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Decolonialities and the Exilic Consciousness

Thinking from the Global South

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ABSTRACT: This chapter is a journey of thought exploring decolonial critique as a situated practice while thinking through exilic consciousness and its constitutive conditions. I begin by reflecting on *decolonialities* to gesture toward varied forms of decolonial projects that need to be situated, given that each location generates different sets of questions/problems that demand different answers. In this way, I reconfigure the exilic condition, and the space of displacement in general, as a plurilingual space that unsettles various colonial forms of epistemic monolingualism predicated on the self-sufficiency of thought. To this end, I reflect on the potentiality of exilic consciousness to generate decolonial critique when thinking from/about the Global South. Finally, this chapter demonstrates the significance of acknowledging the diverse locations and trajectories of decolonial critique and the plurality of thought embedded within the exilic intellectual formation that can potentially undo colonial forms of knowledge-making and being in the world.

KEYWORDS: exilic consciousness; decolonization; situated knowledge; plural thought; theorizing; Global South

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THINKING ABOUT DECOLONIALITIES

Decoloniality presupposes the durability of the coloniality of power that structures and controls various domains of life.¹ However, I want to use the term in the plural, *decolonialities*, to gesture towards both the multi-sited, normative formations of coloniality and the various ways in

* In gratitude, I wish to thank Özgün Eylül İçsen, Iracema Dulley, and Christoph F. E. Holzhey for their comments and suggestions on this short chapter. All shortcomings, needless to say, remain my responsibility alone.

1 Aníbal Quijano, 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', *Cultural Studies*, 21.2-3 (2007), pp. 168-78 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353>>; Aníbal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America', *International Sociology*, 15.2 (2000), pp. 215-32 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580900015002005>>; Walter D. Mignolo, 'Introduction: Coloniality of Power and de-Colonial Thinking', *Cultural Studies*, 21.2-3 (2007), pp. 155-67 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162498>>; Enrique D. Dussel,

which decolonization has been undertaken from different epistemic loci of enunciation to counter such colonial matrices. These modes of decolonization attempt to create the means (theoretical or otherwise) to contest the epistemic authority as well as the political economic structures underlying them within the history of the world capitalist system. In this respect, situating decolonial thought within its location, its 'problem-space', links it with practice, its ultimate task of liberation.² Only in this way can one expose the unmarked universalist tendencies that may appear even within decolonial thought itself, avoiding the problem of reproducing colonial relations of domination and flattening its plurality and diverse trajectories. Therefore, the term I deploy here, decolonialities, refers to a multitude of ongoing projects that aim at displacing hegemonic forms of colonial knowledge perpetuated by the colonial matrix of power. However, they do not stop there: they call for thinking from a different standpoint, engaging multiple epistemological paradigms without assuming self-sufficiency of thought, and thus, embracing a pluriversal method of thinking.

If the overarching story of the world's historical formation reproducing 'monohumanism' has been undergirded

'Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism', trans. by Javier Krauel and Virginia C. Tuma, *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1.3 (2000), pp. 465–78; Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Rita Laura Segato, *The Critique of Coloniality: Eight Essays*, trans. Ramsey McGlazer (New York: Routledge, 2022).

2 David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004). Scott argues for making explicit the implicit set of questions and answers that shape anticolonial arguments. For him, a problem-space is 'an ensemble of questions and answers around which a horizon of identifiable stakes (conceptual as well as ideological-political stakes) hangs' (p. 4).

by colonialism and racism,³ then (counter)storytelling itself becomes a form of critique. Indeed, many decolonial thinkers have pointed out the need to build up narratives that interrogate various modes of coloniality and generate perspectives and imaginaries beyond those colonial narratives. Along with postcolonial thinkers, they invite us to displace the ‘abstract universalism’ of colonial narratives that produce hierarchies of peoples, cultures, languages, and knowledges. For instance, it was through ‘race’ and ‘gender’ as constituting categories that Eurocentric social classifications of the world population were produced and reproduced.⁴ As an alternative to this colonial narrative that simultaneously justifies and obscures the coloniality of power, there arises an invitation to work with other imaginaries that are conceived as a network of multiple local histories that are violently negated, silenced, or repressed by the machinery of colonialism/colonial (hi)story writing.⁵ This is also pitted against a relentless form of Eurocentrism — understood here as the latent, false claim of self-sufficiency by European thought — that manifests itself through the perpetual negligence of other traditions of knowledge.⁶

