Learning to Unlearn

Tlostanova, Madina V., Mignolo, Walter D.

Published by The Ohio State University Press

Tlostanova, Madina V. and Walter D. Mignolo.
Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas.
The Ohio State University Press, 2012.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/24260.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/24260

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=859249

[Sun Oct 1 19:27:04 2023] Access provided at 2 Oct 2023 00:27 GMT with no institutional affiliation
Introduction

1. We mean here the parallel march of the—better known in the West—colonization of South America and the first Russian colonies in Volga region and Western Siberia. Moscow was declared the Third Rome in the early sixteenth century, inheriting from the Byzantine empire a specific providential theocratic imperial consciousness, with the state viewed as a metaphysical principle of sacred cosmology. The sixteenth century also brought the ascension of Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible) as Tsar of all Russia in 1547 and the succeeding colonization of territories that almost equaled Europe in their size. Hernan Cortés managed to control the Aztec Tlatoanate in 1520, and Francisco Pizarro did the same in the Andes, taking over and dismantling the Incanate. When Philip II replaced his father, Charles I, as King of Castile, he initiated a well-thought-out managerial project to organize the Spanish possessions in Indias Occidentales. In the meantime, Portugal was following suit in managing its Brazilian possessions.

2. For the colonization of time and the invention of the Middle Ages, see Dagenais and Greer (2000). For the transformation of barbarians in space into primitives in time, see Walter D. Mignolo, “Coloniality at Large: Time and the Colonial Difference” In Time in the Making and Possible Futures. (Rio de Janeiro, Unesco—ISSC—Educam, 2000), 237–73.

3. For the complete cycle of learning and a summary of the political process that led to the foundation of Amawtay Wasi and its overall philosophy, see the appendix in this volume. Information on Amawtay Wasi can be found in the Internet. There is a publication by UNESCO, in Quichua, Spanish, and English, (Amawtay Wasi. Sumak Yachaypi, Alli Kawsaypipash Yachakuna: Aprender En La Sabiduria Y El Buen Vivir = Learning Wisdom and the Good Way to Live. UNESCO, Universidad Intercultural Amawtay Wasi, 2004; Catherine Walsh, 2005).

4. The reader not familiar with Amawtay Wasi can find a more detailed description in the appendix of this volume.

5. For the relevance of the concept, in Ecuador and Bolivia, related to the state and the rewriting of the constitution, see Catherine Walsh (2008).

6. Along with the general meaning of shifting the geography of reason from its established European place to other locales, what is important in Lewis Gordon’s idea is the
constructive criticism of the disciplinary decadence with the claims of the disciplines at their closed, absolute, and deontological nature, as well as the teleological suspension of the disciplines as the ends in themselves (Gordon 2006: 183). As a result, the thinker who attempts to shift the geography of reason takes a position objectively close to the philosophy of education and knowledge practiced in Amawtay Wasi, which we share. It is to see the issues, the crucial problems to pursue, whose solving is more important than the loyalty to one’s discipline, method, school, or a system of knowledge. Instead of studying an object from the position and with the help of the instruments of different disciplines, we attempt to build a dialogue between different knowledges on what is knowledge as such. Hence, the object in the understanding of Western philosophy disappears, giving place to problems discussed from various positions and the question of what kind of knowledge we need to make the world a more fair and just place for us all.

7. There is one institute of nanotechnology in Monterrey, Mexico, and another one in Brazil, but they are ancillary of similar institutes in the U.S.

8. Chicana intellectual and activist Gloria Anzaldúa described the borders between Mexico and the U.S., as “una herida abierta.” We see in this metaphor, an expression of the global “colonial wound” inflicted by georacial classification of regions and people through five hundred years of Western theological and ecological politics of knowledge: Racism is a politics of humiliation, of wounding people by making them feel inferior, both as human beings (ontological colonial difference) and as rational beings (epistemic colonial difference). Geo- and body politics of knowledge emerge from the colonial wound and not from Aristotle, Saint Thomas Aquinas, and Descartes. See Anzaldúa 1987.

9. See, for example, decolonial arguments in business schools and in the area of management in South America by Eduardo Ibarra Colado (2007), in Australia by Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee (2008); in the area of health, between Morocco and southern Spain by Isabel Jiménez-Lucena (2008).

10. There is an obvious line connecting Paulo Freyre’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) and Chela Sandoval’s Methodology of the Oppressed (2000).

Chapter 1

11. The bibliography on the concept of coloniality is extensive by now, including: a summary in Anibal Quijano (2000); on coloniality of knowledge, Edgardo Lander (2000); on coloniality of being, Enrique Dussel (1977); and on being and geopolitics of knowledge, Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008). “Coloniality” contributed to the move from Eurocentered works on the sociology of knowledge toward the geopolitics of knowledge as decolonization. On this, see Walter Mignolo at www.incommunicado.info/node/view/18.

12. As far as we (Madina and Walter) carried within us the memories of being born and raised in Moscow (with ties with Uzbekistan and Caucasus) and Argentina (with ties with Northern Italy), respectively, the postcolonial academic talk in the United States remained somewhat—and for different reasons—outside the realms of our imperial/colonial experiences and our sociohistorical formation of subjectivity. Interestingly enough, we found in Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and Frantz Fanon (1952) (who are neither Eurasian nor of European descent) a guide for our thoughts and reflection of our subjectivities.

