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Decoloniality and decolonizing Critical Theory

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It has become clear that Critical Theory, understood as the tradition originating from and remaining attached to the Frankfurt School, has to confront questions about its own limitations.[1] This has been understood not just in terms of its project (which, especially in its Habermasian form, appears increasingly unable to deal with the rise of the far right in Europe and the USA) but also in terms of its own limitations as regards gender and race, and its implicitly Eurocentric orientation. It is the last limitation, its inherent Eurocentrism, that has been most resisted integration, insofar as Critical Theory from its inception has retained within it an account of the history of reason that retains a certain Hegelianism, with Europe being the stage of history, and the location of historical, cultural, and intellectual progress. While Horkheimer and Adorno criticized the development of reason in this way, they nonetheless tacitly accepted this formulation of the history of rationality as univocal and distinctly European. Habermas replicates this, even as he criticizes the univocal conception of rationality found in their work. As many have suggested, the time has come to take stock of this and see if Critical Theory cannot be revised in such a way as to make it a project that may still retain a truly universalist character while still recognizing its weaknesses, especially its implicit Eurocentrism.

Decolonial and postcolonial theory have both made a major part of their respective tasks the criticism of this conception of rationality, utilizing the existence of their own respective precolonial cultures as a means with which to criticize European rationality. That it has taken so long for this critique to be received with more than just resistance can be read in many ways, of course. One reason is likely due to the theoretical tendencies of those in the postcolonial camp especially, as many of these approaches are influenced by Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, and others lumped together under the label of postmodernism. Given the antipathy to these authors of those on the forefront of contemporary Critical Theory, at least those who accept the Habermasian critique of postmodernism, this resistance makes sense. But it would appear that a point has been reached where Critical Theory can no longer ignore such critiques. This has been made especially clear by the publication of Amy Allen's recent monograph, which attempts to recognize the salience of the postcolonial and decolonial criticisms of Critical Theory and shows why theorists in the Frankfurt School vein of thought can no longer afford to ignore these critiques.

However, there is one question that has not been confronted in this discussion, one that can easily be missed and yet is of utmost important—can Critical Theory engage with decolonial or postcolonial theory in a manner that integrates the relative insights of each? This article is focused on the first question and leaves aside the postcolonial one. The answer to this question, as will be seen, is no, at least as far as this is the way the question is put. In effect, to attempt to integrate the insights of decolonial thought into Critical Theory is to engage in the project from the wrong direction. If one is to remain faithful to the decolonial approach, it cannot be a matter of integrating decolonial thought into Critical Theory but rather of integrating the insights of Critical Theory into decolonial philosophy. Thus, if Critical Theory is to be decolonized it must first take on the decolonial perspective and then see what is left of Critical Theory after the shift, the decolonial turn, as Walter Mignolo puts it.

This project no doubt appears overdue not merely from the increasing reception of decolonial theory in the USA and Europe, but as well because its own history is inherently enmeshed with the criticism of Western reason, albeit from the position of the enunciation of Europe itself. The impetus to acknowledge and attempt to integrate the insights of the decolonial comes with the recognition of the importance of colonialism for Critical Theory, which has already been recognized in the work of Thomas McCarthy, specifically his *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*. However, he still remains wedded to a Habermasian paradigm that limits his ability to criticize Critical Theory, especially as regards the idea of progress.[2] Nonetheless, the recognition that this is a problem that must be confronted that shows just how important it is today. It is because those who would follow Habermas have finally come around to the question of colonization that the question of the possibility of the decolonization of Critical Theory must be confronted—criticisms that could have been ignored previously can no longer to be left to the side. And this means asking the question: can Critical Theory be decolonized?

To approach this question, one must ask whether Critical Theory itself is amenable to integrating the premises of decolonial thought and how it might do so, whether this would entail merely recognizing the realities of colonization and applying a corrective, or whether the criticisms from decolonial and postcolonial theory require a complete rethinking of the project of Critical Theory. It is in this that Allen's book is useful in clarifying the stakes for the partisan of Critical Theory, as she shows that criticisms from the decolonial cannot be confronted merely by acknowledging coloniality. This requires, more than anything, a questioning of modernity as concept, which entails a criticism of the concept of progress itself (Allen, 2016, pp. 8–16). Given the centrality of the concept for Critical Theory, even more so for subsequent generations starting with Habermas, the reluctance to do this is understandable. And yet, it must be done if it is to recognize its own limits. This is what animates Thomas McCarthy to push against the universalism of Habermas and recognize that "the normative status of the resources handed down by our tradition is more modest and contextualist than" Habermas claims (Allen, 2016, p. 27). But, as Allen suggests, such modesty is an unsatisfactory answer to the criticisms of the Eurocentric standpoint of Critical Theory. She suggests that part of the answer involves a willingness to "*unlearn* certain aspects of our own taken-for-granted point of view in order to engage in a genuinely open way with various participants in debates about global modernity" (Allen, 2016, p. 27).

