Deprovincializing Habermas

Global Perspectives

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Defending Habermas against Eurocentrism: Latin America and Mignolo's Decolonial Challenge

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The task of this chapter will be to consider some of the implications of the relation between Jürgen Habermas' critical social theory and postcolonial theory in the distinctive context of Latin America. Although contemporary social research presupposes that these societies can be comprehended through the contextual re-specification and revision of the categories of Euro-American philosophy and social science, the most influential effort to construct a Latin American 'postcolonial' theory — namely, the coloniality/modernity research programme led by Walter Mignolo — has called into question such 'colonial' strategies. Habermas in particular has been chastized for his 'Eurocentric fundamentalism' (Grosfoguel et al. 2007). Such polemical characterizations not only discourage more reasoned dialogue, they also reflect a more general lack of awareness of the potential contributions of Habermas' theory to many of the questions addressed in postcolonial theory. Accordingly, the argument developed here will be that those who have recently been involved in critically appropriating aspects of the Habermasian tradition in Latin America need not see their efforts as jeopardized by charges of Eurocentricism. Nevertheless, the 'decolonial' challenge represented by Mignolo does suggest the need for greater sensitivity to some of the issues posed by post-colonial theories.

The three sections of the following discussion can be summarized as follows. The first section will provide a brief introduction to Latin American philosophy and social theory through a discussion of the dominant modernist, 'universalistic' tradition and its reception of the Frankfurt School legacy, and especially of Habermas. The second will focus on the challenge to Habermas' social theory

represented by the 'modernity/coloniality research programme', as synthesized in the 'geopolitics of knowledge' of Walter Mignolo. The third section will suggest that Habermas' notion of modernity as an 'unfinished project' can incorporate multiple modernities and issues of cultural diversity. In conclusion, it will be argued that Habermas — allied with insights from some of his sympathetic critics and 'postoccidentalist' thinkers such as the Brazilian educational theorist, Paulo Freire, and the philosopher, Eduardo Mendieta — provides a more persuasive account of the conditions of possibility of the intercultural dialogue necessary for reducing the pathologies of modernity in Latin America.

To begin, it is instructive to ask whether 'Latin America' might be considered 'non-Western'. Although Latin American courses generally qualify as non-Western in the undergraduate curricula of the United States, this assumption has been conventionally rejected by cultural theorists because of the absence of a non-Western heritage based on 'universal' religions such as Islam, Hinduism or Confucianism. Nevertheless, there has been a dissident tradition, more recently associated with intercultural and liberation philosophy, that has sought to bring attention to those 'others' — such as descendants of slaves and indigenous peoples — who were marginalized within Latin American modernity.

Comparative inter-civilizational analysis provides a framework for understanding the New World in terms of four 'modernities': the US, Canada, the Caribbean, and Latin America (with Brazil as a distinctive region). Moreover, the more recent revitalization of indigenous cultures suggests perhaps a fifth 'modernity' that includes the 'colonized' populations of African slaves, and especially the originary peoples deriving from pre-Columbian civilizations (Smith 2010). At the same time, however, this possible additional civilizational category is highly heterogeneous, dispersed in various nation-states, and formed through a process of colonial destruction and post-conquest reconfiguration that included five centuries of contact with modernity. Moreover, this partially non-Western, hybrid underside of the New World affects all four modernities — Canada and the US only differ in being English (and French) settler colonies and thus having distinct political institutions and limited mixing with the indigenous population. In some parts of Latin America, the significance of these marginalized populations is far greater and characterized by much higher rates of

exclusion. Indigenous peoples (not including assimilated mestizos) make up around 10 per cent of the overall population, although they are concentrated in five countries in which they represent between 10 and 50 per cent of the population, namely Bolivia, Guatemala, Peru, Ecuador, and Mexico. Those of African descent constitute around 30 per cent of the total (including mixed categories), again highly concentrated in Brazil and around the Caribbean (Hooker 2005).