13. The idea that “globalization,” as understood today, is a process that starts with the “discovery” of America is shared by European political theorists such as Carl Schmitt
who, in Schmitt 2003 [1952] makes a clear distinction between the “preglobal” and the “global” age. “Globalization” in this view is not a human phenomenon from time immemorial but a historical qualitative turn in appropriation of land, massive exploitation of labor, and international law that is concentrated both in the hands of European and capitalist imperial countries.

14. The concept of body politics of knowledge is radically different from Michel Foucault’s biopolitics. While, in Foucault, biopolitics is conceived in terms of management of power (and is still anchored in the modern—and imperial—conception of knowledge), the body politics of knowledge displaces epistemology from its Eurocentric location to the places (geopolitics) and racialized bodies of the colonies (men and women of color, gays and lesbians of color, indigenous people and Muslims, Arabic and Aymara languages instead of Greek and Latin, etc.). “Body politics of knowledges” refers to epistemic and philosophical creativities in places, bodies, languages, and memories that have been disqualified as thinkers and philosophers, and in this regard, shall not be confused with the imperial body politics of knowledge that—in seventeenth-century political theory in England—conceived the social structure as an analogy of the human body. “Border thinking” refers precisely to the articulation of the displaced appropriating the global expansion of Western categories of thinking and principles of knowledge. Decolonial thinking emerges from all of this, which does not mean that all Blacks and Indians, Muslims and Aymaras, women and men of color endorse it. Assimilation is the alternative to decolonial thinking and decolonial option. See the next chapter “Theorizing from the Borders,” for a more detailed elaboration of this concept.

15. There is already a significant bibliography addressing such issues. For example, “Double Critique: Knowledges and Scholars at Risk in Post-Soviet Societies,” edited by Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova, South Atlantic Quarterly, 105/3, 2006; Globalization and the Decolonial Option, special issue of Cultural Studies (21/2–3, 2007). A recent volume edited by Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui, Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debates, which clearly shows that epistemic universality is no longer viable in a decolonial world. In contrast, Madina Tlostanova has shown the differences between South America on the one hand and Central Asia and the Caucasus on the other (“Imperial Discourse and Post-Utopian Peripheries: Suspended Indigenous Epistemologies in the Soviet Non-European Ex-Colonies” 2006).

16. For more details about these basic and important distinctions, see the special issue of Cultural Studies, Globalization and the Decolonial Option, edited by Walter Mignolo in collaboration with Aruro Escobar, 21/2/3, March 2007.

17. Intellectuals such as Malek Bennabi (Algeria) and Abdelkhebir Khatibi (Morocco) devoted their works to the problems of decolonization in the sphere of knowledge and being (Bennabi 2003a, 2003b and Khatibi 1983). Even if French poststructuralist thinkers developed some of their ideas in France as a consequence of the war in Algeria, their problems were not the same as those of Bennabi or Khatibi, but rather problems emerging from the regional history of Western thought. When Robert Young suggests in White Mythologies (1990) the links between French poststructuralism and decolonizing processes in Algeria and Tunisia, he does so with still another (third) set of problems at hand: the problems set by postcolonial agendas approximately since the mid 1980s. Thus, the geopolitics of knowledge allows us to see three regional projects, each characterized by a set of specific issues and questions. From a decolonial perspective (which is the fourth project in this scenario, emerging from historical process in South America and the Caribbean), none of them can be reduced to another.
18. We write “capital/modernity” instead of “capitalism” because the latter is a term of Marxist discourse while the former belongs to decolonial discourse. We make a distinction between capitalism and the colonial matrix of power. In this particular case, “capital/modernity” links the sphere of control of an economy with the sphere of knowledge and subjectivity. A distinctive feature of capital/modernity is the dispensability of human lives disguised under the discourses of progress, development, and modernization. Capitalism, instead, focuses on the economic aspects and leaves aside the “cultural” dimension that we translate into the control of knowledge and subjectivity in the colonial matrix of power.

19. David Chioni Moore suggested that we locate the post-Soviet world within the postcolonial realm (Moore 2001). He is quite right to point out that postcolonial scholars usually do not include the ex-Socialist block into the sphere of their interests and there are no postcolonial studies in ex-Soviet Union or former Socialist countries. But Moore lumps together eastern and southeastern European countries and the USSR, which have had distinctly different histories and imperial and colonial discourses. It might have been a good idea to explore the hidden reasons of why postcolonial discourses do not exist in the ex–Second World. To do that, it might have been important to get better acquainted with the actual contemporary situation in this quite diverse area. Probably, then, he would not put together, in a purely rhetorical way, Algeria and Ukraine or Hungary and Philippines, which have very different colonial histories. What is lacking in this article, written from the distinctly outsider’s perspective, not at all familiar with internal cultural, linguistic, religious differences, and nuances of this locale, as well as contemporary artistic/cultural/linguistic expressions of postcolonial, postimperial, transcultural sensibilities, is a strong universalizing bent in trying to use the umbrella term “postcolonial,” regardless of possible differences (Moore 2001).

20. What we mean by “second-class” empire can be seen today in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine. President Mikhail Saakashvili denounces Russia’s imperial ambitions, but he himself has no quarrel with joining the Western imperial designs, even if in the capacity of a groveler. A similar case is Ukraine. In the South American and Caribbean countries, the situation is radically different, because from their independence in the nineteenth century, they all wanted to join France and England, and now the United States, which form the history of Christian and liberal capitalist empires of the West.

21. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, “Latin America” did not exist and there was no such a thing as “Latin American” countries. We refer here mainly to the Spanish (and indirectly to the Portuguese) colonies in the New World. The Spanish colonies extended to today’s California and Colorado, including Texas, New Mexico, and to a certain point, Louisiana and Florida. It is common, however, to repeat the mistake of labeling the period between 1500 and 1800 “colonial Latin America.” What we have are “Spanish colonies in the Indias Occidentales,” sometimes also called New World and America.

22. Within the socialist modernity was an internal and external civilizing and modernizing rhetoric as well. The first was intended for the Soviet non-European colonies and was expressed in the reinvention of the old Lenin myth that had typically Eurocentric origins of the heroic civilizing efforts of the great Russian people in backward Central Asia. In the 1960–1980s, it was used to divert attention from the deteriorating living standards by looking for an imagined enemy—the Muslim colonies that the poor Russians presumably had to feed. In the external rendering, the same mythology referred to the Third World countries who were the objects of the continuous Western and Soviet rivalry.
23. For more details available in English, see an interesting though ambivalent discussion on racial politics in the USSR in *Slavic Review*, vol. 61, no 1, spring 2002, and Kalpana Sahni’s book on Russian Orientalism (Sahni 1997).

24. We could think here also of transnational corporations in a transnational unified economy (capital/modernity) in which contending states are moving toward a polycentric capital/modernity (or capitalism in Marxist terminology). Therefore, transnational corporations are not undermining the state but forcing its transformation. The European Union is a case in point; the emerging UNASUR (the projected union of Latin American countries to defend their interests in front of U.S. and the European Union) is another. Therefore, the argument that opposes transnational corporations to national states should be revised in the light of the international and competitive relations between the states (G8, G5). This scenario may not be clear enough if we think in terms of “capitalism,” but it becomes clear if we think in terms of “capital/modernity”—the emerging states are no longer willing to follow the dictates of U.S. or the European Union to modernize but, rather, follow the dictates of their own experiences and needs. It is in this new scenario that a global political society is emerging, calling for decolonial thinking and decolonial political and epistemic options.

25. Brazil most likely will take the leadership in the constitution of UNASUR (Unión Suramericana), which would only resemble the European Union, with its dominating “heart of Europe” (in Hegel’s metaphor), “integrating” the periphery. UNASUR would be like a Central or Eastern European Union in confrontation with England, France, and Germany, as UNASUR is being created basically to avoid the U.S. (as well as other intrusions) into the region.

26. Capital (from the Online Etymology Dictionary) c.1225, from L. capitalis “of the head,” from caput (gen. capitis) “head” (see head). A capital crime (1526) is one that affects the life, or the “head.” The noun for “chief town” is first recorded 1667 (the O.E. word was heafodstol). The financial sense (1630) is from L.L. capitale “stock, property,” neut. of capitalis. Of ships, “first-rate, of the line,” attested from 1652. Capital letters (c.1391) are at the “head” of a sentence or word. Capitalism first recorded 1854; originally “the condition of having capital;” as a political/economic system, 1877. Capitalist is 1791, from Fr. capitaliste, a coinage of the Revolution and a term of reproach.


28. This story told by Nebrija himself in the prologue to his grammar of Castilian languages (printed in 1492) is well known. In connection with this argument, it is analyzed in Walter D. Mignolo, 1995, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization*, Chapter 1.


30. A system of charges in the Spanish colonies, by means of which a group of individuals owed retributions to other groups (the colonizer) in terms of labor or other means.

31. It is perhaps worthwhile to state that we limit the meaning of “imperial differences” to the formation of the modern/colonial world sustained and structured by the colonial matrix of power. In this regard, “imperial differences” do not apply, for example, to the relations between the Ottoman and the Mughal Sultanates, in the same way that “colonial difference” does not apply to their internal organization. By “imperial” and
“colonial difference,” we mean a racial (ontological and epistemic) difference that began to be construed by Christian theology in the sixteenth century, then extended itself, and transformed into secular philosophy. “Imperial difference” implies, for instance, to describe the relations between Western imperial formations and the Ottoman Sultanate (or today between the West and China, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other), but not the other way round.

Chapter 2

32. Any dictionary would have something like this as a definition of epistemology: a branch of philosophy that investigates the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge. But, who were the philosophers who contributed to that definition; what were the sociohistorical conditions in which their thought unfolded; and what were the needs to which their thought responded? Border thinking and epistemology emerges from bodies and subjects that “human knowledge” cast as to be not human enough to have knowledge. Border thinking is always thinking in conflictive dialogue with imperial epistemology, “the dominant branch of human knowledge.” Border thinking emerges from bodies dwelling in the border between an epistemology that was not theirs, which they cannot avoid, and an epistemology that was theirs, which was disqualified. Border thinking thinks from the awareness of disqualification.

33. For example, John Milbank’s (1993) theological critique of the social sciences reverts the order of the secular and the sacred in epistemology, but the geohistorical location of his thought as well as the unspoken male, white, and Christian identity of his discourse are grounded in Greek and Latin categories of thought and articulated in the English language. On the other hand, when W. E. B. Du Bois asked “how can one be American and Black at the same time?” he established the foundation of a “double consciousness” as an epistemic foundation grounded on the racial colonial difference ([1904] 1995).