It is Allen's contention that this unlearning of the implicit Eurocentrism of Critical Theory must ultimately lead back to the criticisms of European modernity of the first generation of Critical Theory, especially that of Adorno, as well as that of his "other son," Foucault. What appears to Habermas as a totalizing critique can reappear in the eye of the anti-Eurocentric thinker as a conceptual resource that undermines the pretension of European thought toward uncritically accepting an idea of progress that puts itself at the center of world history (see Allen, 2016, pp. 166–176; Habermas, 1987a, esp. pp. 114–120). In this, Allen is no doubt correct—it is clear that the best resource *within* Critical Theory lies in this criticism of European reason in general, and her suggestion that an altered understanding of genealogy would be a useful resource in this regard. But, in recognizing this one also realizes the inherent limitations of her book—while she cites decolonial and postcolonial thought to criticize Habermas, Axel Honneth, and Rainer Forst, and thereby provides an invaluable resource for those who are unfamiliar with these critiques, she does not thereby turn toward the positive project of providing a different understanding of the potential project of an altered Critical Theory, except to suggest that a different path forward would be useful. Ultimately, she leaves us with the suggestion that the way forward that should involve a return to the specific critical tradition that Habermas believes he has overcome, in the form of a return to Adorno, with Foucault also seen as an inheritor of the same tradition.

Foucault and Adorno, however, have similar problems of their own, something she herself acknowledges in making this suggestion. Unfortunately, just as the problems unique to their own projects as regards a decolonial utilization of their critical perspectives are identified, the book itself ends with the reader wondering what is left to do. There is little account of how we may utilize and criticize their thought in decolonial and postcolonial contexts, and those familiar with these debates will likely end up wondering whether the book is about decolonizing Critical Theory as a broad project or rather exists to make the case that postcolonial and decolonial critiques actually matter to critical theorists from centers of knowledge in the Global North. That is to say: in such situations, the question of the audience always must come to mind, especially when one is talking about the utilization of theory produced in areas outside of the global centers of knowledge that criticize Eurocentric presuppositions and yet are intending to engage with debates within

those areas from which they are normally excluded. This is not just a question of audience but approach, even language itself. In *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, Walter D. Mignolo asks just this question of himself, explaining that he wrote the book in English because "[w]riting in Spanish means, at this time, to remain at the margin of contemporary theoretical discussions" (Mignolo, 2003, p. viii; see Eduardo Mendieta, 2005, pp. 188–196). If one is to think decolonially one must ask oneself what one intends to do with their work, and this means not just looking at decolonizing thought but also at questions of language, marginalized tendencies of thought, and so on.

Indeed, the confrontation of this problem is what characterizes the decolonial approach as it understands itself and struggles in its expression of a thought that still relates to European thought even as it pushes against it. This is why those who engage with and in decolonial thought likely do not see themselves and their concerns reflected in Allen's monograph, notwithstanding its title. Theoretically, there are two reasons for this. First, there is a lack of differentiation between the two traditions. While treating them together makes sense insofar as the text serves as an intervention that aims to make clear the need to address decolonial and postcolonial critiques, in spirit it does violence to both, given that it ignores the very reasons that motivated the decolonial turn against the postcolonial approach. Key to this are questions regarding who one is addressing and the resources that one is utilizing. It is this that caused the rifts that led to the dissolution of the Latin American Subaltern Studies group. As Ramon Grosfoguel put it regarding those who remained partisans to the Subaltern Studies project

> *[d]espite their attempt at producing a radical and alternative knowledge, … reproduced the epistemic schema of Area Studies in the United States. With a few exceptions, they produced studies* about *the subaltern rather than studies* with *and* from *a subaltern perspective. Like the imperial epistemology of Area Studies, theory was still located in the North while the subjects to be studies in the South. (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 211)*

Specifically, the sticking point in the conflict between the members of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group was the same thing found lacking in postcolonial studies—an orientation toward a "Western epistemic canon" that was itself seen as a problem.

It is this that is the second reason, intrinsically related to the first and of greater importance, that decolonial thinkers likely do not see their concerns reflected in Allen's work. As Gurminder K Bhambra says, there is not just a disciplinary difference between the postcolonial and the decolonial (namely, between the cultural and socioeconomic in the postcolonial and the sociological, world systems theory, Critical Theory tradition in the decolonial) but also a matter of geographical, temporal, and cultural difference that itself has led to the greater epistemic critique found in decolonial thought (Bhambra, 2014, p. 115–118). Such differences undergird the different understandings of colonialism that each has, and to not attend to this difference, as Allen does, is to do an injustice to both traditions.[3] This, coupled with the fact that the intent of the work is to essentially "make the case" to critical theorists in the Frankfurt School mold in centers of knowledge from the Global North, makes this work one *about* the decolonial but not *of* it. In collapsing the difference between the two and in its intended audience and specific locus of enunciation, she reproduces the same problems identified by Grosfoguel and other decolonial thinkers in relation to postcolonial approaches, which is what motivated the decolonial turn. A properly decolonial orientation would, rather, take a different approach, not to make the case to thinkers from the Global North that decolonial thought and its criticisms are worth taking seriously but rather to initiate a dialogue within the intellectual milieu of the Global South to judge the adequacy and relevance of Frankfurt School thought to the decolonial project, to see if its insights would be a candidate for integration into the decolonial approach.[4]

