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THE URGENCY OF DECOLONIALITY

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ABSTRACT

The notion of decolonisation presupposes a colonial predicament in need of resolution, but what colonial situation exists, and what need is there for decolonisation when national liberation has already been accomplished throughout much of the globe half a century ago?

This paper has two aims. First, it seeks to highlight the political-economic, socio-cultural, and ecological conditions that undergird the crisis of contemporary modern civilisation. It argues that this civilizational crisis derives from a colonial logic that animates all relations of modern exploitation and expropriation. Following this, the paper's other aim is not only to argue for the desirability of de-colonisation, but to highlight its urgency as an existential imperative for life on earth. Moreover, the paper suggests that such a de-colonial move has to be undertaken as a personal everyday practice. Integral to this move is the conceptual distinction I make between colonisation and de-colonisation/de-Westernisation on the one hand, and coloniality and de-coloniality on the other. The paper concludes by considering some practical de-colonial options available to us.

INTRODUCTION

The prospect of decolonisation presupposes a colonial situation in need of resolution, but what colonial situation exists, and what need is there for decolonisation when movements of *de jure* de-colonisation and national liberation have already occurred and brought forth national independence across the globe following the end of World War Two? What would the praxis of decolonisation mean today?

The paper has two main objectives. First, it aims to draw attention to the severity of the overlapping socio-political, economic, and ecological crises that beset humanity today, which constitutes nothing less than a crisis of civilization. I will argue that this crisis of modern rational civilisation has obtained from a logic of coloniality, the *logos* that necessarily animates all relations of (colonial) exploitation and expropriation. Modernity, which is an ontological condition given by an adherence to instrumental rationality in all human affairs - with human others as well as non-human nature - is thus homologous with coloniality. This affirms the modernity/rationality/coloniality homology as per Quijano (2010). Second, the purpose of raising awareness about the unfolding civilizational crisis is meant to underscore not just the desirability of de-colonisation, but also its urgency. Contemporary climate science has revealed that our natural environment - our habitat - is in serious jeopardy in the face of drastic climate change. Yet, there is no indication that at the level of global diplomacy, ecologically meaningful solutions are being discussed, much less pursued. This paper features a discussion that concludes by signalling the various ways and different levels at which meaningful de-colonisation can occur. In the process, it will distinguish conceptually between coloniality and colonisation, and their respective responses, namely, de-coloniality and de-colonisation.

While this paper does not offer a step-by-step formula for de-colonisation, the discussion it initiates points in the general direction of a variety of de-colonial possibilities. Moreover, unlike the *de jure* national de-colonial movements that have tended to operate at the level of geo-political international relations, which in most instances are detached from the mundane concerns of our everyday lives, this paper highlights de-coloniality as a mode of liberation for which each of us has to be responsible, and can directly partake of. I argue that de-coloniality, which grapples with colonialism's underlying logic, represents a significant move. It is a mode of de-colonial praxis available to each of us.

THE WHOLESALE CRISES OF (POST) MODERN CIVILISATION: POLITICAL-ECONOMIC, SOCIO-CULTURAL, ECOLOGICAL

As the world spins and our lives are subsumed by the happy consciousness administered by our popular culture of techno-fetishism, consumerism, advertising, and its encompassing liberalist worldview, all seems well. The said fetishism involves the unquestioned faith in technological progress as the solution to all of humanity's problems. Meanwhile, information and communication technologies have enabled an advertising industry with the powers to create a homogenising global consumerist culture. Additionally, it would seem that the worldview of liberalism, which has truly become global today, tends to socialise us into conformity, if not also complacency. Our socialisation appears to induce conformity with the predominant social tendency to "live to work" rather than the converse, and the complacent

belief that continued economic and technological progress will spawn a glorious future. This complacency is hardly new. In the immediate aftermath of the Cold War, Fukuyama (1992) triumphantly declared with that we had reached the “end of history”. With the collapse of Soviet socialism, there was naturally the hubris to think that the history of the West was also that of the world.

Such conceit is not easy to give up. Despite what has transpired in the thirty years in the West since, involving a dramatic increase of wealth and income inequality amongst its population, some still insist that the globalized world of today represents the best of all possible worlds (Easterbrook 2018, McCloskey 2016, Pinker 2011): we live longer, supposedly wage less war, while continued technological progress promises to deliver humanity from the bane of being human.

The proponents of technology continue to argue that its progress will liberate humans from the drudgery of work.¹ It would be a wonder if such arguments still had currency. After all, the West has over the past decade seen the future of its youth blighted by long-term unemployment. To illustrate, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for under-25 year olds in the Eurozone in March 2018 were highest in Greece, Spain, and Italy and stood at 42.3%, 35%, and 31.7% respectively.² Unemployment increased dramatically when the global financial meltdown of 2008 caused bankruptcy and financial trouble for many employers. Furthermore, the general economic crisis was exacerbated by the imposition of neoliberal austerity policies on Eurozone countries, ostensibly as a solution for the crisis. It is worth noting that labour-saving technology has often been deployed to enforce austerity. The situation is not without irony: the technologists and the captains of industry drone on about the benefits of “saving” labour, yet in the money-exchange economy, it is by way of labour that the masses must earn their bread. Who and what is being saved as the technologically-displaced and austerity-stricken go hungry?

The mass-media of the high-growth and hi-tech-dependent modern capitalist system seems inclined to convince us that we live in the best possible world, and that it only gets better. Wallerstein (1995) has referred to this liberal faith in the inevitability of progress as constituting the geo-culture of the modern world-system. Indeed, in this modern and increasingly postmodern capitalist world of make-believe, things hum along, so-called progress continues unabated, and the roseate future beckons. Technological optimism appears irrepressible and we are supposed to feel assuaged. In this feel-good context, it would not be amiss to ask: what need for decolonisation? Decolonisation of what, and from what?