Latin American Modernity and the Frankfurt Tradition

Given the context of early 19th-century independence movements against Spain and Portugal, Latin American elites shared a universalistic European orientation defined by being 'modernist' in a region characterized by chronically failing 'modernization'. Although now often criticized as 'Eurocentric' in postcolonial literature, the reception of European culture and philosophy was not purely imitative and reflected local conditions, as well as the diverse perspectives of national intellectual elites. Positivist social science and Marxism became major forces in the academic world in the post-World War II period, at which point influences from the United States began to supplement those from Europe. In the mid-1980s, however, Latin American Marxism underwent a prolonged crisis, with many defecting to the emerging democratic options and a new focus on civil society and social movements as bases for radical democratic reform (Castañeda 1993). Despite its roots in the European tradition, a distinctive tradition of Latin American philosophy has also become increasingly visible (Mendieta 2003b).

The reception of the earlier Frankfurt School tradition and Habermas in Latin America has been shaped by several characteristics of the ecology of knowledge production. Brazil is the leading centre for discussion of the Frankfurt tradition generally, partly because it has been the site of Portuguese translations and has by far the highest level of investment in higher education and research (Pucci 2009). Further, the relative success of the Lula regime created a practical laboratory for debates about deliberative democracy and education, symbolized in the work and example of Paulo Freire, whose approach has been taken to have significant affinities with Habermas' theory of communicative action (Morrow and Torres 2002).

In contrast, Spain has been the primary centre for translation and reception in Spanish, as well as the training of many Latin American doctoral students. Only more recently have some doctoral students been studying at the renewed Frankfurt Institute for Social Research headed by Axel Honneth (Basaure 2010), and the New School for Social Research in New York. Mexico and Argentina have been the most important sources of reception in Spanish in Latin America, as secondary publishing centres with strong philosophical and social theoretical traditions. Indeed, the recent occasion of the signing of a cooperative agreement between the *Instituto Germano-Argentina* and Honneth's Frankfurt programme provided an occasion to recall that 'Adorno, Marcuse and Habermas are also Argentines' (Bilbao 2010) — a point referring to Felix Weil (1898–1975), who used his father's business fortune gained in Argentina to fund the original Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. Erich Fromm had also moved to Mexico City in the mid-1960s, thus giving the older Frankfurt tradition a significant profile.

The reception of Habermas has been particularly problematic outside of Brazil for a variety of reasons. The predominance of orthodox Marxist debates into the late 1980s contributed to a very limited response to the early Habermas' theory of knowledge interests, whereas on the traditional Left, the theory of communicative action was greeted with widespread disappointment and, indeed, often superficially considered a 'turn to the right'. His post-metaphysical insistence on the more limited role of philosophy has also found little sympathy from more traditional philosophers and theologians, who have been more interested in the older tradition of Adorno, Marcuse and Benjamin.

Only with the revival of discussions of civil society, the public sphere and deliberative democracy in the 1990s has Habermas' work enjoyed an extensive, if selective, reception in the social sciences, especially communications, education, democratic theory and law reform (Morrow 2010). It is more appropriate here to perhaps speak of the reception of a 'Habermasian tradition', given that discussions often include some of those with whom he has engaged in debate — such as Taylor, Rorty and Rawls — as well as his sympathetic critics close to the Frankfurt tradition, especially Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser (Mendoça 2007). The recent widespread reception of Honneth's theory of recognition in

particular promises to have a major impact on research in the near future (Saavedra and Sobottka 2009; Sauerwald 2008).

To conclude, there are several features of the current Habermas reception that can be highlighted. First, it does not involve a simple imitative application of theoretical concepts and gives little evidence of an overt 'colonial' mentality, as opposed to autonomous, reflexive appropriation and empirical case study analysis. Second, the discussion of Habermas in the social sciences is part of a wider reception of the 'critical' democratic, legal and social movement literature. And third, the question of Habermas' 'Eurocentrism' is not a preoccupation, and Mignolo's modernity/coloniality research programme has for the most part been ignored in the Habermas reception. Nevertheless, as the next section will suggest, decolonial theory does represent a challenge to Habermas' critical theory, which needs to be addressed.