Where Allen (following the shift inaugurated by Habermas) focuses on the question of progress and normativity, decolonial thought goes further in a radical fashion towards the criticism of European epistemology in general and thus find themselves, off the bat, already aligned with the first generation Frankfurt School in this regard. This is why her account could be read as a first step for Frankfurt-aligned critical theorists but also one that itself was already integrated into the general epistemological critique that finds itself expressed in the discourse on the geopolitics of knowledge that Mignolo concerns himself with. As with Mignolo, those who work in decolonial thought recognize that the Eurocentrism of the tradition of Critical Theory also entails a lack of recognition of work in other parts of the world that would bear upon debates in the tradition. Many in this tradition have not bothered making the case that Critical

Theory should engage with postcolonial and decolonial critiques but rather have focused more directly on doing the work of decolonizing Critical Theory; that is, they have not asked the question of its possibility but have been pursuing the project in their own fields, asking not whether Frankfurt School Critical Theory can be decolonized but rather making the case that Critical Theory is useful for their projects.

In this way, Allen's work shows us a possibility as regards the future of Critical Theory for those from centers of global knowledge, but this possibility has already found expression in positive contributions to decolonization in general and are only now being recognized as potentially valuable. Thus, the real problem is that such accounts have not received their due recognition from thinkers of the Global North and the centers of Critical Theory in the Frankfurt School mode. The project should not be one of searching for recognition from Europe and the US for theory that has been excluded but rather pursuing a project that should not *need* this validation.[5] This is what is required to see if Critical Theory can truly be decolonized, to see if it can stand on its own in the non-European context. The universalism of its project, combined with the Eurocentrism of academies in the Global South, has made it so that this question was not as apparent as it is now and, in fact, contributed to the resistance of such approaches, not just in the Global North but also the Global South. Thankfully, things are changing, and this question is one that now must be confronted. For the person who wants to see if it is possible, what is needed is a more concrete and concentrated confrontation between decolonial thought and Critical Theory, especially as regards the critique of rationality and epistemology found in the first generation, which is where such an interaction makes sense, to the extent that the orientation of decolonial thought can be said to hinge upon the need to do justice to different, othered loci of enunciation.

A possible path forward in this direction, which engages directly with the attempts to utilize the tradition of Critical Theory in Latin America, is shown by Rocio Zambrana (2015) in her article, "Normative Ambivalence and the Future of Critical Theory: Adorno & Horkheimer, Castro-Gomez, Quijano on Rationality, Modernity, Totality," which gives us an idea of how to do this. In this article she confronts the Adorno and Horkheimer (2002) of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* with the works of Santiago Castro-Gomez and Anibal Quijano. Her main contribution to its decolonization is to contrast the understanding of the critique of rationality found in Critical Theory, insofar as it exists in the unambiguous sense that is attributed to Adorno and Horkheimer, with an attempt to think from what might be called that underside of modernity (to borrow a phrase from Dussel). The recognition of a thought that exists as underside, exteriority, margin, or otherwise entails the denial of a univocal manner of understanding the concept, as Habermas does, but approaches this in a historicized fashion. As opposed to utilizing the sort of transcendental argument that Habermas uses in rethinking reason, the historical reality of different existing cultures is recognized, and with this the concomitant difference in forms of rationality to be found within each.

Such an interpretation is implicitly critical of Eurocentrism both in terms of the developmental picture of Europe as the motor of world history and in terms of its seemingly rational development (for example, of that iron cage of reason, which comes with social differentiation under modernity). Adorno and Horkheimer are useful resources insofar as the critique in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* illustrates the ambiguity of the concept of Enlightenment, showing that myth contains enlightenment and enlightenment myth (Zambrana, 2015, p. 103). This ultimately serves to reveal the seemingly irrational characteristics of what should ideally be progress—enlightenment means especially rationality as mastery, of nature foremost, and yet this same mastery becomes domination of ourselves and others (p. 104). In this analysis, there is a clear critique of European thought that is entailed, and one that can be magnified by the non-European.

To do this one must deny the univocity of reason, which is implicit in the criticism found in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, but in a manner different from that of Eurocentric philosophers, that recognizes the resources in other countries, with Latin American and especially indigenous resources in the case of decolonial thought—it is not that there is more than one form of reason because of the sorts of reasons outlined by Habermas in his *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984, 1987b) but because reason has a social-historical existence. It is not a matter of myth versus enlightenment but rather their coexistence, if not identity. As Zambrana says, myth *is* enlightenment and enlightenment *is* myth (2015, pp. 102–103). This is to be contrasted with the relationship between the two expressed in Adorno and Horkheimer, wherein myth is already enlightenment and enlightenment *reverts* to myth (Zambrana, 2015, p. 104). Whereas the first suggests a sort of inherent mythic element to reason, the second implies a sort of developmentalist framework wherein the mythic could and should be overcome. This is not, however, to deny the reality of social change or

