

JORDAN E. MILLER  
Salve Regina University

A book profile of Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011. 458 pp. ISBN 978-0-8223-5078-1. Paperback: \$27.95.

Walter D. Mignolo's *The Darker side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* successfully tracks the course of Western modernity, its dependence upon coloniality, and a variety of the ways in which the decolonial option emerged alongside modernity and has the potential to produce other new worlds. It is a long, erudite, and transdisciplinary--or disciplinarily disobedient--exercise. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* studies the intimate relationship between modernity/coloniality and economics, religion, politics, geography, and epistemology. This is only natural since "The task of decolonial thinking is that of unveiling the rhetoric and promises of modernity, showing its darker side, advocating and building global futures that aspire to the fullness of life rather than encouraging individual success at the expense of the many and of the planet" (122).

Modernity, whose point of origination was Europe, has historically hidden its darker side: coloniality. Mignolo identifies these two with each other, writing that, "there is no modernity without coloniality" (2). This prompts Mignolo to use the combined term "modernity/coloniality" throughout the book. Decoloniality, he argues, is a third option to capitalism and communism such that "while capitalist economy is globally shared, the colonial matrix of power ... is disputed" and that dispute provides the conditions for contesting "not only the control of authority in inter-state relations (and therefore in political theory and in human-rights regulations), but also the control of the sphere of knowledge and subjectivity" (xviii). Coloniality is thus not merely a matter of politics and economics, but also of thought. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* inquires about the paths that brought us to this point and proposes a thinking that should aid in the production of a decolonial future. Mignolo quotes Linda T. Smith, defining decoloniality as "long term processes involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic, and psychological divesting of colonial power" (52). It is not enough simply to be critical. These processes, Mignolo argues, should lead to the "new humanity" envisioned by Frantz Fanon, and to a reorganization of society around indigenous notions of "the communal." Mignolo devotes chapters 6, 7, and the afterword to describing this potential and decolonial future more fully.

Throughout *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*, Mignolo opposes decoloniality to Christianity, liberalism (both in its classical and neoliberal variations), and Marxism, but also to postcolonial studies. The difference between postcolonial studies and decoloniality is first their respective points of origins. Mignolo locates postcolonial thought in former British and French colonial contexts. Edward Said's *Orientalism* is exemplary here. Decoloniality, sharing much in common with postcolonial thought, instead originated in the thinking of African and Afro-Caribbean thinkers and activists in former Spanish and Portuguese colonial contexts. Franz Fanon is thus a constant presence both within and

behind *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*. The Americas tend to be ignored by postcolonial studies and Mignolo argues that the decolonial option fills--or has arisen within--that gap. But more than this geographic and genealogical difference, Mignolo is concerned about any discourse's claims to universality. In that sense, decoloniality remains vigilant in its desire to produce new worlds--pluralities of epistemically disobedient, communal social organizations--rather than to make globalist or universalist claims. Postcolonial thinking, Mignolo argues, tends to make (at best) unconscious or (at worst) imperialist claims that collapse regionality into globality. This leads Mignolo to advocate for a decolonizing postcolonial studies (56-58).

The book begins with a discussion of Anibal Quijano's concept of the coloniality of power. From there, Mignolo provides critical reflections on Carl Schmitt and Immanuel Kant, interrogations of the coloniality of time and space, and decolonial engagements with what Mignolo calls "the Zapatistas' theoretical revolution," cosmopolitanism and localism, and decolonial futures. Throughout, Mignolo draws upon work from a variety of border-thinkers such as Anibal Quijano, Franz Fanon, Ali Shari'ati, Paulin J. Hountondji, Enrique Dussel, Partha Chatterjee, and Kishore Mahbubani. The source material and conversation partners Mignolo has chosen not only describe, but also perform the kind of decoloniality he advocates throughout *The Darker Side of Western Modernity*.