Despite the general optimism about the ineluctability of progress, it would be evident to anyone keeping a relatively close eye on world affairs that post-World War Two declarations of national liberation notwithstanding, imperial machinations have never quite ceased, neither after World War Two nor after the collapse of Soviet state-socialism. In the past

¹ See the following 24 April 2018 article in *The Economist*. The article’s heading reads that “a study finds nearly half of jobs are vulnerable to automation” before noting, without irony, that “that could free people to pursue more interesting careers.” <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2018/04/24/a-study-finds-nearly-half-of-jobs-are-vulnerable-to-automation>. Last accessed on 13 July 2018.

² These unemployment figures in the Eurozone are obtained from: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/268830/unemployment-rate-in-eu-countries/>. Last accessed 11 July 2018.

seventeen years alone, we have witnessed a handful of countries in the Middle East bombed by the United States and its NATO allies: Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Yemen, Syria, and Pakistan.

The concept of national sovereignty, which was a notion accompanying the birth of nations following the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia has been reduced to mere platitude. Babones (2016) is unequivocal in declaring the Westphalian era over. He comes to such a conclusion by observing the frequency with which the United States and its allies, notably the United Kingdom and France, and to a lesser degree, their common rival, Russia, have waged war to settle the internal affairs of other states. In particular, they have tended to impose regime-change in states that have pursued policies of national political and economic independence. And interstate war is but only one way of undermining sovereignty. As Babones (2016) notes, "The United States employs a wide range of policy instruments to install and maintain constitutional orders that accord with its desires in countries around the world, often in conjunction with its (many) allies." Be that as it may, one cannot help but feel that in the present global political conjuncture, Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, Syria, Venezuela and Cuba are considered to be rogue states in the eyes of the West in general, and its lead-nation, the United States, in particular.

In the meantime, while such geo-political machinations continue, climate change accelerates. Stassen observes that the "current rate of carbon emissions is unprecedented... (in) the ... past 66 million years." (Stassen 2016: 1-2). Since September 2016, the atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide has surpassed 400 parts per million (ppm). Atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration of 400 ppm is the symbolic red line of global climate change, since it roughly translates to an increase of 2 degrees Celsius in average global temperature.

Although an increase of 2 degree Celsius is the target of the latest international climate treaty, the 2015 Paris Agreement, it has been contested for being set too high. Wasdell argues that in light of "advances in understanding of implicit sea-level raise and the dynamic response of global climate to small changes in average surface temperature", the temperature limit has to be set "below 1 degree Celsius if we are to avoid catastrophic climate change." (Wasdell 2015: v). This view is corroborated by Wadhams (2014), who notes that owing to climate sensitivity of the planet to CO₂, and to the fact that the latter endures for so long in the atmosphere, our carbon budget has already been spent. He adds: "The carbon dioxide that we put into the atmosphere, which now exceeded 400 parts per million, is sufficient... to actually raise global temperatures in the end by about 4 degrees."³

Other researchers have meanwhile arrived at the conclusion that a 4 degree Celsius rise in global temperature saturates the earth's vegetation - in its capacity as a natural carbon sink - to sequester atmospheric carbon dioxide. This leads to the rapid release of carbon back into the atmosphere, which only adds to more global warming. It is owing to such projections that Smith et. al. (2015) suggest that we could be on the verge of "near-term acceleration in the rate of temperature change."

³ Wadhams, Peter. 2014. "Is it time to think about engineering our climate?". University of Cambridge, International Summer Schools Geoengineering Debate.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tvYRNpc3_A&feature=youtu.be. Last accessed 15 June 2018.

The prospect of accelerated and abrupt - rather than gradual - climate change has to be considered in the context of earth's ability to continue serving as habitat for humans and other forms of terrestrial life. One of the necessary conditions for earth to sustain life is its ability to grow food. On this score, it is important to mention Methane, another greenhouse gas with 20-25 times the climate-forcing potential of carbon dioxide. While the Arctic region is the source of much of the earth's Methane, with much of it trapped in the permafrost, the latter is rapidly thawing due to global warming, generating concerns about the precipitation of runaway climate-change. Accordingly, this led to a 2014 report in the Sydney Morning Herald to warn, "Let us be clear: if these methane escapes continue to grow, the risk is they could drive the planet into accelerated or 'runaway' global warming. The last time this happened, 50 million years ago, global temperatures rose by an estimated 9 or 10 degrees. In the present context, that would mean the end of the world's food supply."⁴

Such reports on the climate suggest rather bleak consequences for the human species, since the complex ecological systems needed for life on earth appear to be getting destroyed much more rapidly than their capacity for regeneration. In ecological terms, we have shot past the point of no-return, and the prospect of whether humanity can survive itself seems to be a reality we need to brace ourselves for. It appears that the question is no longer whether but when the cataclysm of species extinction, including that of humans, begins on a significant scale.

Scientists who are cognisant of the seriousness of global climate change and its consequences for the planet's ecological systems are giving us just decades before wholesale ecological collapse. It is a shuddering thought, yet many among us are either oblivious to the severity of the crisis or seem to be awaiting institutional solutions. The dominant institutions of the system, meanwhile, seem bent upon continuing with business as usual. The term "sustainability" has been co-opted as a marketable catchphrase that gives the appearance of corporate social responsibility for environmental sustainability, when the de facto concern seems, invariably, to be the sustainability of profits. Such is the law of (economic) value, the imperative of capitalism. I will clarify this relationship between the ecological crisis and colonisation in a moment.

Meanwhile, our technologically-mediated culture, which is infused with the liberal idea of constant progress, seriously militates against our ability to make sense of current realities. On this score, Marcuse (1964) has been vindicated in his observation about the diminished need for blatant forms of terror in the modern age, for there was now technology. Meanwhile, oppositional thinking hardly needs to be suppressed, for it barely happens.