even development as such; it is rather that universal history must be held to ambivalently, "constructed and denied" (Adorno, 1973, p. 320). As Adorno says, "[n]o universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb" (1973, p. 320). It is this that finds expression in Latin American philosophy, especially in the work of Enrique Dussel. *The Invention of the Americas*, for example, can be understood as a sort of speculative retelling of that sort of horror that leads from the slingshot to the atomic bomb in the context of the colonization. And it also contains its own negation of split between myth and enlightenment, with his retelling of human history emphasizing that "a *rational* world of myth flourished in the great urban civilizations reaching from Mesopotamia to the Southern Andes" (Dussel, 1995, p. 76).

This sort of thinking is contrasted with the other form of positing a different form of rationality or the possibility of multiple rationalities in Latin America that uncritically accepts Adorno and Horkheimer's narrative about the fate of a univocal reason. In these sorts of approaches, which are exemplified for Santiago Castro-Gomez by Pedro Morande and Cristian Parker, there is a risk of affirming a sort of "radical alterity" or "absolute exteriority" that would be an unintentional reinscription of the colonial difference in different terms in their "seek[ing] to articulate a genuinely Latin-American rationality in order to confront the colonial legacy" (Zambrana, 2015, p. 107). All invocations of otherness and exteriority, motivated as they are by the rejection of a Hegelian totalizing logic (that is precisely what Adorno and Horkheimer attempt to resist) risk hypostatizing that other as untouched, as immediately perceived, as absolute "others" of rationality (Zambrana, 2015, p. 108). This is what is at stake in Castro-Gomez's critique of Morande and Parker to which Zambrana draws our attention—both seem to consider the specific rationality found in Latin America as "sub-modern," insofar as its "rationality is a matter of 'religious ritual'" (2015, p. 108). There are, obviously many arguments that could be made against this sort of characterization of specifically Latin American reason, but the most important is that that colonization was, after all, a form of contact that did not leave either side intact: both are "mutually albeit asymmetrically transformed by their encounter" (2015, p. 108). The difference between the encounter between the different cultures must not obscure the fact that there was, after all, colonization, which was characterized by a blending.

The problem is that the encounter was less a meeting and more a misrecognition. As Dussel reminds us, Columbus was convinced that he was in Asia, and this discovery was less an uncovering in the etymological sense of the word, but rather an initial "covering over" that thereby did not even recognize the people of the Americas as properly Other (Dussel, 1995, p. 32). The uncovering of the reality of Latin America before the conquest as having its own legitimacy was thus an important part of reconsidering the history of Latin American thought in a way that would recognize the reality of indigenous traditions of thought, such as that of the Aztecs, on which Miguel León-Portilla focused his energies. This is part of what might motivate such a characterization of a distinctly Latin American rationality, especially as it has become a major issue in Latin American philosophy for a large part of the 20th century, with one of the major themes of this debate being the problem of the seeming inadequacy and denial of a Latin Americanness in favor of an attachment to Europe as the bastion of progress.[6] It is thus not surprising that such a tendency would lend itself to the far stronger claim of a sort of absolute difference to be found in Latin American thought, which ends up reinscribing colonial difference yet again.

In this regard, Castro-Gomez "helps us reformulate their [Adorno and Horkheimer's] understanding of immanent critique," in that he questions the image of a univocal reason that would thereby relegate Latin American to either complete integration or complete exclusion from modernity (Zambrana, 2015, p. 111). Myth *is* enlightenment and enlightenment myth—there is no absolute other that is confronted by an absolute reason. The misrecognition of the indigenous by Europe therefore becomes a meeting not of reason and its other, but a reason that could not recognize the other as other. This does not alter the main factors motivating European rationality but rather takes away its "tragic" element, of its lament that the potential of Enlightenment has itself fallen prey to this reversion to myth (Zambrana, 2015, p. 109). It has always been mythic, and there has been no fall from a height or potential expressed at the moment of the high bourgeoisie. This, of course, was unfortunate for the colonized who could not fit into the model of the human that Europe had erected.

Here we can see that the critique of the tragic reading is not sufficient, as it requires a different model of historiography, a different story about the rise of modernity as a global phenomenon and thus must be supplemented by a

different formulation of social totality, one that pushes against the European image of a totalizing modernity. This is where Zambrana brings in a specific reinterpretation of this Eurocentric experience in terms of Anibal Quijano's concept of the coloniality of power. As Zambrana notes, Adorno and Horkheimer miss what Quijano calls "the historical-structural heterogeneity of power," which must be corrected, as "[h]istorical experience teaches us that, far from a monolithic totality following a single logic, the global pattern of capitalist power 'is a matter of structural articulation between historically heterogeneous elements'" (Zambrana, 2015, p. 114). This altered form of totality, instead of merely concerning itself with the world-historical fate of Europe, paints a picture drawn from world systems theory, whereby the power of capital originated or "established" coloniality "as a global pattern (*patron*) with America" (Zambrana, 2015, p. 112).