Mignolo and the Modernity/Coloniality Research Programme

The 'Modernity/Coloniality Research Program' (also referred to as the 'Decolonial Option' or 'Decolonial Turn') refers to the ambitious project of a loose interdisciplinary network of scholars led by Walter Mignolo (Duke University), who have met at various points from 1998 onwards (Grosfoguel 2008; Mignolo 2007b), becoming the most influential tendency within the broader context of the 'postcolonial' in Latin America (Moraña et al. 2008). As Scott Michaelsen and Scott Cutler Shershow have put it,

> For better or for worse, Walter D. Mignolo's work on the problem of colonialism has had a sizable impact on the field of Latin American studies. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to suggest that his books tend to monopolize, in our time, the question of Latin American 'dissenting imaginaries' (2007: 39).

The group emerged out of the failure of efforts to develop a Latin American 'subaltern studies' network. The project defined itself in opposition to existing postmodern, postcolonial and subaltern theory, as well as related forms of identity politics and multiculturalism. Whereas postmodernism was criticized for both relativism and being part of a Eurocentric critique of modernity, postcolonial

and subaltern theory were charged with excessive reliance on European theorists and over-generalizing the experiences of English colonialism. Indeed, the group rejects the term 'postcolonial' because of the implication that colonialism ended two centuries ago with the success of independence movements in Latin America. The group also explicitly rejects the Marxist tradition as Eurocentric, and hence limited by its origins in the 'local history of Europe' and its class conflicts.

Mignolo turned to the decolonial project late in his career. Although he grew up in a rural Italian immigrant family in Argentina, scholarships allowed him to undertake university studies in Paris in semiotics and Latin American cultural history. An eventual academic position in the US provoked a first phase of political radicalization in response to Chicano studies and racial conflicts in the 1970s. In 2000, the publication of *Local Histories/Global Designs* (Mignolo 2000) provided the initial conceptual framework for the 'geopolitics of knowledge' that guides the coloniality/modernity research programme, although his later essays and the contributions of other group members have subsequently modified and radicalized the project.

Consistent with the primacy given to the recovery of non-European sources of knowledge, Mignolo's geopolitics of knowledge builds on the work of the philosopher Enrique Dussel (1934–) and the sociologist Aníbal Quijano (1928–). Dussel is a well-known pioneer of liberation philosophy who fled Argentina for Mexico in 1975, a turning point that led to a new reading of Marx and Levinas. The outcome was a 'philosophy of liberation' based on the standpoint of the subaltern (Dussel 1998), a project that developed as part of a dialogue with the Frankfurt critical theory tradition (Dussel 1995, 1996). Mignolo uses Dussel's liberation philosophy as an example of 'decolonizing' philosophy, although Dussel himself describes his method in terms of deconstruction-reconstruction and transmodernity. Consequently, a crucial question for the future of Latin American philosophy is the conflict of interpretation over Dussel's legacy — that is, over whether it can be fully reconciled with the decolonial world-historical mission of 'decolonization as an unfinished project' (Maldonado-Torres 2011), despite its reliance on European thought, including its dialogical relation to Marx and the Frankfurt tradition.

The more decisive basis of Mignolo's geopolitics of knowledge, however, is the theory of the 'coloniality of power' developed by the Peruvian sociologist Quijano. This point becomes evident in considering three of the key conceptual foundations of Mignolo's synthesis, which is both deconstructive and reconstructive: his use of Quijano's theory of the 'coloniality of power' as the basis for an epistemological interpretation of the continuing and relatively unchanged effects of colonialism; his own concept of 'border think-ing' as a way of describing the suppressed subaltern knowledges resulting from the experience of 'colonial difference' and resistance to coloniality; and a political strategy that gives primacy to episte-mological 'decolonization' as a process of 'liberation' (as opposed to Eurocentric notions of 'emancipation'), to be realized through 'de-linking' and 'epistemological disobedience'.