In sum, humanity is today mired deep in the throes of a deep and escalating crisis of simultaneously political, economic, social, cultural, and ecological dimensions, and there are no signs of abatement. More importantly, there is little acknowledgement of the severity of the crisis, much less the pursuit of viable practices to resolve it. In fact, we seem to be collectively paralysed and merely awaiting its denouement. The question of whether humanity can survive itself has now ceased being a mere topic of philosophical reflection; it is now a rapidly unfolding reality.

⁴ See: <https://www.smh.com.au/opinion/beware-the-dragon-of-runaway-climate-change-20140814-1040cw.html>. Last accessed: 16 June 2018.

But what has the foregoing discussion about modern civilisation - notably, its political economic expressions and its ecological consequences - to do with colonial relations and colonisation? How have we arrived at this point, seemingly at the precipice of our collective demise? In particular, what connects modernity with the Western colonial project and with the ecological and political-economic crises of our time? I submit that it is against the backdrop of imminent ecological and civilisational collapse, and nothing less, that the urgency of immediate decolonisation needs to be appreciated.

In the following section, I will sketch in broad and somewhat schematic fashion the underlying causes for the situation that we find ourselves. This is a situation that I believe captures the essential meaning of “colonialism”, for it is undergirded by a colonial logic that implicates not only our relationships – with both human others and with non-human nature - but also our forms of knowledge as well as our subjectivities.

MODERNITY, COLONIALITY, AND THE WEST

I submit that “colonialism” is a process involving a dominant group’s exploitation of social and natural domains – colonies - that it has generally marked out to be racially as well as spatially and temporally different from itself. In the modern age, the West was the leading exemplar of such colonialism, allowing its exploitation of the non-West based on constructions of racial, temporal, and spatial differences. Such construction of difference was picked up by the Japanese thinker, Yoshimi Takeuchi, who noted that for Europe to be Europe it had to invade the East: “Only by breaking into the heterogeneous, was Europe able to confirm itself.” (cited in Muto 2010: 178). This view is echoed by Wang Hui, who observes, “Historically, Asia is not an Asian concept but a European concept.” (cited in Muto 2010: 178). It would appear that the symptoms described in the foregoing are the result of such a colonial process and its defining logic, which I refer to as “coloniality.”

The concept of “coloniality” is attributable to the Peruvian sociologist, Anibal Quijano (2000), and has been described as the “invisible and constitutive side” of modernity (Mignolo 2007: 451). According to Quijano (2010: 23), “coloniality” involves, in the first instance, a “colonisation of the imagination of the dominated.” It is because of such mental colonisation among the world’s postcolonial peoples that we can speak of the enduring effects of colonialism despite the occurrence of *de jure* de-colonisation - national liberation - worldwide. It is important to note, accordingly, that coloniality invokes not only economic, political, and military domination, but also their epistemic and mental consequences.

Quijano invokes coloniality also to describe a “matrix of power” through which, for roughly over the past four centuries, the West has manipulated and managed its control of global realities in four interrelated domains.⁵ The elements of this matrix include the realms of material reproduction, encompassing the economy and its institutional governance,

⁵ I define the West broadly as being constituted historically by North America (the United States, Canada), Australia, New Zealand, and what would previously have been Western Europe. Essentially, I conceive of “the West” in terms of a cultural geography rather than a physical one. As such, I deploy the term to refer to the above entities who derive their cultural identity from the legacy of the European Enlightenment, or what Trouillot (2002) calls the “North Atlantic Universals”.

sociality,⁶ and knowledge and subjective-formation. As Quijano (2010: 22) observes, “A relation of direct, political, social and cultural domination was established by the Europeans over the conquered of all continents.” This far-reaching domination was literally all-encompassing, for between 1492 and 1941, Europeans had conquered 84 per cent of the globe, establishing colonies and spreading their influence across every inhabited continent (Hoffman 2015).

The consequence of Western dominance meant that Eurocentrism, which was constituted by the general belief in the superiority and universality of Western experience, would become commonplace. This would be the case not only in the West but, gradually, in the non-West too (Kho 2009). According to Latouche (1996: 3), “Westernisation” entailed the “global uniformity of lifestyles” and the “standardisation of the mind”. Because it widely became associated with a way of life that was not only supposedly legitimate, but better, it would become a popular aspiration throughout the world, not least among its colonised populations. This essentially led to the widespread belief that the unique historical experience of the West should become the universal fate of humankind. As Muto (2010: 178) aptly puts it, “The West appropriates for itself the privilege of turning its private affairs and concerns into public affairs and concerns of the non-West.” Accordingly, Quijano (2010: 23) describes that, “cultural Europeanisation was transformed into an aspiration. It was a way of participating and later to reach the same material benefits and the same power as the Europeans: viz, to conquer nature – in short for ‘development’. European culture became a universal cultural model.”

With this development, Eurocentrism - involving Western ways of apprehending the world - was no longer simply another ethnocentrism, for it now took on the status of a universal perspective, akin to a god’s-eye-view of the world. In line with these features of Eurocentrism, typical Western readings of modernity tend to be unequivocal in their celebration of modernity as the high-point not only of the West, but of humanity more generally (Landes 1998; Pinker 2011; Ferguson 2011; McCloskey 2016; Toulmin 1990). Not surprisingly, such positive readings of modernity owe largely to the fact that they are based on accounts that are self-referential, what I would regard as “internal” accounts of modernity that are being offered by its beneficiaries and proponents.

In contrast, it can be said that Quijano, Mignolo et. al. (2010) evaluate modernity from the vantage-point of the colonies and those left out of modernity’s supposed success-story. They challenge the latter account of modernity by bringing to light the hidden story of “the people without history” (Wolf 1982) who have invariably had to bear the costs of those supposedly making history. As Mignolo (2007: 7) notes, the (intellectual) task then becomes one “of uncovering the origin of...‘the myth of modernity’ itself. Modernity includes a rational ‘concept’ of emancipation that we affirm and subsume. But, at the same time, it develops an irrational myth, a justification for genocidal violence.”