34. “Third World nationalism” (e.g., India or Algeria) reproduced in the ex-colonies the model of “Imperial nationalism” (e.g., England or France), and all ended up in the impasse we all know about. “Internal colonialism” was the result, since the first-colonial nation-states, in the modern/colonial world, which emerged in the Americas at the end of the eighteenth and first decades of the nineteenth centuries. Bolivia now is going through an interesting process of border thinking and constitutional decolonization. And, we may see a similar experience in Iraq. “Third World nationalism” furthermore remained within the monotopic and exclusionary imperial logic, just in the hands of the “locals or natives.” Frantz Fanon, instead, opened up the possibility and the need of a double consciousness and border thinking of and from the experience of the damnés de la terre. His thoughts were far removed from national fundamentalisms.

35. For example, Deng Zhenglai (http://cuscps.sfsu.edu/Events/deng_zhenglai.htm) also claims, in Development of Chinese Social Sciences in the Era of Globalization, that Chinese social sciences should keep the open-minded or global orientation as its strategy of development and enhance the dialogue with the West. But at the same time, social scientists should also recognize that China is now a country of global significance and no longer a country secluded from the dominant/Western discourse. Therefore, globalization is a chance for China and Chinese academe to challenge the overarching Western discourse and promote the Chinese interpretation of Chinese history and experience.
and envision Chinese ideals and world ideals. Problematization and exploration of new methods and theory in Chinese social sciences should stem from Chinese history, Chinese modernity, and Chinese transformation. We owe this information to Chunjie Zhang (Duke University). See also the robust arguments advanced by Kishore Mahbubani, 2009.

36. In his ironic travelog, Five Rivers of Life, contemporary Russian postmodernist writer Victor Yerofeyev points out: “A Russian in Europe is like a cockroach. He is running, moving his whiskers, nervously smelling. He is scandalous for Europe’s clean surface. Europe can contemplate with interest the exotic insects, it would like some kind of poisonous tarantula or a caterpillar, ladybirds are a touching site for it, but there are no good cockroaches” (Yerofeyev 2000).

37. A Turkish ironist Orhan Pamuk, in The Black Book, says: “The customer,—one of the shop-keepers said,—does not want to put on an overcoat that he sees every day in the street on the shoulders of mustached, bow-legged and emaciated compatriots. He wants to put on a jacket that arrived from a distant unknown country, and that is worn by new and beautiful people. He wants to believe that once he puts on this jacket he will transform himself, he will become a different person . . . It is for this reason that they invented revolution in dress, shaved off the beards and even changed the alphabet . . . The customers in fact are buying not clothes, but dreams. They wish to buy a dream to be the same as those who wear the European dress” (Pamuk 2000).

38. The Ottoman Sultanate and Russia had a lot in common. The Ottoman territorial expansion was stopped early in history because, to unite with their ethnic and cultural “relatives” in Central Asia, the Turks already in the sixteenth century had to (and could not) bypass Shiite Persia, which later on resulted in the clash of Russian and Ottoman interests in the Balkans. The multiethnic, multiconfessional, and multilingual Russian Empire, with its extensive principle of conquering the space, started to lose its position in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the presence of capitalist Western empires of modernity and had to satisfy its expansionistic appetites mainly in the East and South (i.e., in the locales that were drastically different in an ethnic-religious sense from the metropolis). Each of these empires was born in the outskirts of its religious-cultural oecumena, but with the passing of time, each proclaimed as its imperial mission to take the central place: In Russia, it was the famous Moscow as the Third Rome doctrine, according to which the ex outskirt of Byzantine empire, which became Christian relatively late, claimed the role of Orthodox Christian center, and in Turkey, it was the Central Asian, and hence relatively remote from Muslim centers and shrines, origin of Turks, who became Muslim only in the tenth century and began to inhabit Anatolia even later but soon turned into the most powerful Muslim empire—even if for a relatively short period of time. The Ottoman Sultanate had to correspond to this new role, turning from the eclectic, in the cultural and religious sense, marginal state into the center of Islamic civilization. Embracing Islam, the Turks became the heirs of the ancient high Islamic culture and here, as well as in Russia, a complex religious configuration of juxtaposing itself to both Islam and Christianity was obviously at work. If, in the Russian Empire, it was a juxtaposition with Islam (an other religion) and a contrast between Orthodox and Western Christianity (i.e., an internal Christian difference), then in the Ottoman Sultanate, the juxtaposition was done not only along the obvious division into Christians and Muslims but also within Islam, which was reflected in the rather negative attitude of the Sunnite Ottoman Sultanate to Shiites. Religious identification of both Russians and Turks at that time was relatively perfunctory, syncretic, and border but was presented certainly as the
only true religion on the basis of which the Ottoman and the Moscow imperial myths were slightly later created. For more details, see Goodwin (1998), Lieven (2000).

39. At the time of writing the first version of this chapter, the FAO Summit on the food global crisis just ended. During the summit, it was reported that Monsanto, DuPont, and Syngenta, the largest companies controlling transgenic seeds and fertilizers, declared huge profits. The UN, IMF, and WB concurred that the crisis was human-made and could be fixed. It is not a paradox: It is ingrained in the rhetoric of modernity, based on progress and salvation of all kinds, while increasing capital accumulation and, in this case, “using” people risking starvation as “bodies to feed,” to increase food production, and hence the profits of the corresponding corporations. Look around and you will see the same seeming “paradox”: a rhetoric that maintains the faith in progress and development as salvation, while increasing the mechanisms of economic and political control, by maintaining a structure of knowledge that justifies development as the only way to freedom and happiness. Any alternative to such structure of knowledge is condemned as antidemocratic. La Via Campesina and Food Sovereignty, the two global organizations in the sphere of political society working toward the decolonizing knowledge that controls and manipulates the global food crisis, were not invited to this summit. It was limited to transnational corporations and international organizations (UN, IMF, World Bank).