Mignolo deploys a number of significant concepts which may be familiar to those with his previous work. Most significant and foundational among these are Quijano's concepts of coloniality (as the dark side of modernity) and the colonial matrix of power. The colonial matrix of power describes "four interrelated domains: control of the economy, of authority, of gender and sexuality, and of knowledge and subjectivity" which are in turn supported by racial and patriarchal foundations of knowledge (8). Further, the historical foundation of this matrix is Christian theology, argues Mignolo. Consequently, it is the job of decolonial thinking and doing "to focus on the enunciation, engaging in epistemic disobedience and delinking from the colonial matrix in order to open up decolonial options--a vision of life and society that requires decolonial subjects, decolonial knowledges, and decolonial institutions" (9).

This notion of epistemic disobedience arises from the idea that decoloniality's object is thought, rather than states, economies, or empires, which have historically been the objects of decolonization. Decoloniality has become "synonymous with being epistemologically disobedient" (54). This is because, contra-Marx, "The Zapatistas taught many of us that to change the world as it is may be an impossible task, but to build a world in which many worlds would coexist is a possible task. In order to move in that direction, of building other worlds, which are and will be coexisting and in conflict with the existing dominance of the colonial matrix" is a dangerous endeavor because "building a world in which many worlds will coexist demands epistemic disobedience and epistemic delinking" (54). Mignolo expands upon this at length in chapter 6 which is devoted to the Zapatistas' impact on decolonial thought. Mignolo credits the EZLN with replacing the Western binary of thought/praxis with a the decolonial option of thinking through doing and doing through thinking (54, 74,

214-5). This is an exposition of Mignolo's early claim that one is where one thinks and acts (chapter 2, "I am Where I Do").

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Mignolo is generally hostile toward religion and theology--even in variants such as theology of liberation--due to their historic justification of modernity/coloniality. Nevertheless, Mignolo remains open to indigenous forms of spirituality. After a preface and introduction that contextualize and frame the book broadly within cultural studies, the first chapter opens with a critical reading of Carl Schmitt's *Nomos of the Earth*. The second chapter, likewise, opens with Schmitt as its point of reference. The Darker Side of Western Modernity clearly is not a political-theological work in its own right, but in his confrontation with Schmitt, Mignolo sets the stage for a political-theological reading into and against both Mignolo's text and decoloniality more broadly. This may only be possible, of course, through very particular varieties of political theology.

Mignolo argues that theology is the foundation of modernity/coloniality. As such, decolonial thinking might be described as a kind of iconoclasm. This is what gives it certain resonances with radical theology. "Decolonial thinking and options (i.e., thinking decolonially) are nothing more than a relentless analytic effort to understand, in order to overcome, the logic of coloniality underneath the rhetoric of modernity, the structure of management and control that emerged out of the transformation of the economy in the Atlantic, and the jump in knowledge that took place both in the internal history of Europe and in between Europe and its colonies" (10). Thomas J. J. Altizer has recently described radical theology as "a theological thinking that truly rethinks the deepest ground of theology, a rethinking that is initially an unthinking of every established theological ground" (Altizer, *The Call to Radical Theology*, ed. Lissa McCullough. Albany: SUNY Press, 2012. p 1). Decolonial thinking shares this affinity with radical theology in their respective desires to remain vigilantly, radically critical all the way to the end. In arguing that theology is at the foundation of modernity/coloniality, Mignolo effectively argues for a decoloniality of theology. Thus, a theological engagement with decoloniality seems like a reciprocal--and fruitful--unrealized possibility.

Walter D. Mignolo's *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* is a significant contribution to decolonial theory and cultural studies more broadly. It has rightly provoked a wide variety of reactions in its readers and commentators, eliciting impassioned responses and critiques. This is high praise for a book as difficult as this one. It is a challenging and rewarding book and it deserves to be taken seriously across the humanities.

JORDAN E. MILLER is a philosopher of religion who is currently completing his dissertation at Salve Regina University in Newport, RI in the humanities program. He is also an adjunct professor in the religious and theological studies department there. His research focuses on the intersection between political theologies, radical theologies, and political and social resistance movements. He teaches courses in philosophy of religion, contemporary Christian theology, and world religious traditions.

©Jordan E. Miller.

Miller, Jordan E. "A book profile of Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*," in *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* vol. 13 no. 1 (Winter 2014): 162-164.