What makes the concept of the coloniality of power unique is not just that is pushes against Eurocentrism by linking the birth of modernity with the colonization of the Americas, but also that it in doing so also integrates the imposition of racial hierarchy into the domination that is established at the moment of its birth (see Enrique Dussel, 2002, pp, 227–233. See also Anibal Quijano, 2000, pp. 533–549). Zambrana (2015) describes the specifics of coloniality as such:

> *Coloniality thus refers to (a) the racial classification of the world's population via the racialization of relations between the colonizer and the colonized; (b) the configuration of a new system of exploitation that articulates under one pattern, namely, capitalism, all forms of control of labor—wage labor, slavery, indentured labor, small commodity production; (c) Eurocentrism as a new mode of production and control of subjectivity; and (d) the nation state as the new system of collective authority that excludes populations racialized as inferior. (p. 112)*

The coloniality of power, as is clear, provides a seemingly less pernicious image of totality in its avoidance of a presupposed Eurocentrism as it not only reinterprets the world-historical integration that was constituted by the colonization but also shows the essential Eurocentrism that characterizes and constitutes it from the very beginning as presupposition. That is, it reveals the means by which Eurocentrism itself could be materially constituted and thereby puts the problem at the forefront instead of hiding it.

As Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008) notes, this moment is constitutive of modernity, suggesting that

> *[t]he "myth of modernity" is therefore simultaneous with the emergence of modern subjectivity itself: freedom and the ensuing sense of rationality that emanates from it were tied to a peculiar conception of power that is premised on the alleged superiority of some subjects over others. (p. 213)*

One does not have to squint very hard to see similarities with Adorno, albeit in a context that has taken into account the colonization of the Americas in its critique. Francis Bacon, who expresses the mastery of nature in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, was born less than 100 years after Columbus's famous voyages, and the link between control and knowledge that fills the first pages of this text could very well be seen as reflecting from the European perspective the same process described by Maldonado-Torres and other decolonial thinkers (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, pp. 1–12). What the decolonial does, however, is supplement this by a recognition of the victims of the process outlined in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, showing how that same reason led to the famous debates between Juan Gines de Sepulveda and Bartolomeo de Las Casas on the moral status of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, that the same reason led to racialization as a naturalized justification for slavery, and that same reason also led to a recognition that "the colony—long before the concentration camp and the Nazi politics of extermination—served as the testing ground for the limits and possibilities of modernity, thereby revealing its darkest secrets" (Maldonado-Torres, 2008, p. 217).

Just as the reassessment of European history in terms of the coloniality of power finds the roots of Eurocentrism at the moment of the birth of colonization, it find itself in a similar valence as the criticisms of Adorno and Horkheimer, as as the root of domination is, after all, inherent in enlightenment and therefore in modernity itself. And yet Zambrana and all the decolonial thinkers we have cited have already moved us very far afield from this. It is, after all, one thing to deny the hard distinction between enlightenment and myth, as one might do this and still remain Eurocentric.[7] It is another thing to argue for a different model of totality, because to do so is to change completely the project of Critical Theory. This is not to suggest such a project is not valuable; far from it. What it shows, rather, is that the decolonial

method of pursuing a critical project would necessarily entail a shifting of the geopolitics of knowledge toward Latin America, that means that it would not be a matter of decolonizing Critical Theory, but rather recognizing potential resources in Critical Theory that themselves must be heavily revised and utilized altered to create new understandings of concepts such as totality (Mignolo, 2010, pp. 304–307).

Thus, to decolonize Critical Theory is to miss the point of the decolonial moment—it is not the job of decolonial thinkers to fix the errors of European philosophers insofar as they are Eurocentric. This merely reinforces a sort of theoretical dependency on Europe that must, after all, be overcome. To the extent that Horkheimer and Adorno are useful to decolonial thought it makes sense to utilize them. This is what Dussel has done. He has identified what is valuable in the different iterations of Critical Theory and taken them up in the philosophy of liberation:

From the first generation of Critical Theory we must recover:

a) *Materiality* (corporeal, affective, ecological, economic, and cultural), and

b) *Negativity*, as part of that materiality a *critical* negativity.

From the "second generation," we assume:

c) *Discursivity*, implanted within

d) *the intersubjective community* gives us a more adequate and complete understanding of social reality, from which *consensus* legitimates the given order. (Zambrana, 2005, p. 199; translation mine)

Dussel, however, goes beyond this and integrates other useful concepts (exteriority and critical discursivity) and claims in this to not just go beyond both, but also go beyond the so-called "third generation" of Critical Theory. Indeed, as he makes clear:

> *In effect, this is beyond even the "third generation" [of Critical Theory], because the Philosophy of Liberation located the material exteriority of victims following the 1970s in the globalization of the metropolitan/postcolonial world, the center/periphery, the masculine/feminine, etc., which overcomes the* skeptical Eurocentrism *of the "third generation"—who, following Adorno, I believe did not understand that "falsehood"* (Unwahrheit*) is, in respect to all of these poles of domination, also* global. *(Pp.199–200)*

In effect—Critical Theory and its failings have already been overcome in the selective application of its concepts in the discourse of Latin America.