Quijano et. al. thus seek to draw our attention to coloniality, modernity’s other – darker – side, which implicates logics and practices of unremitting exploitation and predation. It is important to mention that the nature and severity of modernity’s violence have often

⁶ By “sociality”, I am referring to the dominant idealised social forms by which people establish and maintain relations. In this case, I am particularly thinking of contractual, *gessellschaft* social formations.

remained hidden because it is framed within a salvationist rhetoric of human freedom, individual rationality, and emancipation, not to mention the popular notions of *liberte*, *egalite*, *fraternite*, after the catchcry of the French Revolution. Such rhetoric has proven extremely effective propping up the progressivist ideology of liberalism, since it advertises the beneficence of modernity. It was unsurprising, as such, that modernity would have seemed appealing, for it did not just promise techno-material progress, its accomplishment putatively signified the salvation of the world too. Nevertheless, while this might have been the view of those seeking to celebrate modernity's achievements and emancipatory promise, those with a more complete and critical perspective would likely have been aware of its colonial propensities.

To be sure, then, coloniality is the *sin qua non* of modernity whose feted accomplishments are rendered possible only by the perniciousness of colonial domination. As world-systems analyses have shown, there is a Third World because there exists a First World, wealth in the metropolises because of expropriation in the periphery, rights in the one because there is repression in the other (see Magdoff 1978). Meanwhile, the relationship between modernity and coloniality – or more specifically, between rationality on the one hand and repression on the other – is obfuscated by the rhetoric of modernity, which takes on a salvationist garb. Be that as it may, many of us fail – or refuse – to see how the inextricable relationship between Western reason and repression is embedded in the modernist project. After all, seemingly unlike anything the non-West has been able to offer, the emancipatory rhetoric of modernity lays claim to a progressive social agenda that promises universal human emancipation. The monopoly of the West, therefore, was not simply confined to the “hard power” inherent in its telos of techno-material development, it appears to have had the last word on “soft power”, on the progressive ideology of social change too.

It is important here, in view of this apparent monopoly of Eurocentrism over our individual and collective imaginations, to reiterate why “coloniality” is conceptually useful for understanding contemporary global realities. In the first instance, it is pertinent to note that “coloniality” differs from and expands on the more limiting and limited concept of “colonialism”. Whereas the latter has a certain anachronistic ring to it insofar as it invokes classical colonialism as a form of military domination, or even its neo-colonial variant as economic subjugation, “coloniality” as per Quijano (2010), invokes an all-encompassing matrix of power that transcends the idea of colonisation as involving military and/or economic domination.

As noted, Western manipulation of this all-encompassing colonial matrix historically meant that it could more or less establish its control not only over the domains of economy, governance or sociality, but also subjectivity and knowledge on a global-scale. This has made Eurocentrism and its ontological expression qua modernisation/Westernisation an indubitable fact of modern life as they manifest across the above said domains. Consequently, although Quijano (2000) may not effectively be saying anything particularly new with regard to Western colonialism, it is to his credit to have synthesised the disparate observations of its many-sidedness and innovatively brought them within a single formulation under the rubric of “coloniality”. It needs to be recognised, moreover, that the success of this conceptual move is evidenced by the fact that it has greater purchase explaining contemporary realities.

Not only does Quijano's (2000) "coloniality of power" or "colonial matrix of power" account for the historical origins of Western modernity, thereby accepting and subsuming the traditional understanding of colonialism as a form of direct occupation, coercion, and surplus expropriation, it also accounts for Western monopoly in the realm of "soft power", pertaining to the latter's control over the production of knowledge and subjectivities. Therefore, "coloniality" accounts not only for colonialism as a political-economic phenomenon of domination and surplus expropriation, it accounts for such a process by elucidating its underlying *logos*. Significantly, the notion of coloniality as the "logic" of colonial domination allows us to explain Western hegemony in other realms of modern life, not least its forms of political governance, its forms of sociality, and its dominance in the production of modern subjectivity and knowledge. Elsewhere, I have documented how this logic extends to the attempted colonisation of nature by way of intellectual property claims on biological material (Kho 2012).

Understanding coloniality as an all-encompassing matrix framing virtually all aspects of modern life therefore allows us to make sense of the apparent paradox between rationality and colonial violence. It allows us to reconcile the evident contradiction between the emancipatory rhetoric of modernity and its violent actuality. Hence, while the discrepancy between modernity's rhetoric and reality can be observed to be paradoxical – with the West deploying discourses of emancipation at the same time it is gratuitously inflicting colonial violence, especially upon non-Western Others – there seems to be good reason, in light of its historically-enduring nature, to interpret this gap between word and deed to be deliberate and self-conscious on the part of those who have historically controlled the levers of global political power, namely, Western ruling elites. Arguably, the disparity between the emancipatory rhetoric of modernity and the actuality of coloniality is therefore not an aberration, which is how it tends often to be explained away. Rather, as the historical record reveals, and Quijano (1989) is correct to point out, this supposed paradox is not an inadvertent violation of the values suggested by its rhetoric, but is rather constitutive of modernity itself.

Modernity is, therefore, sustained by a paradox whereby its celebrated virtue of reason - Descartes' *ratio* - co-exists *pari passu* with the violence of colonial repression. For this reason, modernity's emancipatory rhetoric has become unconvincing on the basis of its historical record. It is this substantial empirical record that leads me to infer that modernity and coloniality - as much as their respective auxiliaries of reason and repression, freedom and unfreedom - are different sides of the same coin; they are inextricably linked and coeval with each other.

