

## Locating the Queer in Postcolonial/Decolonial Discourse: A Bibliographic Essay

I am beginning a project here, not ending one. To create a responsible bibliography of postcolonial/decolonial criticism that also attends to queer theories, subjectivities, and identities is a much larger project than can be accomplished here. My attempt, then, is to highlight a few important works in the field of postcolonial/decolonial criticism that responsibly (or not) attend to the intersectionality of postcolonial/decolonial theories and queer theories. A partial enumerative Works Consulted bibliography will follow this discussion in order to further open the discussion, but it is by no means exhaustive. It is tricky business to claim a definitive description of "postcolonial," "decolonial," and "queer," as the theories, literatures, and identities that these words signify are intersectional and continually shifting. However, for the purposes of this discussion, I will discuss what I see as a paradigmatic shift in a certain critical circle from "postcolonial" to "decolonial" as prominent metaphor and will attempt to describe where these prominent theorists within this circle situate the queer in their work.

There is much controversy over defining "postcolonial." In the discourse, even the word itself is represented in a myriad of ways: postcolonial, PostColonial, (post)colonial, post-colonial, etc., depending on where the emphasis lies. In the most basic sense, postcolonial literature and criticism is seen as emerging in the late 1970's-early 1980's, but can be traced back to the "era" of widespread European colonialism itself. The groundbreaking work of Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha are foundational to postcolonial theory, but as seen in the enumerative bibliography that follows, they are in good company with many other influential thinkers and writers. The controversy over defining "postcolonial" is situated in a discussion about whether the "era of colonialism" is truly over; both through globalization and war-making and through the legacy of colonialism still apparent in "formerly" colonized states, one can see that there may not truly be a "post" in "postcolonial."

Theorists like Emma Perez, Walter D. Mignolo, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Chela Sandoval advocate, in many ways, for a "decolonial" way of thinking, which recognizes that the colonial "era" is indeed not over, and only through an active agency of the marginalized/colonized, and with a new understanding of borders and transnationality (coupled with a recognition of the power of nationalism and the hegemony of nation-state metaphors for geographic and psychic locations) we can begin the process of subverting the "logic of coloniality" (Mignolo) and through this decolonial way of thinking, which is active, create change. If we don't shift from a colonial (and perhaps "postcolonial") to de-colonial way of thought and praxis, we will be "falling back into the old house while just changing the carpet," (Mignolo, "Delinking...", 500). Decolonial theories and literatures allow for a more effective intersectionality with queer theories because there is a critical attention paid to how constructions of gender/sexuality intersect with the colonial enterprise (i.e. colonization creates and reinforces binary gender/sexuality)

It is important to start with Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, a book-length genre-bending *manifesta* about ethnic/sexual identity, hybridity, and (dis)placing oneself. This book, along with the work of Cherrie Moraga, demonstrates not only an epistemological shift between binary colonizer/colonized, but also a formal shift from "traditional" Western

scholarly discourse to a more postmodern questioning of genre through form. The work of both writers also signifies an emergence of Chicana feminist theory, which uses decolonial ways of thinking to explore gender and sexuality. *Borderlands/La Frontera* is both academic and creative, blending "academic" research, creative nonfiction, mythology, and poetry. This book-length work explores the history of colonization in what is now known as Mexico, along with the histories of border-formation between the what-is-now U.S. and Mexico, in addition to how language and identity have been impacted by these multiple colonizations. One of Anzaldua's most known contributions with this book is her theorizing of the *mestiza*, a term used to describe "mixed race" but a more accurate translation might be "torn between ways" (78), which Anzaldua extends to create an epistemology of border thinking, or "mestiza consciousness" (80). She situates the borderland as not only a physical place but also an epistemological and psychic one. It is here, at the crossroads, that Anzaldua situates the queer: "The mestizo and the queer exist at this time and point on the evolutionary continuum for a purpose. We are a blending that proves that all blood is intricately woven together, and that we are spawned out of similar souls," (85). It is this breaking down of subject/object, the continually construction/deconstruction process that mestiza consciousness employs, and the situating of the queer as subaltern (and highlighting the intersectionality of race, heritage, language, sexuality, gender, etc.) that makes Anzaldua's work so influential to the thinkers that follow, whether they identify as queer theorists, "postcolonial" theorists, or decolonial thinkers.