Quijano's sociological theory of the 'coloniality of power' argues that the Spanish and Portuguese colonization of the 16th century created a novel system of power and control based primarily on racial classifications, but supplemented with gender and property classifications and a system of labour control that even today con-stitutes the 'specific rationality' of global power: 'Eurocentrism' (Quijano 2000: 523). It is important to note that the coloniality of power argument is primarily an epistemic — and structuralist — thesis about the continuing dominance of mental and cognitive structures as the basis for explaining inequality in modernity. Quijano writes,

> This relationship consists, in the first place, of a colonization of the imagination of the dominated. . . . Coloniality, then, is still the most general form of the domination in the world today, once colonialism as an explicit political order was destroyed (2007[1991]: 170).

The second foundation of the decolonial approach is what Mignolo adds to Quijano's theory of the epistemic effects of colo-niality: a 'geopolitics of knowledge' informed by Foucault's under-standing of 'subjugated knowledges', but redefined as 'subaltern knowledges'. The central concern is the 'locus of enunciation' of knowledge claims, especially the colonizing use of European impe-rial 'global designs' to subordinate 'local histories' (Mignolo 2000). Colonial victims thus have subaltern standpoints based on 'colonial difference', a term that has epistemic implications but is also linked

to the traumatic effects of colonial 'wounds'. The now influential concept of 'border thinking' is used to describe colonial culture as a cultural and epistemic 'battlefield' that cannot be understood adequately in conventional notions of syncretism or hybridity. Consequently, the modern world system is characterized by a marginalization of the 'subaltern knowledges' arising from colonial difference. Such border thinking has a 'double voice' because it is characterized by a two-way translation across epistemic borders. This thesis is exemplified in a series of case studies of New World writers — American, indigenous, Caribbean, Latin American — who express such 'subaltern reason'.

A third central theme follows from the primacy given to coloniality: *liberation as epistemic decolonization* through 'de-linking', a thesis legitimated in part by a controversial reading of Franz Fanon (Mignolo 2007a). The argument, however, goes far beyond other discussions of the 'decentring', 'deparochialization' or 'deprovincialization' of European thought (Chakrabarty 2007; Costa 2006). Mignolo's understanding of 'decolonization' is based on the ambiguous imperative of de-linking from the West:

> It is no longer possible, or at least it is not unproblematic, to 'think' from the canon of Western philosophy, even when part of the canon is critical of modernity. To do so means to reproduce the blind epistemic ethnocentrism that makes difficult, if not impossible, any political philosophy of inclusion (Mignolo 2002: 66).

To be sure, Mignolo equivocates in acknowledging that such a task is 'not impossible', even if it is 'difficult'. It is clearly 'not impossible' in Latin America, since Dussel's liberation philosophy does build on the critical canons of Western philosophy, despite extensive use of local traditions. For Mignolo, delinking also requires an 'alternative to the social sciences', rejecting Immanuel Wallerstein's alternative of their 'opening' as insufficient to overcome Eurocentrism: 'I have highlighted philosophy, but what I said about it applies to the social sciences as well' (Mignolo 2002: 73).

Some of the more problematic implications of the project are also evident in the call within the project for integrating traditional and modern knowledge:

> I am referring to a world in which non-occidental systems of knowledge can be incorporated into the curriculums of occidental universities

on equal terms in areas like law, medicine, biology, economy and philosophy. A world in which for example the Yoruba cosmovision, the Buddhist cosmovision of Zen, or the cosmovision of the Cuna Indians, can serve to advance towards a more integral science . . . (Castro-Gómez 2007: 444).