Chapter 3

40. The name “Eurasian studies” itself sounds highly ambiguous. In the Russian mind, it immediately evokes Eurasianism as a philosophic-cultural movement of the early twentieth century, going through periodic revivals at the times of nationalist and imperial booms, like today. This is not what is meant by the name “Eurasian studies” in the West. It rather designates just a presumably objective geographic phenomenon—Eurasia. However, geography here hides a geopolitical myth. Eurasia in geography means the whole continent, which comprises Europe and Asia. Geography does not recognize Berlin walls and divisions between Protestantism and Orthodox Christianity or Latin- and Cyrillic-based languages. Therefore the term “Eurasian studies” is meaningless in a geographic sense, because it would mean to study France along with Turkmenia and Spain along with China. What is meant by “Eurasian” here is rather a geopolitical and civilizational myth of not Europe and not Asia, which Russia stands for. Thus, although Russia itself stopped being interesting for Western area studies, its specter is still present in the very name of “Eurasian studies.” However, this euphemism seeks to erase Russia and replace its name (and former power) with a “new” geopolitics of knowledge.

41. Several attempts have been made by Russian scholars working within the Frankfurt school tradition in the last decade to apply postcolonial theory to post-Socialist discourse by turning it upside down and assigning the role of the subaltern to the ex-Russian colonizer in the newly independent states. However, the old geopolitical models are still obvious in these constructs, as they look mainly at those colonies that have always claimed their closeness to Europe (the western Ukraine, the Baltic countries) in contrast with Russia coded as an Asiatic empire. This is a cunning rhetoric, as it attempts to transfer the Russian imperial guilt and responsibility to the ex-colonial others (Penzin 2011).

42. Even the best of the Western experts on Central Asia suffer this Orientalist bent, which is clearly seen in the titles of their articles, in the visual representations of the
people adorning the covers of their books, which stress the sensational and the exotic and abuse the modernity vs. tradition and civilization vs. barbarity dichotomy. See, for example, Sahadeo and Zanca 2007.

43. The mardikors were and are today, in post-Soviet Central Asia, the day laborers with no permanent jobs. After the 1916 Turkistan massive revolts against the Czarist Empire, connected among other things with the Russian attempt to force the local population to public front-line work, a whole subculture of mardikor insurgent songs and poems emerged, many of which remain only in oral form and only recently were collected and presented in the Uzbek Memorial of the victims of repression. The usual tactic was to collect the oral histories, as if for the future publication, then hide them in inaccessible archives and get rid of their reciters (the ozans or shamans), attempting to buy them into Socialism by asking them to write odes to the tractor and kolkhoz, or later, to publish the dastans in distorted forms, where the liberatory heroic impulse was amputated (Paksoy 1995a, Tekuyeva 2006a).

44. This is a question that recently caused a heated discussion among the Western ex-Sovietologists, who started to question the formula of divide and rule and attempted to prove the presumable good intentions of the Soviets in drawing the Turkistan borders by stating that the Bolsheviks were thinking not only about defending the intactness of their new empire but also about activating their nation-building and, later, gradual nation-dissolving theories and creating a new brand of colonialism. This is the opinion of Francine Hirsch (2000) among others. To anyone who has experienced the Soviet power from within, this rationale sounds not only simplistic and easily bought into the Soviet ideological clanking but also highly cynical, as it presupposes that one can somewhat excuse the USSR if one proves that it was building a new and better brand of colonialism! In all such reasoning invariably alienated from history and from the indigenous subjectivity, there is a crucial element missing—that of race.

45. The yard of my Moscow apartment complex, as well as the majority of other Moscow yards, has been cleaned over the last five years by a family of Uzbeks from Namangan. Both the husband and wife have university degrees. He is an engineer and she is a doctor. They brought three children, out of five, to clean Moscow streets as well. The children are segregated at a Moscow school. The family resides in a construction trailer that, as they explained to me, is much better than before, when they stayed in a basement infected by rats. The municipal authorities employ them half legally, with a $100 monthly salary, and no Moscow “registration,” which makes them vulnerable to any policeman in the street. Today, when the economic crisis hit Moscow violently, the Uzbek families are risking quick deportation and subsequent starvation at home.

46. The resistance tactics of the Central Asian peoples were and are similar to those of the Caribbean intellectuals, who also resorted to fiction instead of forbidden historiography or philosophy, to tell the truth and preserve the link with the past, with the ancestral beliefs, with their freedom-fighting legacies. It is resistance in the disguise of fiction that we find, for example, in the works of Alisher Ibadinov and other Central Asian writers of the Soviet time, most of whom perished in Stalin’s purges. Unfortunately, today, after the Central Asian states became independent and it is seemingly the indigenous people who are in power there, the same logic of repression persists. A telling case is the fate of Mamadali Mahmudov, a writer who, having suffered in Soviet times, received a prize for his resistant literary works after the gaining of independence, but then in the 1999 was imprisoned again, this time, apparently by the new government, which promotes its freedom-loving and democratic image (Paksoy 2002).
47. Kalpana Sahni correctly points out a process of gradual popularization of racism and Eurocentrism in the Soviet period, linked with the erasing of the difference between the elite and popular culture. If, in Czarist Russia, Eurocentrism arguably was restricted by the aristocracy and middle class strata, in the Soviet Union, it became a commonplace discourse among the Soviet people (Sahni 1997: 162). Today, we can trace the remnants of the Brezhnev era myth interiorized by Russians and used as a justification for the colonization excesses and neocolonialism. It is a myth first formulated in Lenin’s time and depicting the sacrifices of the “great Russian people” for the development of the backward nations. Soviet economists and ideologists of the 1970s revamped this myth by adding pseudo-scientific grounds to it. In the last decades of the Soviet rule, it was necessary to take attention away from the deteriorating living standards of the soon to collapse empire. The economic stagnation was then presented to the Russian majority as entirely a fault of Central Asia, which presumably the heroic Russian people constantly dragged to their own higher status, risking their own well being and prosperity. This myth continues to live today in both Russia and Central Asia and the Caucasus zombified by the Soviet propaganda and still generates colonial complexes.