Because Anzaldua's work both specifies *and* deconstructs place, she breaks from previous "postcolonial" theorists who are site-specific only, and because Anzaldua deconstructs "queer", she also makes a break from how previous theorists (and some current ones too, to be discussed below) categorize sexuality/sexual identity in binary terms, or as separate from the colonial enterprise (or "homosexuals" as "victims" of such a colonial enterprise). Anzaldua does not separate sexual identity/practice from geographical location, language, history, or culture. As the forerunner of "border thinking" or "mestiza consciousness", to do so would contradict the way of seeing that she is promoting.

Emma Perez is a friend of Anzaldua's, and heavily influenced by her work. Perez's book, *The Decolonial Imaginary*, uses a Foucauldian methodology to study Chicana history. Perez is also influenced by Edward Said, but takes the methods of Foucault and earlier postcolonial theory (like that of Said and Bhabha) to construct her concept of the "decolonial imaginary", which happens in the "time lag" between colonial and postcolonial, and which situates Chicana/o agency and subjectivity at the center of the analytical process, not on the margins, and not as static objective "reality." Her goal is to write a history that "decolonizes otherness," (7) rather than reifying the binary self/other or colonizer/colonized. In this work, we see Anzaldua's influence and Perez's use of, and then break with, the postcolonial theorists that have come before her. Perez, like Anzaldua, situates the queer at the center of analysis while also recognizing intersectionality of geographic locations, languages, races, etc. Perez uses copious primary research to ground her study of the Chicana social movements on both sides of the borderland between what is now the U.S. and Mexico during the Mexican Revolution. The primary research grounds her theoretical work, but also serves as the process through which she builds her theory. She introduces queer intersectionality in this book but goes into detail about this concept in her article below.

In Perez's article, "Queering the Borderlands: The Challenges of Excavating the

Invisible and Unheard," Perez uses her concept of the decolonial imaginary to situate the queer in decolonial thinking more pointedly. Perez argues that many postcolonial critics and traditional historians look at history through a heteronormative lens. For example, she says, "A colonial white heteronormative gaze, for example, will interpret widows only as heterosexual women mourning husbands," (124) and Perez challenges us to "look beyond white colonial heteronormativity to interpret documents differently," (124). Perez has done just this in both *The Decolonial Imaginary* and this article. Changing one's mindset while doing research is key to Perez's process. Perez, in her study of widows, for example, would not automatically assign passivity to the women, but would imagine agency at the center of these women's lives. Perez also traces the histories of sexualities and places them in a colonial context. In her article, Perez situates the construction of heterosexuality/homosexuality and the rigid policing of gender alongside the construction and policing of borders between the U.S. and Mexico. Like Anzaldua, Perez does not separate her study of history from her study of sexuality, and, like Anzaldua, the queer is central to the decolonial process.

Maria Lugones, like Perez and Anzaldua, and Mignolo (see below), does a heavy critique of contemporary conceptions of modernity as held in binary opposition to the "third world." In her essay, "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," Lugones argues that colonization inscribed a new gender on the colonized that was not the "same" as the gendered relationships present in Western/European cultures. Lugones argues that this "new" gender also incorporated race and class as part of its construction, and was used as a "contrast" to European constructions of gender and sexuality. Lugones, like Anzaldua and Perez, weaves historical research and theory into her discussion of how compulsory heterosexuality is a modern/colonial construction and how this construction was used to police gender/sexuality on and between "both sides" of the colonial project (colonizer/colonized). Lugones also does an extensive historical study of "pre-colonial" constructions of gender/sexuality (or lack thereof; it's demonstrated in her essay that gender or sexuality weren't even categories in some "pre-colonial" cultures). Therefore, Lugones offers Chicana/Third World queer theory as locus for interpreting the deployment of gender/sexuality as part of the modern colonial project, and thus, there cannot be a separation of queer epistemologies from decolonial thinking.

Similarly, Walter Mignolo discusses queer epistemologies as they are situated in language in his book-length work, *Local Histories, Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Mignolo, drawing on the work of Anzaldua and Moraga, discusses Moraga's concept of "Queer Aztlan" as a way to think about how language and coloniality intersect, and as a method to fracture "the configuration of hegemonic languages," (269). Through language and because of language, comes thought, and Mignolo, like his decolonial theorist contemporaries, draws much from language to discuss ways of knowing, seeing, and thinking. His essay "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality, and the Grammar of De-coloniality" Mignolo makes the case for decolonizing knowledge and denaturalizing modernity, thus, decolonizing ways of being (as categorized through hegemonic epistemologies as gender, class, sexuality, etc.). Mignolo importantly, in this essay, makes a distinction between de-colonial thinking and postcolonial critique: "The de-colonial shift...is a project of de-linking while post-colonial criticism and theory is a project of scholarly transformations within the academy," (452). While post-colonial thinking might

be emancipatory, de-colonial thinking is liberatory. Mignolo argues, in most of his work, for new frameworks to situate this de-colonial process, to de-link from the modern/colonial epistemologies and adopt border thinking as a new framework. Like with Anzaldua, Perez, and Lugones, Mignolo argues for a shift in consciousness, as a decolonial political or critical project cannot happen without a major shift in consciousness. It is within this border consciousness, or border thinking, where the queer resides.