Thus, in her "Shifting the Geopolitics of Critical Knowledge," Catherine Walsh (2007) identifies one major contribution of Critical Theory that is applicable in Latin America; namely, the distinction made by Horkheimer in "Traditional and Critical Theory" that can define the very project of Critical Theory. According to her, his contribution is important to decolonial thought because

> *[b]y placing attention to the structures in which social reality, as well as the theories that seek to understand this reality, were constructed, Horkheimer challenged the positivism of his era, establishing a relation between critical theory and issues of social justice and transformation. (p. 227)*

It is this imperative that is behind decolonial thought, and this in a given geopolitical location. We can understand this better by looking at Santiago Castro Gomez's (2000) essay on the same article, where it is taken similarly as providing a model for postcolonial theory. Castro Gomez says that such a Critical Theory argues that "social life does not depend entirely on the intentionality of consciousness but rather on the dialectic of between subject and structure" and is understood as a sort of "second nature" (2000, p. 508). Such a critical perspective can thereby be transferred to other contexts, such as the Americas, where it is then recognized that "the set of historic objectifications of human activity we call 'culture,' are not rooted in the species' transcendental abilities, but rather in relations of power that are socially construed and which have acquired a 'global' character" (2000, p. 509). What these understandings of the project of Critical Theory do is shift the locus from which one looks at questions such as culture and totality to a marginalized global position. It is the marginal position that defines decolonial thought's attempts to find its own unique form of expression, and therefore requires the elucidation of its own project.[8]

The task, then, for those who continue to be adherents of Critical Theory is to recognize that, in a way, the call to decolonize it quite easily falls back into Eurocentrism as long as it remains anchored to a project that is fundamentally European in nature. Not only are there local sources to draw upon that can be used to further the critical project in general, which thereby tacitly find themselves aligned with the motivations of Critical Theory (opposition to domination and so on), but the project itself must aim at liberation in attending to its own marginalized context. In this way, the most properly decolonial current representative of Critical Theory in the Frankfurt mode (at least, being one who was born in Europe and who studied at Frankfurt, which are major caveats) may actually be Stefan Gandler, because he has made Mexico his residence and has taken up Bolivar Echeverria and Adolfo Sanchez Velasquez as exemplars of non-dogmatic Marxism and as being uniquely positioned to provide resources for critical thought, representing a large shift, at least in one individual, in touchstones for criticism. In his interpretation of these two thinkers he specifically positions himself against the more Eurocentric formulations of Habermas, and finds a model of criticism and interpretation that is not only an equal to that of Europe's, but also superior to it.[9]

While such an affirmation is dialectically suspect, it nonetheless gives us an idea for a method by which Europeans and Americans themselves may decolonize their practice. This would involve the unlearning of Eurocentric tendencies of thought, as Amy Allen suggests. In a work that discusses this and predates Allen's suggestion of this for Critical Theory, Madina D. Tlostanova and Walter Mignolo (2012) have a co-written a book that seeks to apply decolonial concepts in Central Asia as well as in Latin America. A common cause is found in decolonial thought, one that makes colonization apparent in the different contexts of the two regions, explaining that [w]e are not

> *comparing Central Asia and the Caucasus, on the one hand, with South America and the Caribbean, on the other, but rather analyzing the underlying colonial matrix of power maintaining the illusion that these "areas" are far apart from one another (and they are as far as local histories are concerned), while in fact they are linked to Western hegemony by the logic of coloniality. (p. 2)*

This allows one to recognize the commonality between the two regions that both are enmeshed in the same world structure described by Quijano and derived from world systems theory. Commonalities are recognized but only in the sense of a logic that must be resisted, one that is quite similar to that identified by Horkheimer and Adorno, but that is recognized as having a location, one that has its own history and cannot be understood as reason *tout court*.

In all this there is still something missing; something correctly identified in Allen's approach as being of prime importance for Critical Theory and something that motivated the turn away from Adorno—the normative dimension. This is also perhaps the most underdeveloped aspect of decolonial thought and something that, therefore, deserves more attention. Again, Dussel has been at the forefront here, specifically attempting to blend the discourse ethics of Habermas and Apel with the approach of Levinas and the responsibility to the Other. It is obvious that squaring this particular circle, turning this transcendent other into the material other and integrating it would appear to lead to intractable problems, even discounting the fact that this approach itself also needs an accounting of its amenability to decolonization. Yet there is something at least tacit in his recognition of the exclusion of the indigenous peoples of the Americas that has continued until the present and that itself is a motivating factor in actually doing the work of decolonization.