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- 3 See Sylvia Wynter, ‘Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, its Overrepresentation — An Argument’, *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3.3 (2003), pp. 257–337 <<https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2004.0015>>. Monohumanism here refers to Wynter’s conceptualization of the genealogy of the ethnocentric concept of Man. With its racial and colonial configurations within European history, it has been taken as the model of being human against which other humans are valued or devalued.
 - 4 Quijano, ‘Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality’; María Lugones, ‘Heterosexuality and the Colonial/Modern Gender System’, *Hypatia*, 22.1 (2007), pp. 186–209.
 - 5 Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*, Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).
 - 6 Syed Farid Alatas, ‘Religion and Concept Formation: Transcending Eurocentrism’, in *Eurocentrism at the Margins*, ed. by Lutfi Sunar (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 87–102 (p. 98).

Thus, to think decolonially is to think against coloniality/colonialism by taking seriously the intellectual traditions, or traditions of intellection, of postcolonial spaces as loci of enunciation, emancipation, and generation of new forms of liberating knowledge. Here, I emphasize the possibilities of liberating knowledge because the act of decolonization is not *ipso facto* a liberating one; the claim of decolonization can be appropriated to reproduce and perpetuate colonial relations. The key idea here, however, is relationality. Coloniality is a form of relation that can take various forms and manifests itself in different locations and domains of life. Decolonialities, in my view, could be thought of as a plasma that animates modes of thinking and being in the world that contribute to liberation. It does not claim the monopoly of ways toward liberation. Catherine Walsh, for instance, thinks that:

[d]ecoloniality denotes ways of thinking, knowing, being, and doing that began with, but also precede, the colonial enterprise and invasion. It implies the recognition and undoing of the hierarchical structures of race, gender, heteropatriarchy, and class that continue to control life, knowledge, spirituality, and thought, structures that are clearly intertwined with and constitutive of global capitalism and Western modernity. Moreover, it is indicative of the ongoing nature of struggles, constructions, and creations that continue to work within coloniality's margins and fissures to affirm that which coloniality has attempted to negate.⁷

7 Catherine E. Walsh, 'The Decolonial For: Resurgences, Shifts, and Movements', in *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, ed. by Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 15–32 (p. 17).

From this perspective, decoloniality does not yield a dogmatic belief or a form of fundamentalism.⁸ Rather, it is a call for opening a horizon in which no particular epistemological notion acts as a primary determinant that fixes the social and institutional norms shaping knowledge production in a given location. Walsh continues:

Decoloniality, in this sense, is not a static condition, an individual attribute, or a lineal point of arrival or enlightenment. Instead, decoloniality seeks to make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis, and thought.⁹

I agree with this formulation as long as one does not think that displacing Western rationality and epistemology is the prime and only task of decolonial thought in all locations of critique. While this task is imperative in one location, it can be paralysing in another. To insist again on thinking with the ‘problem-space’ of decolonial thought, one can refer to Malek Bennabi who, from his location, points out that colonialism can be a reality, a repressive and ‘immense sabotage of history’, but also a myth, and an alibi, for not undertaking the responsibility of liberation in domains in which colonialism cannot be incriminated.¹⁰ Frantz Fanon, on the other hand, rightly points out that the defensive position of colonized intellectuals and their incessant and vehement

8 Fundamentalism is understood here as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o speaks of it: ‘Fundamentalism — economic, political or religious — is, essentially, an insistence that there is only one way of organizing reality.’ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Secure the Base: Making Africa Visible in the Globe*, The Africa List (London: Seagull Books, 2016), p. 23.

