and the French, for instance, the civilizing mission and the more abstract idea of progress (understood not only in economic terms) were crucial domestically and in inter-State relations. Civilizing abroad was related to domestic progress, and the idea of domestic progress justified the civilizing mission abroad. But after World War Two, the United States took the lead of the global order and Harry Truman translated 'progress' into development. During the second half of the twentieth century the relations within the domain of the colonial matrix of power changed. Up to World War Two, the economy was integrated into society. Since 1950 society began to be increasingly integrated into the economy.

Where is racism in this picture? Well, I go to Anibal Quijano in linking the emergence of racism with the emergence of capitalism. Racism consists in the racialization of ethnicities (see, e.g., Quijano 2007). *Ethnos* is a Greek word translated to Latin as *natio*. But there was also the terms *religio* and *relegere* in Latin that refer also to community building; the former by re-linking (re-ligare) and the second by memories (re-legere). That is, *ethnos* and *natio* refer to what a community of people share in living together and recognizing themselves/ourselves in their/our memories,

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languages, symbols, shared knowing, and emotions, while race refers to an asymmetrical power relation between ethnicities or nations.

The inter-State relations of the sixteenth century that served as the historical foundations of today's international state system and international law also established a hierarchy of ethnicities. Thus, existing ethnicities (religious and/or national communities of faith or/and birth) around the planet became racialized by one ethnicity (Christian/European) that moved from being one among many to being the one who controls knowledge and classification. For racism is nothing else than epistemic and it depends on the institutions and languages that control knowledge.

The bottom line concerning the relation between the State, the market, and race is thus as follows: (a) a world-system or, in other words, an interconnected world order emerged in combination with Western Catholic Christianity and shaped the world until the eighteenth century, after which Western Protestant Christians took the lead and secularized theological knowledge to the degree of eliminating Christian theology from international relations; (b) during this emergence and transformation of the westernized world-system, knowledge became controlled by Western European languages and map making. Map making was crucial to this emergence because it produced the idea of a unified world order of land and water masses; and, (c) this world-system included the creation of a global ranking of ethnicities and continents: Asia, Africa, and the America were constructed as inferior to Europe by European global powers, and so on. That is racism. How can one overcome it? It is crucial to decolonize knowledge and liberate sensibilities.

How does decolonial theory respond to the proliferation of digital or cyber territories, borderlands, and conflicts?

Digital or cyber territories are one thing; borderlands and conflicts are another. They are related, but not the same. Let's start with borderland and conflicts.

Borderlands are a consequence of the linear global thinking mentioned above, and global linear thinking refers to the enactment of international law that emerged in the sixteenth century and not before; de Vitoria in Salamanca, Grotius in Holland, and Locke in England set the rules of the game. The Berlin Conference of 1884, which saw Africa parcelled out and distributed among European States, was yet another chapter. One side of the border marked the march of Western Civilization, while the other side of the border marked people to be civilized and land to be appropriated and expropriated. This lasted until people on 'the other side of the border' began to raise their voices and resist. One recent example is Russia stopping the march of Western civilization and 'taking' Ukraine; another example is China stopping the United States and its allies from infringing on their jurisdiction. But borders are also financial: the China Development Bank stopping the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in their attempt to 'develop' the world. And, of course, borders can also be subjective as is the case when it comes to racism and sexism. Borders, then, can be found at all levels: personal, economic, aesthetic, political, etc. And because people at all those levels began to say 'Basta' to the Western juggernauts, we now must face the global disorder that we find ourselves in. The juggernauts work with the idea of *frontiers*. Frontiers mark the limits of civilization. Beyond that there is barbarism, of all kinds. The *frontiers* could be within a territory; sexual frontiers for example are intra-territorial. However, when the *barbarians* on the other side of the frontier began to talk, and talk the language of civilizations, but from the experience and knowledge and memories that civilization despises, that is the moment in which *borderlands and border thinking emerges. Border thinking is thinking of and by the barbarian. This is precisely what I am doing in this interview and all my work: barbarian theorizing that arises from dwelling in the borderland.*

Cyber-territoriality is just an extension of global border thinking. First came the sovereignty of land and seas, where machines and men could move and conquer. Then it was the turn of airspace, when machines began to fly. And now, it is the cybernetic control of space. Remember that the foundational book of all of this was Norbert Wiener's *Cybernetics or Control and Communication in Animals and Machines* (1948). 'Control' is the key word here that connects with your question. We (the modernity/coloniality collective) operate from the basic assumptions that the

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colonial matrix of power is a structure of management and control operated by human beings through specific institutions. Cyber-territorialities are not (yet) made by cyborgs, but by humans who both manage and are controlled by the colonial matrix of power. So cyber-global-linear-thinking is just an extension of global linear thinking and what Carl Schmitt (1950) called the *Jus Publicum Europaeum* that has now been taken up by the United States.

So, what are decolonial takes on such cyber-territorialities? Politically, they are not different from all previous versions of global linear thinking — that is a game from which it is necessary to delink through decoloniality. Cyber-territoriality is a new dimension of inter-State struggle. Civil society does not engage in cyber-territoriality. Under international law, which is a fundamental component of the colonial matrix of power, cyber-war is one more aspect of inter-State wars which are no longer just military but hybrid as 'experts' say — financial, mediatic, military, diplomatic, political, and cyber. The world order, including cyber space, is still regulated by the colonial matrix of power, even now that there are no longer *frontiers* that Western States could expand but *borderlands* (*spaces*) where there are people who do not want to be ruled and rolled over. *Cyber-war is a war between rewesternization and dewesternization*. Decoloniality does not have much to say about it other than to analyse it and delink from it.