Whether Mignolo would embrace this statement as a whole is an open question, but it is consistent with his call for a democratization of epistemology. Although such arguments were initially developed in relation to Latin America, they were subsequently generalized as part of a global geopolitics of knowledge. The project is not modest about its claims: 'The de-colonial turn refers to a shift in knowledge production of similar nature and magnitude to the linguistic and pragmatic turns' (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 261). Similarly, Mignolo characterizes the American chicana lesbian Anzaldúa's contributions as comparable to a Cartesian shift of perspective (Mignolo 2005: 135). Further, a central member of the project also insists that,

[J]ust as one can speak of an (unfinished) project of modernity (J. Habermas), so too can one speak of an (unfinished) project of decolonization. These two projects are not entirely separable, since decolonization itself can be seen as a 'permanent process' that 'completes' or subsumes and exhausts the emancipatory elements of modernity (Maldonado-Torres 2011: 3).

Despite being a major influence on North American 'Latin American Studies', Mignolo has received some severe criticism. For example, literary theorists have questioned his use of Derrida and charged him with arcadian romanticism (Michaelsen and Shershow 2007). Marxist cultural theorists have criticized his idealism, culturalism, and abandonment of exploitation and class conflict (Read 2005: 82–83). The Brazilian critical sociologist José Maurício Domingues questions his 'incredibly harsh commentary on Habermas' views' of democracy (Domingues 2009: 121) and rejects his 'inversion' of modernization theory, alleging that it is based on a reductionist account of modernity as domination, and implies that 'only what is not modern — or is at least in ambiguous relations with modernity — is valuable in Latin America' (ibid.: 114).

Philosophers have largely ignored decolonial theory, with the exception of those with interests in Latin American philosophy,

such as the sympathetic article by the feminist philosopher Linda Alcoff. Although questioning his interpretations of hermeneutics, truth and identity, she nevertheless concludes that 'I believe we should consider seriously Mignolo's insistent claim in recent years that paradigms originating in the West do not need to be "expanded" or "pluralized" but more robustly transcended' (Alcoff 2007: 91).

Eduardo Mendieta is another exception, describing the foundations of his own 'dialogical cosmopolitianism' in terms of the three public intellectuals he thinks provide the most responsible way to carry on the Frankfurt critical theory tradition:

> Dussel, thinker of the underside of globalization and modernity; Habermas, the thinker of the enlightenment to come and power of discursive-communicative reason at work in quotidian existence; West, thinker of a political pragmatism that gives primacy to the empowerment of society's downtrodden (2007: 6–7).

Mendieta's synthetic stance is surprising in implicitly viewing Habermas and Mignolo as broadly complementary, as he makes evident in his description of Mignolo as a valuable resource for a 'critical cosmopolitanism' that links diversity and universalism as 'diversality' (Mendieta 2007). But this reconciliation depends on a selective reference to Mignolo, ignoring the essays and chapters where he draws upon a contentious reading of Fanon to legitimate a de-linking from European modernity. In short, whereas Mendieta's position can be located as part of a decentring and pluralization of Western social theory, Mignolo's decolonial approach often suggests the need for a 'robust transcendence' of it, to use Alcoff's phrase.

Although this is not the place for a detailed critique of Mignolo's project, other problems should be noted. First, the self-description of decolonial theory as a 'research program' cannot be justified in the social scientific sense, given the theory's dogmatic reliance on Quijano's coloniality of power thesis. Second, the discussion on border thinking and decolonization fails to engage the existing literature on indigenous knowledge. This has significant consequences, such as ignoring the 'darker side' of both fragmented indigenous traditions and 'border thinking' (for example, the Maoist movement in Peru), as well as failing to consider the research — strongly

influenced by Habermas and Freire — on many relatively success-ful examples of intercultural dialogue on health, education and the environment (Morrow 2008, 2009). Third, whatever the merits of Mignolo's decolonial analysis, it applies primarily to zones with large and relatively autonomous indigenous populations. While suggesting that critiques of modernity originating in the West 'can-not be valid for … those who are not white or Christian' (Mignolo 2002: 85–86), Mignolo does not confront the anomalies aris-ing from the fact that most black and indigenous people in Latin America are Christian and that the remaining vast majority are 'white', even as mestizos, most of whom deny their distant indig-enous ancestry. Consequently, decolonial theory cannot be usefully applied to Latin America as a whole, which is why leading Latin American researchers such as García Canclini have focused on the national reproduction of hegemony and the complex relations between globalization, culture industries, hybridity and modernity (García Canclini 1995). For Mignolo, of course, this strategy suf-fers from the 'Eurocentric' influence of authors such as Gramsci and Bourdieu.