COLONIALITY AND THE GEO-POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

How one conceives of and evaluates modernity thus appears to be contingent on where and how one is physically, socially, and geo-politically placed in the historical production of the modern world. It is clear from this that knowledge does not emerge *ex nihilo*, but has a sociological basis, with the content of produced knowledge largely inflected by the historical, social, and physical location of the knower. This sociology of knowledge (Mannheim 1952) accounts for why what a Hobbes, Weber, Popper, or even a Marx or Foucault would say

about modernity would tend to differ from what a Gandhi, Fanon, du Bois, Anzaldua, or even a Mao, would have to offer about it.

Whereas the former group of European thinkers would have grappled with modernity as heirs of a cultural phenomenon they could rightfully claim to be theirs, the latter group of non-European thinkers have, in contrast, had to deal with modernity as an alien cultural phenomenon imposed by the West upon what were erstwhile autochthonous cultural and civilisational trajectories. In other words, by virtue of its foreign and Western provenance, modernity/rationality for the non-West has historically manifested as coloniality in the first instance; it only ceased to be recognised as such when colonialism, particularly of the mind (Nandy 1983), had succeeded on a global-scale. Accordingly, whereas the former group of named European intellectuals would have been afforded the self-assurance, capaciousness, and privilege to contemplate their own civilisational accomplishment of modernity, especially when speaking in praise of it, the latter group of named non-Western thinkers and activists has typically had to grapple with the colonial violence that modernity implied, often as a matter of the cultural life-and-death of their societies. Whereas undertaking a critique of modernity might have been an ethical option for one group, it was an existential imperative for the other.

Accordingly, it is because of the contrasting political and social locations of these two groups of thinkers that have resulted in their opposed experiences of modernity, in turn accounting for their different assessments of it. Dussel (1995) speaks about this asymmetry of epistemic privilege and its consequence as follows:

Modernity is, for many (for Jurgen Habermas or Charles Taylor) an essentially or exclusively European phenomenon. In these lectures, I will argue that modernity is, in fact, a *European phenomenon but one constituted in a dialectical relation with a non-European alterity that is its ultimate content*. Modernity appears when Europe affirms itself as the ‘center’ of a World History that it inaugurates: the ‘periphery’ that surrounds this center is consequently part of its self-definition. The occlusion of this periphery (and of the role of Spain and Portugal in the formation of the modern world system from the late fifteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries) leads the major contemporary thinkers of the ‘center’ into a Eurocentric fallacy in their understanding of modernity. If their understanding of the genealogy of modernity is thus partial and provincial, their attempts at a critique or a defense of it are likewise unilateral and, in part, false.

The importance of the thinker’s subjectivity in the production of knowledge is what Mignolo (2007: 6) refers to as “the geo- and body-politics of knowledge”, a notion which suggests that the knowledge produced in the metropolises would differ from that in the periphery because their contrasting geo-political milieus would afford their respective thinkers varying and even divergent corporeal and subjective experiences from which knowledge is necessarily produced.

It can immediately be seen that this insight about the geo- and body-politics of knowledge offers a ready corrective to Descartes’ erroneous syllogism, *cogito ergo sum* (“I think therefore I am”). Descartes’ *cogito* inaugurated modern philosophy by privileging the mind and the rationality it symbolised; but, more substantially, it initiated a specious epistemic claim about the nature of reality: that the mind (consciousness), necessarily of the individual, was

separate from body (matter) and the world. Despite being fallaciously reductionist, this epistemic reductionism involving the sundering of mind from body, would come to define modern Western cosmology. It would lay the ground for modern/Western understanding of all reality, encompassing the natural as well as the social worlds. As the old saw aptly puts it: What is Matter? Never Mind! What is Mind? No Matter!

Descartes' privileging of reason (rationality), therefore, involved a clear delineation of knowing from being, the knower from the known, and the ideational from the material. This is a dichotomy whose implications were far-reaching in engendering yet more dualities: not least, between the epistemic and the ontic, reason (of the mind) and passions (of the body), truth and falsehood, spirit and matter, subject and object, and, of course, also fact and value (or meaning). In the last case, the True (as given by scientific reason) and the Good (as given by ethics) were conceived of to exist independently of each other, giving rise to what can be understood as an amoral universe. Perhaps it is this very amorality that accounts for the blithe dismissal of the supposed paradox between the emancipatory rhetoric of modernity and its violent manifestation.

Summing, Descartes' *cogito* - "I think therefore I am" - first implies that mind is more certain than matter; and, second, that the exclusive emphasis on one's thinking is grounded in the belief that one can be certain only of the contents of one's mind. It can be seen that the Cartesian emphasis on mind - *one's* mind - and its thoughts implicates a certain subjective individualism. Indeed, as a mode of cognition, rationality had from the beginning been conceived of as an individualistic phenomenon. It is here that Descartes' reputation as the father of modern philosophy lies, held in place by the two characteristic pillars of modernity, namely, solipsistic reason and solitary individualism.

Yet these are also the two pillars of modernity that Mignolo's (2007) notion of the geo- and body-politics of knowledge tears down. In his discussion about the geo-politics of knowledge, it becomes clear that the mind is not in fact solipsistic, nor is the act of thinking individualistic. Instead, the celebration of modernity by Eurocentrists on the one hand and its condemnation by subalterns on the other, suggest that the reality is better captured by literally turning Descartes' syllogism on its head, hence: "I am therefore I think". And it is not just a matter of one's social conditions instigating the act of thought; social position determines its nature, too. This insight thus repudiates Descartes' conception of reason as individualistic, independent of the world as well as of others. Instead, it situates the bases of our thinking in the social and geo-political milieu that we live: thinking is and has always been inseparable from being, which is collective.

But Descartes' error has had other grave implications for the modernist project and the way it has constrained our way of life. While Cartesian-inspired cogitation involved an inward, subjective, turn, the material world was to be grasped as object to be treated mechanistically and functionally, in the same way that an uninvolved external observer would. In this fashion Descartes mechanized the world so that humans could become its "masters and possessors" (Taylor 1989: 149), in the process, introducing yet another duality: the divide between humanity and nature.