Will international relations (IR) remain a colonialist discipline as long as it seeks to analyse the inter-national instead of proposing the abolition of all borders and the creation of a new world order?

Well, IR was invented just for that: to make possible and legitimize arrangements among sovereign states and to appropriate and expropriate territories, as can clearly be seen with the Berlin Conference of 1884. IR will remain a colonialist discipline as long as there is the inter-State system that was created in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. So, I see two ways of responding to your question.

(a) The emergence of decolonial approaches to IR, something that goes under the rubric of 'decolonizing IR.' Work on this has proliferated lately. I already mentioned the pioneering work of Siba N Grovogui. There is also the most recent work of Nigerian Christian N. Okeke (2015), Australian scholar Anthony Anghie (2005), and Afro-Brit Robbie Shilliam (2015) among others. All these works look at IR from the perspective of colonial histories and legacies. Minimally, considering this decolonial IR work means that it does not get caught up in the European half of the story (mentioned with Schmitt above), it starts from the impact of international law on the colonies. That was after all the job of European IR as Schmitt clearly saw it. These are all arguments engaging border thinking for the simple reason that the starting point focuses on the experiential legacies of colonialism rather than the Western half of the story of imperialism.

(b) The radical decolonial view summons the moment in which IR will no longer be necessary because coloniality would be over. As long as coloniality is not over, but all over, IR will remain a colonialist discipline entrenched in coloniality and contested by both decolonial and dewesternizing thinkers, even if with different aims. Decolonial thinkers argue for the end of the nation-state as the form of governance entrenched with capitalism, while dewesternizing thinkers in places like China, Russia, and Iran — where none of these countries question yet the State-form although they may pursue different styles of governance depending on the local histories of each country — argue for bending IR so they can no longer 'be instructed on what to do' and grow their ability to instead expose their own interests.

What is the most important advice you could give to young scholars of borders, borderlands and border thinking?

That is a tough question, the hardest one in this conversation. I would start by inviting young scholars to distinguish borderlands as a place where things happen (the State tracing border, immigrant crossing borders, disputing borders) and the *study of borderlands* from any of the existing disciplines — economy, political sciences, international relations, literature, art, inter-disciplinarily, or even trans-disciplinarily — from *dwelling in the borderland*. Studying the borderland means that whomever does the study places themselves outside the borderland while whomever dwells in the borderland *reflects* on themselves and their experiences of living in the border. I mentioned the examples of Anzaldúa and Fanon. We could add W. E. B. Du Bois, Steve Biko, Sylvia Wynter, and

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others to the list. All these thinkers are un-disciplinary: they do not study, they think and their thinking is border thinking because they think from their body and not from the 'mind,' as modern and secular (Cartesian if you wish) disciplines do. Disciplines separate the known from the knower. Horkheimer (1972) corrected this and argued rightly that in critical theory the knower invents, constructs the known. The difference between Horkheimer and the thinkers mentioned previously is that Horkheimer did not experience colonial forms of racism. Granted, as a Jew he experienced European internal colonial racism. But that is different from the experience of a lesbian Chicana, a black Caribbean woman, a Caribbean man in France or an Afro-American born in the American borderland.

Concerning borders, I already talked about distinguishing them from frontiers. Let me add here that borderlands as well as border thinking, living, and the use they foster are not academic but lived experiences. I 'learned' through this that prior to being an academic, I am a person located in the colonial matrix of power, and the colonial matrix of power cannot be observed externally because there is no outside. We are all within the colonial matrix. The challenge is to think and learn from where we are located.

Not all of us on the planet dwell in the border. For the border to exist there has to be a line and two sides with respect to the line. On one side dwell the *humanitas* and on the other side the *anthropos*. This line dividing the borderland between the *humanitas* and the *anthropos* was invented and traced by the *humanitas* in the process of constituting itself in their own territory. As a third world person, I belong to the *anthropos* and I began to assume it with pride. That was my decolonial moment. Before that I wanted to be on the side of the *humanitas* and for that reason I went to study in France.

So, my advice is to be aware that there are people on both sides of the border and be aware of what side you dwell in. You have not chosen it; you came to the world when the world was already delineated by international relations, global linear thinking, racism, sexism, and so on. If pedagogically you want to understand critical theory à la Horkheimer and border thinking (or border theory if you would like a modern rather than a decolonial vocabulary), you could think of their points of origination and all their consequences; critical theory originated in Europe at the crossroads of Jewish European history and Marxism, while border thinking and decoloniality originated on the 'other side of the border,' in the Third and Second World. You have to be aware of the geo- and body-political dimensions of knowledge and understand them as the energy fuelling both border thinking and decoloniality.

This interview was conducted by Sebastian Weier

Notes

[1] I have explored these issues extensively in the already mentioned book *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledge and Border thinking*. For a more recent, shorter version, see Mignolo (2011).

[2] For the map, see Huntington (1993: 30).

[3] Coined by Karl Jaspers (1953), the term 'axial age' refers to the period from the eighth century to the third century B.C.

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