9 Walsh, ‘The Decolonial For’, p. 17.

10 Malek Bennabi, *Islam in History and Society*, trans. by Ashma Rashid (New Delhi: Kitabbhavan, 1999), pp. 47–48 and 57.

denunciations of colonialism ‘reassure’ the colonizer, who ‘likened these scathing denunciations, outpourings of misery, and heated words to *an act of catharsis*’. For Fanon, ‘[e]ncouraging these acts would, in a certain way, avoid dramatization and clear the atmosphere.’¹¹ As for colonial regimes, one can always speak about colonialism as long as colonial structures are kept intact.

THINKING ABOUT EXILE AS A PLURILINGUAL LOCUS OF ENUNCIATION

After mapping the complicated and multi-layered experience of being displaced and exiled, Edward Said speaks of exile not as ‘a privilege, but as an alternative to the mass institutions that dominate modern life’ and invites the intellectuals living in exile to ‘cultivate a scrupulous (not indulgent or sulky) subjectivity’.¹² When Theodor Adorno declared that it is the moral duty of the intellectual not to feel at home, he was alluding to the possibility of enacting the exilic consciousness within the home turf and suggesting that this option is an ethical one: ‘It is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home.’¹³ Aligning with Adorno’s refusal of institutionalized structures of knowledge-making, Said thought of cultivating an exilic detachment from ‘homes’ to see them with critical eyes. While the exile develops a sense of uneasiness with the whole concept of place and belonging in its conventional

11 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 173; emphasis added.

12 Edward W. Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 184; emphasis added.

13 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. by E. F. N. Jephcott, *Radical Thinkers* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 39.

or nationalistic terms, they sense their existence as being, as Said pinpoints, 'out of place':

For an exile, habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus, both the new and the old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally. There is a unique pleasure in this sort of apprehension, especially if the exile is conscious of other contrapuntal juxtapositions that diminish orthodox judgment and elevate appreciative sympathy. There is also a particular sense of achievement in acting as if one were at home wherever one happens to be.¹⁴

There is a sense of territoriality in the notion of exile under which the idea of home lingers. In exile or any space of dislocation, one lives in a place that one can hardly lay claim to. One lives in a place marked with a constant force of nonbelonging, and usually occupies a position subaltern to the dominant culture that often constitutes the exile-displaced as an outsider. Thus, inhabiting the space of exile, one enters into a set of narratives and relations through which the dominant culture imposes its own ways of being and knowing. Ultimately, the mode of feeling-at-home is replaced by the sense of home-in-motion that one needs to construct to keep on living.

For those living within an exilic condition, there is a kind of double estrangement experienced as a result of displacement from 'home' and nonbelonging to hegemonic culture in the space of exile, as well as of the structural imposition of categories of knowledge that are either alien to one's experience or loaded with colonial and racialized presumptions. In a system that commits 'epistemicide'

14 Said, *Reflections on Exile*, p. 186.

by systematically oppressing particular ways of knowing while persistently interpellating the exilic subject as an outsider,¹⁵ there is a latent demand for assimilation — or, to use its politically correct equivalent, integration — into the dominant system of being and knowing.

Hence, one always inhabits a paradoxical position anchored in the geographical enigma of one's location-in-motion, living in a perpetual crisis that invites one to see the world from the prism of exilic consciousness cultivated on the move. Said highlights the productive dimension of this exilic consciousness: 'Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that — to borrow a phrase from music — is *contrapuntal*.'¹⁶ The word *contrapuntal* here entails the possibility of reading and understanding beyond the monolingual and monoperspectival positioning, thereby enacting dialogical encounters involving multiple languages and perspectives without imposing any hierarchical structure. As Said embraces the term's musical reference, the idea of *contrapuntal* puts forth an imaginary in which different forms of knowledge reside together, with harmony and tension.