To be sure, this human-nature divide entailed relations between an individualized humanity governed by reason and the passive nature that would come under its control (Merchant 1980; Toulmin 1990). Here, Descartes' deployment of reason lay with seeking a

mathematical understanding of the natural world in order to establish man's mastery over it. It is in this regard that Cartesian reason (or Mind) can be understood as a disengaged reason: the rational individual Mind is sundered not only from Body, the individual is also conceptualised as existing independently from the natural and social worlds. Coloniality, the logos of *divide et impera*, was thus set afoot.

It can be seen that it was on the basis of Descartes' reductionist and exclusivist reason that the Western colonial project was founded. In particular, the human-nature dichotomy that it inspired has allowed those in the metropolises touting modernity's celebrated accomplishments to do so without having to be aware of, much less be concerned about, their costs. These costs, which are economic, political, cultural, as well as ecological, have so casually been disregarded because they have been externalised and borne by the colonies and its hapless denizens. The role of Cartesian rationality has been significant, since it is evident that the various forms of conceptual divisions instigated by Descartes' *cogito* – for instance, of mind from body, self from other, and humans from nature – have served to facilitate the blithe externalisation of modernity's costs from one realm to the other throughout the history of colonialism.

Furthermore, as the West relegated the colonised to an-other temporality (Fabian 1983), it effectively excluded them from humanity and defined them into "nature". A Eurocentred linear temporal scheme, with its accompanying ideology of developmentism and its corollaries of "backwardness" and "progress", thus emerged. Indeed, the proponents of modernity, especially of its Western prototype, have often placed indigenous peoples, people of colour, women, and peasants at the earlier stages of this temporality, thereby conceiving of them as "backward" and ontologically closer to "nature". And it was through the temporal and conceptual exclusion of these marginalised peoples from the category of "human" and their association with "nature" that have facilitated and actualised the process of colonial exploitation and expropriation (Werlhof 1988: 96).

Consequently, in the same way that the peripheries in the world-system have been analysed on the macro-level of global geo-politics to serve as colonies for metropolitan capitalist extraction (Wallerstein 2011, Frank 1966, Amin 1976), I am here extending the argument by submitting that the marginalised populations of coloured people, women, peasants and their milieus, have analogously served as colonies for expropriation so that modernity and its way of life can be reproduced and sustained.

An example of modernist expropriation is exemplified by the way value is produced in women's reproductive work and "transferred" to the formal economy *sans* compensation. The regenerative ecological processes of (non-human) nature that are similarly expropriated serves as another equivalent example. Although these vital, life-giving activities are conceptually considered to be of "zero" monetary value and dismissed as "non-work", it is evident that they are the *sin qua non* of the formal money-exchange economy and are indispensable for the latter's functioning.

Yet, because traditional women's work and the natural environment have conceptually been categorised into "nature", the tendency has been for reproductive domestic work and the ecologically regenerative processes of non-human nature to be taken for granted and exploited. Consequently, the life-nourishing values such activities generate are effectively expropriated without acknowledgement. Seen in another light, this is equivalent to

homemakers (primarily women) and the environment paying a subsidy to the formal money-exchange economy. This is a situation that still obtains, explaining why coloniality persists despite the *de jure* accomplishment of worldwide national liberation in the latter half of the 20th C. Although colonial occupation may have ended, it is apparent that the structures of knowledge that the coloniser established during his tenure continue to exert undue influence on ways of thinking and being in the former colonies.

DECOLONISATION, DECOLONIALITY, AND DE-LINKING IN PRAXIS

Modernity, here, has been revealed to be a project whose cultural origins lay in the West. Owing to this, the project of modernity has involved the propagation of the Enlightenment ideas of rationality, freedom, equality, and emancipation. At the same time, the above has shown that the project of modernity paradoxically also consists of a “darker side” (Mignolo 2011), entailing gratuitous colonial violence and coercion on a global scale. This supposedly darker side of modernity resides in Western control and manipulation of what Quijano (2000) has termed, the “colonial matrix of power.” Because the elements of this colonial matrix include the mundane domains of economic re-production, political governance, sociality, as well as that of knowledge and subjectivity formation, it is reasonable to conclude that coloniality – the *logos* of colonisation – is pervasive across the gamut of social life on a global-scale. It is because of the perpetuation of such logics, not least via the “Westernisation of the world” (Latouche 1996, Kanth 2015), that the war on Others and non-human nature has continued, notwithstanding enduring anti-colonial resistance around the world till now.

Nonetheless, as already noted, since the severity of the ecological crisis threatens the future of our civilisation, de-linking from the matrix of coloniality would appear an urgent imperative. But, what prospect of this? How are we to de-link as an everyday, practical, matter? What would de-colonisation-as-praxis amount to?

While a lack of space prevents us from detailing how such a de-linking should proceed, it would be fitting here to lay out the (de-colonial) possibilities on offer. To begin with, our realising that modernity has a “darker” side in which most of us are implicated constitutes the first step in the process of de-linking, de-colonisation, and better yet, decoloniality.

It should be apparent that de-linking would involve breaking away from the matrix of coloniality. As the above has revealed, this may be pursued across different domains and at multiple levels. Given the elements of the colonial matrix, de-linking can occur in our relations of politics, economics, in sociality, and in the production of knowledge. And it can be pursued in any of these realms simultaneously: at the macro-international level of geo-politics, at the more intimate level of inter-subjectivity and sociality, as well as at that pertaining to the interiority of the individual person. The praxis of decolonisation and decoloniality therefore affords a variety of options to all who recognise the colonial logics (coloniality) that modernity implies, and who are looking for an exit.