Indeed, there is another approach, found in the work Maldonado-Torres, that follows this intuition. This approach, however, itself is inspired by Dussel's own use of Levinasian themes and furthers it through an integration of the thought of Fanon and the question of recognition. While this approach may seem more amenable to integration into approaches such as those of Axel Honneth, the limits of recognition remain a problem, especially as it has become increasingly apparent that "recognition" can take both progressive and regressive forms. This problem has become especially apparent as an issue in Bolivia, where the link between activism and decolonial intellectuals is strongest. As Javier Sanjinés has noted, an indigenous group known as the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario was quite capable of integrating itself into government upon gaining more influence and "transforming itself into a conservative neoliberal force" (Sanjinés, 2002, p. 139). What is needed is something stronger that can overcome the resistance to the decolonization of one's own approach. In this sense, perhaps it might be said that decolonization is hard to justify in a normative way because it aims not at integration of other perspectives into European thought but because it is

a matter of radically changing the way we live in such a way that cannot be explained within the present; of a sort of utopian possibility that decolonization represents and that itself could therefore make it an attractive possibility. Much remains to be developed in this direction, but it suggests that the decolonial does have its own possible draw for critical theorists and, indeed, in terms different from the mere recognition or integration of decolonial insights.

Indeed, to be able to appreciate these insights requires the process of decolonization, specifically of unlearning Eurocentric ways of thinking, something mentioned both in Allen and in Mignolo and Tlostanova and Mignolo. In the case of the second, there is a description of the model of Amawtay Wasi, The Intercultural University of the People and Nations of Ecuador, that is oriented toward an education informed by the traditional principles of the indigenous population of Ecuador (pp. 13–14). In this context it is not a matter of merely unlearning but "[l]earning to unlearn in order to relearn" (Gandler, 2013). Resisting the form of the traditional university, Amawtay Wasi represents a model of learning that opposes a variety of tendencies found in the European model (p. 12). These differences are too involved and particular to the institution to go into here. What the example illustrates is the possibility of different and local models that would represent the decolonization of the university, the decolonization of knowledge, and the decolonial possibilities in Latin America that can be understood as illustrating the possibility of translating this program to other contexts. More than anything, however, it represents a choice, a possibility, a proper recognition of being able to be see things otherwise.

In his discussion of the Zapatistas Mignolo recounts the story told by Subcomandante Marcos (Rafael Guillén) about his own shift in perspective:

> *In the first encounter between Antonio and Guillén, Emiliano Zapata came in as a topic of conversation. Guillén told the story of Mexico from a Marxist perspective and situated Zapata in that history. Then the Old Man Antonio told the story of the Indigenous communities from a Mayan perspective and situated Zapata, indeed, Votan/Zapata, in that history. After this exchange of stories, in which Zapata became the connector of two stories embedded in different cosmologies, Old Man Antonio extended a photograph of Votan/Zapata to Guillén. In the picture, Votan/Zapata is standing up, with his right hand grabbing the handle of the sword that is hanging from his right side. While Guillén was looking at the picture, Old Man Antonio asked him whether Zapata was pulling the sword out or pushing it in. Once it is understood that both histories have their reasons, it is only an unconscious structure of power that can decide which one is history and which is myth. And this is not necessarily cultural relativism. (Mignolo, 2011, p. 220)*

If this is not cultural relativism, then what is it? Mignolo suggests that this is a matter of "political choices and options prompted by the awareness of the colonial difference" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 220). Following the logic pursued in the anecdote above, this interpretation appears very persuasive and, indeed, one that illustrates quite sharply the normative terms involved in such a situation and how the choice one makes itself illustrates the essence of the decolonial. Most important here is the use of the word "cosmology" here—Mignolo is implicitly making the two positions coeval *not* by suggesting that the indigenous interpretation is itself rational in the same way that the Marxist interpretation is but, rather, by understanding the Marxist position itself as expressing a cosmology.[10] This move is reminiscent to that taken by Fausto Reinaga in *El Pensamiento Amautico* where, rather than insisting on the equality of the indigenous peoples to the Europeans or even the mestizos, he instead says it is the mestizos who must overcome racial thinking and join the indigenous peoples, must move beyond categories of race and ethnicity, that themselves were imposed on the Americas (Reinaga, 1978, pp. 45–46, 105–106).

It is just this sort of practice that needs to be involved in the decolonial project. This is why this article initially presented itself as a question: decolonize Critical Theory? Can we? Or, rather, should we? It seems that to attempt to do so is to miss the point, and recent attempts to engage the decolonial with Critical Theory illustrate this. Critical theory was received in Latin America long ago. It has already been applied to local conditions in different ways, some more, some less Eurocentric. It has, however, been confronted with these problems by those thinking from Latin America, who still face the coloniality of power. Perhaps it is rather the critical theorists who must decolonize themselves by changing the center of their thinking, not supplement their implicitly Eurocentric perspective with a decolonial addendum, that in many ways is what recent attempts to integrate such thought have effectively done

without meaning to or necessarily realizing that they have done so. They must, counterintuitively, look inward to voices that have been silenced in the process of nation building to the exclusion of others, supplementing their histories of modernity with others. E. P. Thompson influenced subaltern studies and postcolonialism, which itself influenced decolonial thought. If Critical Theory is to decolonize itself, it must import back a perspective that will integrate subaltern and peasant voices that are just as much marked by economic and ethnic difference as colonized countries were marked by the natural extensions of the economic and the racial.