The reconfiguration of exile as a locus of enunciation recognizes that we are living in a pluriversal and multilingual world, since all those living in exile are cognizant of 'other(ed)' philosophies and knowledge productions. Exile as a condition enables one to generate knowledge from a space marked with plurality, even when one registers one's epistemic location. In other words, to inhabit

15 Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

16 Said, *Reflections on Exile*, p. 186.

exile is to be able to think from the space across languages, a generative space, that facilitates the possibility of theorizing through a constant dialogue between one's language(s)/cultures and those of others. This generative space is a space of translation that is marked by a relational and processual nature as it animates 'plural thought that does not reduce the others (societies and individuals alike) to the sphere of its self-sufficiency'.¹⁷ In this sense, exilic consciousness unsettles colonial relations between people, cultures, and languages.

In my reading, translation marked with self-insufficiency is something that resembles what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o calls the language of languages.¹⁸ Only when marked with self-insufficiency can the act of translation potentially bring two languages into a generative space of meaning-making in ways that neither devalue nor annihilate each other's epistemic and symbolic systems. Ideally, this encounter becomes transformative, as no one dominates and, thus, limits the possibilities of meaning-making. Though translation transplants the translated text onto a different 'lingual [and oral] memory',¹⁹ it does not necessarily reduce the translated text to the target language's vision of theorizing and meaning-making or

17 Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Plural Maghreb: Writings on Postcolonialism*, trans. by P. Burcu Yalim, *Suspensions: Contemporary Middle Eastern and Islamicate Thought* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), p. 6.

18 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing*, The Wellek Library Lectures in Critical Theory (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 61.

19 Alton Becker, *Beyond Translation: Essays toward a Modern Philology* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995). 'Lingual memory' constitutes the repertoire of what Becker sometimes calls 'prior texts', oral or textual, as well as 'words and silences that shape a context, in space, in time, in social relations, in nature, and in emotions and subtle intimations' (p. 12). It is that which makes the languaging of language and its meanings familiar.

rigidly fix this text within the host language's system of references. Thus, meaning-making can remain multilingual and multidimensional.

Indeed, reducing the linguistic world through which one theorizes to that of the other is a form of reduction that often takes the shape of colonial imposition due to the power asymmetries constitutive of the rhetoric of multilingualism in the European setting. The exilic subject, or any alert bilingual reader for that matter, avoids this form of reductionism precisely because of the awareness that languages coming into contact — though differentially — have the potential to activate the unsettling play of a lingual/oral double memory. In this way, those who confront an exilic condition or displacement can avoid the tyranny of monolingualism and the self-sufficiency of thought. Even though this quality of thinking is gained through an existentially painful experience, it does not belong merely to those who live in multilingual worlds of exile and displacement at large. As Said and Adorno point out, it is even desirable to cultivate an exilic consciousness in order to free the act of thinking from its own limits, whether historical or structural.

Still, the experience of living in exile or any form of displacement can be existentially shattering for those going through it, and there is nothing to romanticize about it. One must always think of refugees, the displaced, the dispossessed, and the unimaginable numbers of dead people en route who were buried in land or water. What undergirds the tendencies of romanticizing is the unwillingness to mud one's feet in the slums of the political. In this respect, it is critical to reflect on how one's positionality involves class, gender, and race-related configurations. Therefore, it is significant to remember that we live in an age of mass displacement and migration due to the pres-

ence of oppressive, genocidal state regimes and imperial wars with unequally distributed global impacts.

EXILE AND DECOLONIALITIES: THINKING FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Theorizing from and through the Global South entails registering the location of intellection.²⁰ Dilip Menon thinks of the category of Global South ‘as a project, a conceptual and experiential category that is not a mere geographical agglomeration’,²¹ and extends it into an invitation to ‘rethink the world anew *from a different standpoint*’.²² Yet whether one thinks of the Global South as a metaphor, an epistemic choice, or even as a geopolitical or experiential category, the weight of geography looms large due to the presence of heterogeneities that constitute it.²³ Thus, the task of relocating the act of theorization derives from the fact that each geographical location generates its set of problems and questions, and decolonial critics respond to the latter while eventually orienting themselves to the planetary consciousness at large.