48. The situation started to visibly change when I was working on the second revision of this chapter—the indigenous social movements in practically all former and present colonies of Russia/Soviet Union have begun to raise their voices due to various internal and external factors.

49. See a thorough and unbiased report of the event by Shirin Akiner (2005).

50. In the last several years, an armed resistance has been emerging in the territory of historic Circassia. Analysts both in Russia and abroad viewed the Nalchik bloody uprising of October 2005 as Circassia’s entry into a war of liberation. The recent decision making Sochi the place of the 2014 Winter Olympics and the large scale preparations for this event have stirred up the Circassian resentment globally. Circassian organizations point out that, by an irony of history, the 2014 Olympic Games will mark the 150th anniversary of the Circassians’ defeat by Russia in 1864 (Tlisova 2007). One of the possible scenarios is that the Olympics, if they ever happen in Sochi, might be the match that would light a major uprising in the Caucasus, this time centered on the Cherkess people.

51. In Andijan, it was particularly graphic, as the incident started with the insurgents breaking into a local prison and forcibly freeing the prisoners (killing and wounding those who refused to obey) then marching them down the main road toward the National Security Service, where they were made to stand as a human shield as the insurgents fired on the building behind them. The bodies of those killed earlier in prison were thrown in front of the railings. See Akiner (2005) for more details.

52. However, there were links between religion and social movements in Latin America in the past, for instance, in the Peruvian anticolonial movement of Aky Onkoy.

53. This sentiment is expressed in the attempts to apply the postcolonial discourse to an analysis of the Russian situation of the “new subalterns” in the ex-colonies. See, for example, Alexei Penzin’s works on this problem (2011).

54. Thus, in 1851 American popular writer, globetrotter, and publisher Maturin Murray Ballou (Lieutenant Maturin Murray) wrote a sensational exoticist tale The Circassian Slave, or the Sultan’s Favorite. A Tale of Constantinople and the Caucasus (Murray Ballou 2006), in which he presented Circassia as a prototypical South of Europe populated by noble savages: “Circassia, the land of beauty and oppression, whose noble valleys produce such miracles of female loveliness, and whose level plains are the vivid scenes of such terrible struggles; where a brave, unconquerable peasantry have, for a very long period,
defied the combined powers of the whole of Russia, and whose daughters, though the children of such brave sires, are yet taught and reared from childhood to look forward to a life of slavery in a Turkish harem as the height of their ambition—Circassia, the land of bravery, beauty and romance, is one of the least known, but most interesting spots in all Europe” (Murray Ballou 2006: Chapter 4).

55. Nakshbandi was born near Bukhara, where now stands his shrine and mausoleum to which thousands of people have been paying homage for six centuries. Nakshbandi Sufism was one of the main versions of Islam in this locale for a long time, predictably banned in Soviet years. This order was different from other Sufi orders, as it did not stress the ascetic life and turning from the real world to the transcendent one but rather spoke for the equality of both worlds, the real and the mystical, their existence in each other and through each other. This philosophy is marked with a special tolerance and rejection of orthodoxy: It regards women as equal to men and allows them into the main parts of the mosques along with men.

56. There are many parallels between the non-European borderlands of Eurasia and other locales marked with transcultural impulses. One of them is the idea of a hybrid, impure ethnicity, mixed blood. It was the Russian imperial scholars that built the convenient—pure in blood—classification of people living in Central Asia. In reality, they never existed. And, even the imperial ideologues themselves realized that. The first Turkistan general-governor, von Kaufman, lamented that the local population is mixed and often impossible to define in ethnographic terms (Abashin 2004: 49). Moreover, there was a specific variant of Central Asian Creoles—the “Sarts”—half Uzbek and half Tadzhic, in an ethnic sense and in some elements of the way of life resembling the Tadzhic but speaking a Turkic language (new Uzbek) and not Farsi. And, again, as in the Caribbean or in Latin America, a supraidentity made these internal names unimportant for the people themselves, because they knew that a certain pan-Turkic identity is working for the unity of all Central Asian tribes. The latter was dangerous for the Russians, and Russia fought this threat in many ways, from the forceful change of linguistic hierarchy to a population census based on binary principles.

57. Ilkhom comes from an Arabic word meaning “inspiration which God sends to the creators.” In 1976, a half-underground club of young artists, musicians, and poets called Ilkhom founded a theater studio—the first independent theater in the whole Soviet Union—which was to become the center of Tashkent’s alternative aesthetics. Its first performance was at attempt at a transcultural link, as it combined the traditions of the Uzbek street theater Maskharaboz with the latest theatrical experimentation, which gradually resulted in the creation of specific Ilkhom theatrical principles and school of acting based on constant improvisation.