Consequently, while the national liberation movements following World War Two represented a watershed in the history of colonial relations, it is clear from our contemporary predicament that they have been far from adequate. Today, as Western hegemony diminishes and China re-emerges into prominence on the global scene, we are witnessing a re-structuring of the international geo-political order. For example, primarily due to the

increasing political clout of China in international affairs, we have seen in the past few years a process of de-linking in general and de-Westernisation in particular, with the establishment of alternative global political-economic formations such as BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India and China), the Asian Infrastructural and Investment Bank (AIIB), and the Belt-Road Initiative (BRI).⁷

While the interpretations of these global developments vary, what is unarguable is that these Chinese state-led initiatives effectively amount to a shift away from the neo-liberal hegemony of the Washington Consensus – comprising the free-market fundamentalism of the World Bank, IMF, and the U.S. Treasury - while simultaneously charting the course of an alternative global political, economic, and trading order. And in light of the fact that the Washington Consensus has prevailed over the global economy since the collapse of state-socialism in the late-1980s, it would be reasonable to describe this Chinese state-led effort of de-linking as both “audacious” and “modest” simultaneously.

These China-led initiatives are “audacious” since they radically challenge the monopoly the West has maintained over the colonial matrix of power. On the other hand, describing Chinese de-linking via de-Westernisation as “modest” also seems apt, for they merely represent an attempt to shift away from the Western dominated capitalist world-order rather than a disavowal of capitalist relations per se. It is for this reason that I see a parallel between such relatively “modest” efforts at contemporary de-Westernisation and the movements of de-colonisation and national liberation of the post-WWII era: they aim only to break from the direct clutches of Western domination but not transcend its underlying logic. Still, it is a necessary first step whose relative modesty is matched by its boldness. This seemingly paradoxical evaluation of Chinese de-Westernisation can perhaps be explained by the “totality” of Western dominance that has been established over the past four-centuries. In the West’s stranglehold over the colonial matrix of power, any de-colonial move would be considered audacious while likely also being limited in its consequence.

To be sure, then, de-linking in the forms of de-colonisation and de-Westernisation *do not imply* de-coloniality; while the former are necessary, they are not sufficient for the accomplishment of the latter. Such de-colonial moves are limited, for they do not directly challenge the predatory logics of modernity as such. Hence, we witness China’s BRI and AIIB challenging Western dominance of global capitalism while leaving the logic of capitalism intact. The capitalist goal of profit-expansion still obtains but what is new is that the game is now played with the significant involvement of non-Western others; in this case, Chinese economic and political elites, who had previously been marginalised within the racialized hierarchy of the modern capitalist order.

A further point to note about the restricted nature of such de-linking via de-colonisation and de-Westernisation is that they tend to occur at the level of the macro-structural, at the official and institutional levels of the nation-state and its international relations. Apropos, the processes of de-linking here thus become the concerns of a nation-state’s international diplomacy, and are taken up by its ruling-elites, invariably, to the exclusion of the majority.

⁷ The latter is a globally ambitious infrastructural-development project aiming to link China to Europe by way of establishing greater co-operation and connectivity, especially between Eurasian countries and the PRC. The BRI is slated to eventuate in a land-based Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) on the one hand, and an ocean-based Maritime Silk Road (MSR) on the other, hence its appellation.

These processes of de-linking tend, therefore, to be somewhat removed from the popular practices of everyday life on the ground. Be that as it may, it is no wonder that colonial logics – coloniality – should persist despite the attainment of formal national political independence.

So, while China's Belt-Road Initiative might well signify a political and historic moment of de-linking via de-Westernisation, we should harbour no illusions about their potential to expunge colonial tendencies in any meaningful or comprehensive sense. Instead, we should expect the imperatives of capitalism to still govern the nature of the economy worldwide, and for its pernicious exploitation to continue on the backs of nature, women, and supposedly lesser Others, as the modernist pursuit of unlimited growth continues. It is indeed for this reason that some would consider China, with its investments around the world today, including its BRI project, to be at the forefront of a new wave of colonialism.⁸ We are seeing the franchise of modernity expand to include other geographies and ethnicities, thereby making them – and us - all culturally Western (and modern) now. For this reason, it is important to re-iterate: de-Westernisation is necessary, but it is not sufficient to enable it to become a panacea for colonialism's predatory cultural logic.

While Chinese initiatives of de-Westernisation represent a de-colonial move of de-linking from the enduring Western matrix of coloniality, it should be recognised that they merely re-constitute relations within one element of it, notably the reconfiguration of Sino-Western political economic relations. That is, China's growing economic prowess has enabled it to break from its erstwhile dependence on Western capital, allowing it not only to circumvent pro-Western political economic institutions, but to establish institutions of its own while openly welcoming the participation of other countries. In this manner, Chinese ruling elites are re-building the capitalist world order to shift the global political economic equation in their favour. The AIIB and the BRI are just two examples of such a development in recent years. However, since the said initiatives merely challenge the Western monopoly of ostensibly global political and economic institutions rather than their exploitative nature, modernity continues to cast its long shadow. Coloniality is, thus, effectively left to perpetuate, with the continued economic exploitation of nature and others, and the expropriation of value they produce. Here, the distinction between colonisation and coloniality is once again made clear. Whereas classical colonialism involves explicit military domination, the notion of coloniality implicates its invisible cultural logic: economic expropriation continues via a colonization that occurs seemingly without colonies.