By contrast, the collection, *Postcolonial, Queer* edited by John C. Hawley, exemplifies how "postcolonial" criticism, while having similarities to decolonial criticism/thinking, diverges from the decolonial in that the essays featured in this collection privilege the Western academic epistemologies, and thus do not allow for as rich of a discussion about how genders/sexualities are constructed and re-constructed by the empires that enforce and reinforce them. Even though William J. Spurlin's essay "Broadening Postcolonial Studies/Decolonizing Queer Studies" makes a theoretical attempt to position the queer as central mode of analysis of how heterosexism helps shape hegemonic colonial modernity, he is still arguing for inclusion rather than integration. Most, if not all, of the essays in this work do not look at intersectionality as far as epistemology or theory is concerned. This book of essays, an important work in its own right, as it is a responsible work in the field of postcolonial criticism, does not make the move toward a new framework for looking at geo-politics or culture. The queer is situated as separate entity, not attached to the colonial modern project in intrinsic ways, but more so described in terms of identity politics rather than epistemological methodologies.

This is a preliminary look at some key texts within this debate. The question of how to explore, study, and critique colonialism when considering queer theories and ways of knowing is a relatively new debate within the field. Bound often by geographical differences ("post" seems to be bound to what Said dubs the "Orient" and also the academy, where "de" seems to be located in a hybrid space of what constitutes the "Americas" and how this space intersects with the academy), and certainly by key theoretical differences, the scholarly discourse on the topic of queer subjectivity remains a rich place to formulate a project about colonialism and modernity in literature, culture, and politics.

#### Works Cited:

Anzaldua, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

Hawley, John C., ed. *Post-Colonial, Queer: Theoretical Intersections*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2001.

Lugones, Maria. "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System." *Hypatia*. 22:1 (2007): 186-209.

Mignolo, Walter D. *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

-----, "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality, and the Grammar of De-coloniality" *Cultural Studies*. 21:2/3 (2007): 449-514.

Perez, Emma. *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

-----, "Queering the Borderlands: The Challenges of Excavating the Invisible and Unheard." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*. 24:2/3 (2003): 122-131.

Works Consulted:

Aijaz, Ahmad. *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. London: Verso, 1992.

Cevallos-Candau, Francisco Javier, et al, eds. *Coded Encounters: Writing, Gender, and Ethnicity in Colonial Latin America*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994.

Cruz-Malave, Arnaldo and Martin F. Manalansan IV, eds. *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*. Albany: SUNY Press, 2002.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Constance Farrington Harmondsworth. London: Penguin, 1967 [1963].

Greer, Margaret R., Walter D. Mignolo, and Maureen Quilligan, eds. *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empires*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Keating, AnaLouise, ed. *EntreMundos/Among Worlds: New Perspectives on Gloria Anzaldúa*. New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2005.

-----, ed. *Gloria E. Anzaldúa: Interviews/Entrevistas*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

-----, *Women Reading, Women Writing: Self Intervention in Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Audre Lorde*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996.

King, C. Richard, ed. *Postcolonial America*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 2001.

Mignolo, Walter D. *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003.

Mignolo, Walter D., and Madina V. Tlostanova. "Theorizing from the Borders: Shifting to Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge." *European Journal of Social Theory*. 9:2 (2006): 205-221.

Minh-ha, Trinh. *Woman, Native, Other*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989.

Mohanty, Chandra. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Feminist Review* 30 (1988): 61-88.

Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York, NY: Vintage, 1992.

Quijano, Anibal. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America." *Nepantla: Views from the South*. 1:3 (2000): 533-580.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1979.

----- . *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983.

----- . *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1993.

Spivak, Gayatri. *In Other Worlds*. New York: Methuen, 1987.

----- . "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Nelson and Grossberg, eds. *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988.

Walsh, Catherine. "Shifting the Geopolitics of Critical Knowledge: Decolonial Thought and Cultural Studies 'Other' in the Andes." *Cultural Studies*. 21:2-3 (2007): 224-239.