58. When I was writing the second version of this chapter, Ilkhom brought to Moscow theater festival The Golden Mask, the two last Weil shows—the most ambitious and provocative of his projects. I was lucky to attend one of them, Ecstasy with the Pomegranate, a sensuous parable of yet another trickster, a Russian by origin, modernist painter Alexander Nikolayev, fascinated with the Orient. He came to Uzbekistan, later became a Sufi and turned into Usto Mumin, always driven by an angst and attracted by a transsexual Bacha [boy] dancer. This performance is a virtuoso transcultural, transmedia, and global phenomenon, not only in its presentation but also in its creation. The androgynous bacha dances were directed by a famous American dancer, writer, director, and founder of the modern interracial and intercultural dance group Reality, David Rousséve. A talented young Uzbek artist, Babur Ismailov, did a fascinating work of adapting Nikolayev’s paint-
ings for video and animation presentation during the show. An interesting Korean by origin composer, Artyem Kim, created a delicate, sensuous, and suggestive soundtrack of the *Ecstasy*, based on rhythmical leitmotifs repeated in various media—from traditional musical instruments to voice and even pebbles in a big metal pot. As a result, a border performance emerged, always balancing on the edge of various art forms, languages (Weil uses Anzaldúa’s type of bilingual repetition with variation when a phrase is first said in Uzbek then repeated in Russian but with a deviation), rhythms (traditional Uzbek mixing with Caribbean), symbols (e.g., queer semiotics interchanges with Sufi).

59. The abundance of English-speaking universities in Central Asia is particularly symptomatic in relation to the Amawtay Wasi phenomenon, as it demonstrates how easily indigenous cosmology, knowledge, and thinking can be appropriated, neutered, and used as a new multicultural edition of mind colonization. A perfect example of such initiative from above (as opposed to Amawtay Wasi, as the indigenous people project from below) is the regional internationally charted University of Central Asia, cofounded in 2000 by the heads of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzia, and Tajikistan under the supervision of and with the money from “his highness” the Aga Khan, the Imam [spiritual leader] of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims since 1957 and a representative of a small expatriate Muslim top elite in the West (UCA 2011). The university is positioned as promoting the Central Asian Mountain Societies and their cultural and economic heritage in the new world order. Yet, the curricula and specializations, the tuition in English, and other telling details demonstrate that the university is going to make Western style experts and new local elites according to the new old formula: ethnic-national-regional in its form, neoliberal-capitalist in its essence.

Chapter 4

60. In 2002, the *Slavic Review* organized a discussion on the meaning of race in the USSR, where opinions differed from Eriz Weitz’s (2002) parallel between Nazi and Soviet racial politics, even if there was no clearly defined idea of race in the Soviet Union, in his view, and Francine Hirsch’s (2002) opposite idea of the clear Soviet definition of race accompanied by an incoherent and often inconsistent racial politics. In good faith, the American scholars tried to analyze Soviet modernity without paying much attention to its darker colonial side or listening to the colonized/racialized/gendered voices. In reality, the Soviet racial othering is not unique for any modernity/coloniality, as it is based on the familiar operation of divesting the (unreformable) enemy of its human nature to justify its annihilation. On top of that, there was always a gap between the official racial ideological discourses and rhetoric in the USSR and the real practices of the Janus-faced empire.

61. The exception in this case was the Orientalistic interpretation of the homosexual problematic, particularly, homosexuality between grown men and young boys, especially in the form of the “bacha cult,” which was ostracized by the Russian empire and later banned by the Soviet authorities and presented as an inherent part of Central Asian law. It was not directly linked to Islam though. Lesbianism figured in these accusations much less frequently, although it also was regarded as a direct and unhealthy result of female seclusion and a harmful medieval or bourgeois survival.

62. For instance, she makes a viable comparison of the Uzbekistan national gender project and those of Turkey, but she fails to mention that both cases represent the realm of
subaltern empires and their colonies and the specific identity generated catching up with modernity.

63. The majority of Kamp’s elaborations can be found in earlier books and articles by Uzbek gender activist M. Tokhtakhodzhayeva, published in Uzbek and in Russian (Tokhtakhodzhayeva 1996, 1999, 2001), with only a brief reference in Kamp’s book. This testifies to the asymmetry of knowledge production and distribution—as anything that Kamp would write will be by definition more reliable in the academic world than Tokhtakhodzhayeva’s or Shakirova’s works, as they are assigned the role of native informants and diligent pupils of Western feminists and gender theorists. Therefore, their knowledge is appropriated by the West and reproduced under a sanctified Western name, or sometimes a name that is non-Western but still sanctified by Western education or tenure at a Western university. Chandra Mohanty and Jacqui Alexander address this issue in their seminal Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures: “Token inclusion of our texts without reconceptualizing the whole white, middle-class, gendered knowledge base effectively absorbs and silences us. This says, in effect, that our theories are plausible and carry explanatory weight only in relation to our specific experiences, but that they have no use value in relation to the rest of the world” (Alexander and Mohanty 1997: xvii).

64. See an interesting article on body and gender by a Tajik scholar Gulnora Beknazhova, who nevertheless clings to the outdated pattern of the traditional vs. emancipated women (Beknazhova).

65. Area studies and Western-style ethnography lie in the basis of an interesting book written by the northern Caucasus scholar Madina Tekuyeva, Man and Woman in Adygean Culture: Tradition and Modernity (2006a), where one has to read in between the lines to fight the methodological constructions that do not fit the described material.