This distinction between colonisation and coloniality explains the persistence of exploitative relations even after the end of classical, settler-colonialism. After all, in being a cultural logic, coloniality can reproduce in time and place beyond the geo-cultural borders of its origins. Hence, while the West may have been the birthplace of modern colonialism, giving rise to a specific cultural consciousness governing human-nature and human-human relations that, in turn, spawned a specific kind of economy impelled by infinite growth, there

⁸ See: Manero, Elizabeth. 2017. "China's Investment in Africa: The New Colonialism?" In *Harvard Political Review*. February 3. See also: Wroe, David. 2018. "'How empires begin.' China has made its global move. This is Australia's Response" In *The Sydney Morning Herald*. 22 June. For the effects of China's investments in Central Asia, see: Lang, Johannes. 2018. "The Next Great Game: The Clash over Central Asia." In *Harvard Political Review*. June 13.

is no basis to expect its confinement to only the West as such. Cultural processes, as much as ideas and thought, are transmissible by virtue of being mental phenomena, capable of readily being taken up by others. The fact that such colonial phenomena are the expression of a specific consciousness, namely, a logic of coloniality that can be easily transmitted, implies that such phenomena can transcend time-space parameters and take root in other cultural, geographic, and temporal contexts. Coloniality is thus the logic of empire, implicating colonialism in its evisceration of the culture and minds of the colonised. (see Fanon 2007 (1961), Nandy 1983, and Memmi 1967). Coloniality thus refers to colonialism's intangible and often invisible dimension that most potently and perniciously (de)forms the minds and subjectivities of the colonised.

CONCLUSION

The discussion engendered by this paper highlights the necessity for radical decolonisation qua de-coloniality - a de-linking from colonialism's underlying logic - in order to resolve the civilizational crises that beset us. Accordingly, de-coloniality involves the decolonisation of our minds. De-coloniality is to the mind what de-colonisation is to the colonisation of political economic structures. It involves, foremost, a process of de-linking from the Western colonial matrix of power in the production of knowledge, subjectivity, and consciousness.

It follows that since the mind is a human endowment, de-coloniality is a process for which each of us can and has to be individually responsible. Indeed, because it entails the decolonisation of our minds and the extirpation of colonial logics from our practices, de-coloniality is an option we can choose, particularly when we have come to understand the exploitative nature of modernity and how we are all implicated in it today. Still, as noted, the first step towards de-coloniality involves our necessarily seeing the homology between modernity, rationality, and coloniality. This would be followed by attempts to break away from the colonial matrix that modern life implies.

There is no space here to examine the multifarious ways that concrete practices of de-coloniality can be undertaken, but the above discussion regarding the geo-politics of knowledge seems to offer a fitting point to begin. For a start, the insight about knowledge being a function of the thinker's social and geo-political location dispenses with the Eurocentric notion that Western knowledge is universal. A necessary step towards decolonising the mind would then require a deflation of the knowledge-claims of the West, a move I believe Chakrabarty (2000) invokes when he speaks of "provincializing Europe."

I have further argued that Western and modern ways of knowing and being have been developed on the epistemic and ontological foundations of Descartes' mind-body dichotomy. This, in turn, has spawned other divides, such as that existing between self and others and between humans and nature. While this has resulted in the accomplishment of modernity as a condition that is unsurpassed in the production of things, especially commodities, its singular and superlative material productivity has been predicated on the severe exploitation of "others" - human as well as non-human nature - that has within the span of roughly the past 100 years, contributed to drastic human-induced ecological change on a scale unforeseen in millennia. It has already been noted that earth, which serves as our habitat, is now seriously imperilled by the prospect of abrupt, runaway climate-change and that human extinction cannot be ruled out. As Bateson observed nearly five decades ago,

“The unit of survival or adaptation is organism plus environment. We are learning by bitter experience that the organism which destroys its environment destroys itself.” (Bateson 1972: 483).

It should be recognised, then, that while the condition of modernity has involved the ever-relentless development of the material forces of production, it has been woefully inadequate in producing meanings that give sense to life. These observations proffer de-colonial possibilities along three trajectories, which may be pursued concurrently. I now signal them by way of conclusion.

First, dealing with Descartes’ solipsistic *cogito* as a manoeuvre of de-coloniality requires that we re-discover more holistic, empathic, and aesthetic conceptions of being-in-the-world. This involves countering the exclusive celebration of individualist and instrumentalist reason by cultivating an aesthetic of moral feeling, which is always communal, shared, and inter-subjective. At another level, this may be understood as involving efforts to overcome individualist and contractual social forms - notably, *gesellschaft* (society) - in favour of affective and moral *gemeinschaft* (community). Drawing from my specialised field of Chinese studies, I am aware that the Confucian tradition, for one, has much to recommend in this regard. Ames commends as much, observing that the “Confucian project begins from a recognition of the wholeness of experience and the constitutive nature of relationality that is entailed by it.” (Ames 2011:71).

Second, our move of de-coloniality also requires that we reconceptualise our relations with nature. On this score, my experience in the field of Chinese studies again compels me to commend that classical Chinese cosmology has something useful to say. As Beinfield and Korngold have noted:

The ancient Chinese perceived human beings as a microcosm of the universe that that surrounded them, suffused with the same primeval forces that motivated the macrocosm. They imagined themselves as art of one unbroken wholeness, called Tao, a singular relational continuum within and without. This thinking predates the dissection of mind from body and man from nature that Western culture performed in the seventeenth century.” (Beinfield and Korngold 1992: 5).

Of course, the recognition of the integrity of humans and nature, of humans being a part of nature, is certainly not confined to the indigenous Chinese. Strang observes from her fieldwork in Far North Queensland, Australia, that “indigenous relations to land conflate concepts of Nature and the Self”, adding that “Aboriginal relations to land are therefore implicitly founded on interdependent precepts of social and environmental sustainability.” (Strang 2005: 26).

Third, and, finally, we need to pause and radically re-think what it is that makes a good life, away from modernist conceptions of it as being constituted by unlimited materialist growth.

Undoubtedly, all of the above is easier said than done. How could institutional change attempting to reverse four-plus centuries of colonial relational practices ever be easy? Yet, with abrupt climate-change threatening the destruction of our habitat, and possibly not long after, our very existence, what less can we do? Is the aim of life not the perpetuation of life itself? If so, pursuing de-coloniality in the ways suggested is urgent.

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