Finally, Mignolo makes a problematic call for 'liberation from the social sciences', on the assumption that the social sciences in Latin America remain imitative and Eurocentric. Nevertheless, he tellingly fails to name or confront the leading contemporary Latin American social researchers who are supposedly guilty of such a colonial mentality. This antipathy towards the social sciences is closely related to a rejection of 'development' in any form as a Western imposition, a stance related to post-development theory (Rahnema 1997). Mignolo claims only sufficient knowledge of Latin America to make concrete political recommendations, con-cluding that given the 'impossibility' of democracy in capitalism, the best alternative would be Andean indigenous communalism, based on the principle that the economy should administer scarcity rather than accumulation (Mignolo 2008: 55–57).

Mignolo's utopian vision can be linked with what Victor Li calls the aporia of 'neo-primitivism' that haunts much modern social theory, which uses radical alterity as part of the redemption of the Western self: 'the primitive is valorized *in order to save us*, its radical heterogeneity *all too predictably serving our desire for a way out of modern civilization*' (Li 2006: 30; emphasis in original). Li gives Habermas a central place as the most sophisticated effort to

accommodate difference, while still defining modernity in opposi-
tion to the pre-modern. Mignolo, on the other hand, appears to
claim to break out of this aporetic dilemma by privileging the non-
Western primitive as the 'other' within a 'diversality' that links
diversity and universalism through 'another logic' characteristic of
'border thinking'. Yet Li would probably remain sceptical of this
claim, especially since the empirical primitive 'other' has largely
disappeared, being increasingly replaced by a spectral primitive
'other' constructed by the human sciences and the global mass
media.

So what could Habermas learn from Mignolo and the decolo-
nial project? Mignolo's preoccupation with coloniality does point
to forms of distorted communication and knowledge interests that
have not been adequately addressed. Nevertheless, despite the
many valuable insights of Mignolo's understanding of border think-
ing and critical cosmopolitanism, the resulting political call for
radical decolonization as de-linking is not very helpful in the Latin
American context, and distracts from a more multidimensional
understanding of poverty, the development of human capabilities
and transformative change. Consequently, a further opening up of
Habermas' theory to colonial difference could benefit more from
engagement with some of his sympathetic critics (such as Seyla
Benhabib and Thomas McCarthy), as well as with the Latin
American 'postoccidental' strategies of Paulo Freire's critical peda-
gogy and Eduardo Mendieta's approach to Latin American phi-
losophy. Before turning to this concluding theme, however, it is
necessary to provide an overview of Habermas' understanding of
'multiple modernities'.

Habermas on Modernity

The decolonial camp charges Habermas' theory of modernity with
Eurocentrism on the grounds that it 'is not sufficiently radical to
exorcize a coloniality which remains invisible to him. Habermas
does not realize that modernity is based on a massive epistemological
project of bad faith, to which he himself falls victim' (Maldonado-
Torres 2011: 10). Such charges can be given a superficial plausibil-
ity by recalling his comments in an interview of more than two
decades ago regarding whether his theory provided 'lessons' for the
Third World: 'I am tempted to say "no" . . . I am aware of the fact

that this is a eurocentrically limited view. I would rather pass the question' (Dews 1992: 183). Although implicitly admitting a sin of omission, 'tempted to say "no"' suggests that he was also not taking a paternalistic stance. More important, however, is whether his account of modernity is open to such questions, even if it rejects the totalizing and reductionist concept of 'coloniality'.