NOTES

[1] Decolonization, as referred to in the title of this article, is different from recent accounts like those of Baum, insofar as it wishes to make a distinction between decolonization as a process related to the decolonization of Africa, and decolonization as related to the project of decoloniality, which is what this article is concerned. Bruce Baum's article (2015), as with many others, is focused on another area than that of the increasingly visible area of research that is understood as being the subject matter of the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality project, which is associated with a number of intellectuals such as Walter Mignolo, Catherine Walsh, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and Maria Lugones. It is to this tradition that is referred to here.

[2] Beyond this, his criticism is limited by its taking the approach of adding sources that recognize racism to the formula of Habermasian Critical Theory—it is a sort of expression that might negatively be referred to as that of the "hand wringing" of universalist liberals who are now ready to recognize the racism of Kant and Hegel but wish at all costs to find something which might redeem them. As an attempt to understand Critical Theory in the American context, there is certainly something in his work that is of value. But the substituting of the position of the USA for that of Europe could also be taken as substituting the perspective of one hegemon for another.

[3] This point is made strongly here because the difference between the postcolonial and the decolonial is strongly maintained by the decolonial thinkers as part of their own self-understanding, one which is often ignored by those who are not as familiar with its development. That said, both the postcolonial and the decolonial do have many similarities, with similar conclusions reached for similar reasons but with a different orientation. For example, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, in his *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, takes into consideration the very same considerations that Mignolo and other decolonial thinkers do in considering their own locus of enunciation, the geopolitics of knowledge, and so on, and describes the situation in Kenya and his own shift away from English to his own language, Gikuyu. Beyond the difference of historical context that is worked through in that of decolonial theorists from Latin America, there is also a difference in influence and tradition, mentioned above. There is no doubt about the affinity between such a work and the decolonial as understood in this article. It is just that the differences between the postcolonial and decolonial approaches must be attended to if one is to be reflecting the self-understanding of those within each tradition. (I thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing Thiong'o to my attention).

[4] This claim itself leads to a set of issues, hitherto still not fully examined, regarding the relative position of decolonial thinkers. If Mignolo wishes to shift the locus of enunciation to the Global South, why does he teach in the USA and write in English? Further, what is to be said about postcolonial thinkers like Achille Mbembe whose major referents are French philosophers from the Global North? There are no easy answers to such questions and I think that it remains to be examined in further depth than is possible here. What will be said is that I believe the beginning of an answer is given later on in this article where the question of normativity and its relation to the decolonial project returns again. What can be said is that it is surely something that must be the object of further examination in greater depth.

[5] It thus relates to questions of the identity of intellectual traditions as well. In this regard, it is of a part with the debates regarding the identity of Latin American philosophy, its existence and uniqueness, which one see's challenged in the work of Salazar Bondy and which has been treated with great depth in English in Vallega (2014).

[6] Vallega (2014) details this problem in the work of Leopoldo Zea, Salazar Bondy, and Samuel Ramos. The problem remains, especially at the national level of Mexicanness, at least for Guillermo Hurtado, whose *El Buho y La Serpiente* (2007) is useful in terms of a retrospective analysis of the debates.

[7] It is this that is behind the tendency to recognize an affinity between them, Adorno especially, and the so-called postmodernists and poststructuralists, which might in many ways explain the adoption of such theorists in critical works from the global periphery.

[8] Similarly, Walter Mignolo makes it clear that the decolonial project requires an interrogation of what he refers to as the loci of enunciation, that is, the specific historical-social context of the emergence of thought, which is inevitably taken into consideration in intellectual work from the global periphery, but rarely acknowledged when it comes from the global center. On this, see Mignolo (2000) pp. 100–124. He, further, says that "A Critical Theory *beyond* the history of Europe proper and *within* the colonial history of America…becomes *decolonial theory*." (Walter Mignolo, 2005, p. xx).

[9] Thus, in his 2013 article "*Juarez y el Liberalismo Politico Mexicano. Aportaciones Emancipadoras Desde las Americas*," he distinguishes between moderate and radical liberalism, finding that it was in Mexico, with Benito Juarez, that radical liberalism found expression in his treatment of Maximillian, specifically in applying the law to him in ordering his execution against the wishes of many in Europe, thereby insisting on the actual equality of all under law *in actuality*. Of course, this does not mean that Gandler's (2013) critique is of a kind with decolonial thought but rather that even in just making the choice to orient himself relative to Latin American thought, he is already further along than most Frankfurt aligned critical theorists in the decolonization of his thought.

[10] This point can be brought back to European traditions via Cornelius Castoriadis, both with his specific criticism of Marxism as claiming its own objectivity when it actually just sneaks in a metaphysics (Castoriadis, 1978, pp. 670–688) as well as his postulation of the social-historical imaginary as expressed in Castoriadis (1987), esp. pp. 340–373).

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