However, in the situation of the displaced, the attempt to register one’s epistemic location becomes a more com-

20 See Walter D. Mignolo, ‘Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26.7–8 (2009), pp. 159–81 <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409349275>>; *Changing Theory: Concepts from the Global South*, ed. by Dilip M. Menon (Milton Park: Routledge, 2022); Dilip M. Menon, ‘Thinking about the Global South’, in *The Global South and Literature*, ed. by Russell West-Pavlov (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 34–44 <<https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108231930.003>>.

21 Menon, ‘Thinking about the Global South’, p. 36.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

23 Menon rightly warns against the tendencies to reduce the South to ‘a merely theoretical space, leading us to verbal prestidigitation like North of the South, South of the North, and so on — Detroit as South in the United States, Johannesburg as North in Africa’ (Menon, *Changing Theory*, p. 3).

plicated task: One needs to attend to the set of problems and questions in one's immediate (new) environment as well as to the sets generated elsewhere. These two sets of questions and priorities may intersect, especially given the planetary scale of the urgent issues we face today. Nonetheless, the enigmatic problem of the exilic condition comes forth in intellectual settings that deny the plurilingual and collective nature of thinking. These settings also often involve implicit or explicit forms of racism/monohumanism supplemented by exclusionary narratives constituting the dominance of nation state and citizenship paradigms. Thus, such knowledge ecosystems devalue and dismiss a knowing subject that speaks from a different epistemic standpoint. In opposition, the figure that insists on thinking otherwise cultivates a decolonial attitude, which entails incessant border crossing, negotiation, and translation.

Reflecting on these conditions of theorization which constitute my location, I wonder: Does exilic consciousness necessarily promote decolonial thinking, or, more specifically, what is it to theorize from the Global South while one is displaced in the Global North? One interesting formulation that brings decolonial thinking close to exile comes from Walter D. Mignolo, who somehow echoes Said's contrapuntal method. After citing Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, which marks the beginning of the end of the land-centric political imagination of location, Mignolo offers a connection between exile and border thinking:

Now, if exiles (as well as diasporic people, immigrants, and refugees) are all a form of 'location-in-movement' rather than 'location-in-land' (and both in-movement and in-land are understood as 'places'), we could perhaps argue that border thinking is a necessary consequence of these sorts of locations. Exiles 'have' to leave the territory

where they belonged and, consequently, are located in a particular kind of subaltern position, and that subaltern position creates the conditions for double consciousness and border thinking. To be in exile is to be simultaneously in two locations and in a subaltern position. And those are the basic conditions for border thinking to emerge at different levels: epistemic, political and ethic.²⁴

Enacting the plurality of thought and taking an exilic point of view, theorizing from the Global South entails ushering in perspectives and knowledges that challenge the colonially administrated world. This, in effect, implies engaging with a spectrum of intellectual traditions that have been part of the Global South. Yet, they have not been thought of as a body of knowledge production with distinct homological affinities, capable of offering perspectives that challenge formulations perpetuated by colonial epistemologies that assume various forms of monolingualism and monohumanism. This is an intellectual chance to generate and think with imaginaries capable of unsettling the capitalist and war-oriented world, imagining a more just and better future. Exilic consciousness is potentially decolonial as long as it existentially enacts the struggle against colonialities in order to undo them. It is decolonial in as much as it facilitates the cultivation of habits of thinking that challenge hegemonic forms of knowledge, hence imagining the planet differently in order to undo the perpetual silences and the erasures of different ways of knowing, sensing, and doing that are devalued or annihilated by the dominant local cultures universalized by the coloniality of power.

24 L. Elena Delgado and Rolando J. Romero, 'Local Histories and Global Designs: An Interview with Walter D. Mignolo', *Discourse*, 22.3 (2000), pp. 7–33 (p. 15) <<https://doi.org/10.1353/dis.2000.0004>>.

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