To confront the widespread prejudices regarding Habermas' conception of modernity, it is necessary to consider several of its neglected features: (*a*) a non-teleological understanding of moral universalism; (*b*) a concern with the 'pathologies of modernity'; (*c*) an awareness of 'multiple modernities'; (*d*) the recognition of the diversity of 'forms of life' that mediate the use of procedural reason; and (*e*) a sensitivity to the contradictory character of Western human rights discourses as potentially both repressive and emancipatory. I will consider these points in turn.

Habermas' references to an 'unfinished project' of modernity may suggest that he has in mind a teleological unfolding of Enlightenment modernization processes. But in fact, he argues that 'moral universalism is a historical result . . . not something that can safely be left to Hegel's absolute spirit. Rather, it is chiefly a function of collective efforts and sacrifices made by sociopolitical movements' (Habermas 1990: 170).

Misreadings of Habermas' defence of modernity also reflect a failure to appreciate his complex theory of rationalization. Habermas' qualified defence of aspects of modernity is two-edged: as part of the Frankfurt School tradition, he is also acutely aware of the *pathologies* of modernity. His account thus differentiates between two parallel processes in modernity: the 'instrumental rationalization' characteristic of science and technology as a form of control, as opposed to the 'social rationalization', which is directed towards organizing communicative relations around values. Consequently, the historical modernization process has been highly 'selective' in its use of technical rationality, given the potential of market forces and administrative power for the 'colonization of the lifeworld' (Habermas 1987). The use of the term 'colonization' here, however, should not be confused with its use in decolonial theory, where the focus is on the very different question of the primacy of *epistemic colonization* on the part of European thought.

Third, the selectivity and cross-cultural variations in 'modernization' lead Habermas to embrace Eisenstadt's conception of

'multiple modernities': 'The West is one participant among others, and all participants must be willing to be enlightened by others about their respective blind spots' (Mendieta 2010: 1).

A fourth problem is that those who criticize the formalism and proceduralism of Habermas' approach as a form of abstract universalism generally neglect his simultaneous insistence on the diversity of 'forms of life' (McCarthy 1999: 18). Such misleading interpretations fail to take into account his distinction between universalizing 'moral' arguments and contextual 'ethical' ones (related to Hegel's *Sittlichkeit*) grounded in cultural diversity. Such issues first received widespread attention in Habermas' debate with Charles Taylor on the 'politics of recognition' and subsequent writings on 'inclusion' (Habermas 1998). Similarly, Eduardo Mendieta concludes that 'one may argue then that procedural reason is post-Eurocentric or anti-ethnocentric, and in this way seeks a dialogue not just among the disciplines and sciences, but also among cultures and traditions' (Mendieta 2003a: 135).

A final question relates to the colonizing uses of Western rights discourses. The decolonial project reduces modernity to such pathological possibilities, whereas Habermas also considers emancipatory potentials:

> This normative idea of equal respect for everyone was developed in Europe, but it does not follow that it is merely a narrow-minded expression of European culture and Europe's will to assert itself. Human rights also depend on the reflexivity that enables us to step back from our own tradition and learn to understand others from their point of view . . . . That of course does not mean that Europeans and Americans do not need members of Arabic, Asiatic, or African cultures to enlighten them concerning the blind spots of their potentially selective ways of reading the meaning of human rights (1997: 82).

Opening Habermas: The Postoccidental Option

Although Habermas has written only in more general terms about the need for cross-civilizational learning, various resources are now available for 'opening' Habermas with respect to such issues. On the one hand, there are important contributions from authors close to Habermas. For example, Benhabib has attempted to rework his universalistic moral theory to make it less vulnerable to charges of ethnocentrism (Benhabib 2002). And McCarthy's recent *Race*,

Empire and the Idea of Human Development analyses the complicity of European thought in racism and colonialism as part of an immanent critique that fleshes out the social justice implications of Habermas' concern with the 'unfinished project' of modernity in peripheral and non-Western contexts as part of a 'critical theory of development' (McCarthy 2009).