66. For example, in the Russian and early Soviet Empires, the colonizers demonstratively ignored possible sexual partners from the colonized women as being below their status, while the colonial men who chose the Russian/Soviet modernity also preferred to marry Russian women, thus elevating their own status by acquiring a more desirable (Whiter) partner. Later, the situation reversed, in the sense that the local elites and the middle class started to regard the Russian women as sexually accessible and socially emancipated but definitely preferred to marry local women from good families who were educated and enlightened enough yet continued to act as the bearers of the sanctified local tradition.

Chapter 5


68. There are some exceptions, like German Catholic Carl Schmitt, for whom Catholic Spanish intellectual tradition takes precedence over Protestantism, which was crucial for his co-national Max Weber who argued for the connection between capitalism and Protestant ethics.

69. On the distinction humanitas/anthropos, see Nishitani Osamu, “Anthropos and Humanitas: Two Western Concepts of “Human Beings,” in Translation, Biopolitics, Co-


71. An example of how decolonial humanities are being thought out in Russia, see http://www.jhfc.duke.edu/globalstudies/currentpartnerships.html; http://www.jhfc.duke.edu/globalstudies/Tlostanova_how%20can%20the%20decolonial%20project.pdf,

Chapter 6

72. See Walter D. Mignolo, “Globalization and the Geopolitics of Knowledge: The Role of the Humanities in the Corporate University,” Nepantla: Views from South 4.1 (2003): 97–119. (Chapter 7 is a modified version of this article.)


76. A copy of Abraham Ortelius’s map can be found at <http://image.sl.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/ebindshow.pl?doc=crux/a127;seq=11>; this map was published for the first time in his atlas titled Theatrum Orbis Terrarum (1570).


78. I am following here a less-known narrative of another conceptualization connecting people to “cities”: see León-Portilla, 2003, 15–35.


80. Stories are being told of Chinese people going to the West then returning to China, being welcomed, and initiating companies, small and large, which in part explains the Chinese economic boom in the past twenty years. That is not the case for those from countries like Bolivia, Tanzania, or Tunisia. The various types of frontiers and citizen mobility are strictly related to colonial and imperial differences and to the economic world structures that the colonial and imperial differences contributed to creating and maintaining.
81. Arguments are often advanced that sound like a reaction to the situation in the U.S. rather than an analysis of racism in the modern colonial world. Poverty, in the sense that the term has in the modern colonial and capitalist world and racism are two sides of the same coin: The Industrial Revolution would not have been possible without the Colonial Revolution in the sixteenth century.

82. As with any key category of thought, the decolonial shift needs to be articulated within the conceptual package of Western epistemology (i.e., Greek and Latin translated into modern imperial languages—Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, and English) and to work out the displacement, the fracture, the colonial or imperial differences rearticulated from the perspective of coloniality. As Ali Shariati would say, why shall we study the Qur'an with the instrument and principles of the social sciences and the humanities and not reflect on the social sciences and the humanities from the instruments and epistemic principles we find in the Qur'an? (See Ali Shariati, On the Sociology of Islam [1979], 44–45.) Something similar happens with pacha-sophy, looking at the Greek philosophical legacy from the categories we find in the Aymara language.

Chapter 7

83. On October 20, 2010, a meeting was held in Canada to consider the possibility of a common higher-education framework, similar to the European Plan Bologna (http://chronicle.com/article/A-Common-Higher-Education/125062/). In February 2011, the government of the U.S. appointed a National Commission on the Humanities, http://www.dukenews.duke.edu/2011/02/rbhumanities.html.

84. See Natalia Vinelli’s interview with Felipe Quispe (2002). Quispe, also known as El Mallku, is a Bolivian indigenous activist and leader. Now in his fifties, he is finishing a PhD in history at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés.

85. To make a long story short, each time that I write “coloniality,” just think about the other side, the darker and obscure side of “modernity.” And remember that there is not and cannot be modernity without coloniality. The reason why “coloniality” sounds odd and remains invisible is that the histories of modernity have been told from the perspective of modernity itself! As is often said, it is difficult to understand and feel poverty while standing in the marina in Marseilles, looking at the sun set in the Mediterranean. Of course, you can “conceive” of colonialism and “know” that there are poor people around. But, that is a different story.

86. As far as the history of science is concerned, Mexico provides a good example to be contrasted with that of India; see Prakash 2000; see also Gortari 1979. As for the “original” scientific revolution, that is, the metropolitan one that gets exported to and imported into the colonies, see Jardine 1999.


88. For a critical and historical overview of the modern (that is, postindependence) university in Chile, see Thayer 1996. For a historical and critical historical overview, see the classic Readings 1996. Both books generated interesting debates. The one on Thayer’s book was published in Nepantla 1 (Quijano 2000): 229–82. The debate on Readings’s book was published in Smith 1996. See also Sousa Santos [1987] 1998, on “the idea of the university,” and Hinkelammert 2002. For an analysis of the United States and Japan, see Miyoshi 2000.
89. For the peculiarities of the U.S. university during the Cold War, see Chomsky et al. 1997. For the crisis of the university in Latin America during the post–Cold War years, see North American Congress on Latin America 2000.

90. For more information about the structure and goals of the Universidad Intercultural, see Macas 2000, Macas and Lozano 2000, and “Universidad Intercultural” 2002.

91. See also Multinational Monitor 2002. The special issue of the Boletín ICCI-RIMAI from which the quotation is drawn is devoted entirely to the Universidad Intercultural and provides ample information related to the issues I bring up here.