On the other hand, there are forms of what Mendieta has called 'postoccidentalist' critical theory that do not succumb to the reductionism of Mignolo's one-dimensional decolonial version, even though they do speak in terms of critique 'from within' where 'the other speaks and responds back' (Mendieta 2007: 93). For example, educational philosopher Paulo Freire has long been recognized as a postcolonial thinker (Giroux 1993), even though he cannot be incorporated directly into the decolonial project, as noted with regret by a decolonial researcher (Walsh 2009). Furthermore, Freire's intersubjective understanding of knowledge and dialogue can be interpreted as having remarkable affinities with Habermas' theory of communicative action (Morrow and Torres 2002). Similarly, while Mendieta is appreciative of Mignolo's concepts of critical cosmopolitanism and border thinking, he tactfully ignores the ambiguous rhetoric of decolonization as de-linking, which opens the way for his own effort to synthesize Dussel, Habermas and West as part of a 'postoccidentalist' option in critical theory. The crucial challenge for Mendieta — to preserve his relation to Habermas and West — will be to respond to the contentious decolonial thesis that Dussel's liberation philosophy and conception of transmodernity 'acquires its proper meaning' only as the 'unfinished project of decolonization' (Maldonado-Torres 2011: 3).

A crucial limitation of Mignolo's decolonial approach is that it tends to reduce liberation to a single dimension — decolonization as de-linking — at the expense of a more multidimensional account of power, domination and emancipation. Instead of a search for 'alternatives to philosophy and the social sciences', Habermas' focus is on their continued reflexive, postpositivist transformation. In other words, an intercultural opening up and autonomous local appropriation are part of the same process. This stance does not preclude the necessity of situated decolonizing practices, such as bi-cultural indigenous education, intercultural learning and greater intercultural reflexivity in research. But it shifts the focus from decolonial

denunciation to the more open-ended goals of autonomy, mutual recognition, empowerment, deliberative democracy and dialogical collective learning. In other words, the opening up of the human sciences implies a gesture of global solidarity, an invitation for non-European standpoints and perspectives to take responsibility for constructing localized traditions of philosophy and social science as part of a complex process of creative appropriation *and* democratizing access to knowledge. An excellent example is evident in the 'knowledge democracy movement' in the international Freirean network. The point of departure is a simple question: 'Have we in the creation of formal academic structures of knowledge production created both an extraordinary body of scientific knowledge that has benefited large parts of humanity, but also constrained the flow of knowledge excluding many from recognition as producers of knowledge?' (Hall 2011: 12). So what is required is not a 'de-linking' from modern knowledge, but *re-linking* it in multiple ways in a 'Knowledge Commons' as part of a dialogue with those most in need of transformative knowledge.

Freedom requires not only autonomy, but also meeting modernity 'halfway' with the critical literacy that empowers 'border thinking' of diverse types beyond the limitations of oral culture. As Habermas has noted, 'any universalistic morality is dependent upon a form of life that meets it halfway', in the form of a 'modicum of congruent' practices of socialization and education that facilitate abstract, flexible ego identities and complementary, responsive institutions (Habermas 1990: 207). Such indigenous subjects who meet modernity 'halfway' — particularly indigenous intellectuals — have been insightfully analysed in Peru by anthropologist Marisol De la Cadena as 'indigenous mestizos' (De la Cadena 2005). In other words, when socialization processes create hybrid subjects with such capacities, ethical reflection and the reconstruction of communities cannot ignore dialogue with universal questions, as is vividly evident in the Andean, Zapatista, and other autonomy movements. So the question is not that of deciding *between* 'Western' and 'indigenous' democracy, but of the possibility of rethinking both in terms of the 'tribal' dimensions of 'intercultural public spheres' (James 1999).

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