

*Ameryka Łacińska*, 1 (131) 2026  
ISSN 1506-8900; e-ISSN 2081-1152  
© 2026 Author & Editor



Michał Zalewski

Uniwersytet Ignatianum w Krakowie. Poland

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-4905-0124>

e-mail: [michal.zalewski@student.ignatianum.edu.pl](mailto:michal.zalewski@student.ignatianum.edu.pl)

Philosophical Foundations of the Coloniality  
of Knowledge and the Possibilities of Epistemic  
Liberation: Decolonial Analyses  
by Aníbal Quijano and Walter Dignolo

*Filozoficzne podstawy kolonialności wiedzy oraz możliwości  
epistemicznego wyzwolenia: dekolonialne analizy  
Aníbala Quijano i Waltera Dignolo*

Received 13.04.2025; Accepted 22.09.2025; Published 30.03.2026  
DOI: 10.7311/20811152.2026.131.04

**Abstract:** The article presents analyses by Aníbal Quijano and Walter Dignolo on the epistemic dimension of colonial violence. Utilising the foundational distinction between colonialism and coloniality - and, by analogy, decolonialism and decoloniality - the thesis posits that the coloniality of knowledge serves as the underlying principle driving the processes of European territorial expansionism since the late fifteenth century. It focuses on three fundamental assumptions/concepts in the Western philosophical tradition: the universality and common validity of theoretical findings, the distinction between the subject and the object of cognition, and the classical ontological paradigm, which attributes cognition to objective reality. The study demonstrates how these assumptions function as the preconditions for the epistemic domination exerted by Europe over its conquered territories. The subsequent section presents Quijano and Dignolo's proposal to decolonise the eurocentred cognitive perspective and construct a new epistemic order based on hermeneutic pluralism and cognitive equality.

**Keywords:** Coloniality, decoloniality of knowledge, epistemic domination, universalism, pluritopic hermeneutics, cognitive pluralism.

**Streszczenie:** Artykuł prezentuje analizy Aníbala Quijano i Waltera Mignolo dotyczące epistemicznego wymiaru przemocy kolonialnej. Wychodząc od kluczowego dla obu autorów rozróżnienia kolonializmu od kolonialności - i analogicznie dekolonializmu od dekolonialności - prezentuje tezę o kolonialności wiedzy jako ukrytej matrycy procesów Europejskiej ekspansji terytorialnej od końca XV wieku. Skupia się na trzech fundamentalnych dla Zachodniej tradycji filozoficznej założeniach/koncepcjach: uniwersalności i powszechnej obowiązywalności teoretycznych ustaleń, rozróżnieniu na podmiot i przedmiot poznania oraz klasycznym paradygmacie ontologicznym, przyporządkowującym poznanie obiektywnej rzeczywistości. Założenia te zostają pokazane jako warunki możliwości epistemicznej dominacji Europy nad podbitymi terytoriami. Dalej zostaje przedstawiona propozycja Quijano i Mignolo dekolonizacji perspektywy poznawczej i budowy nowego porządku epistemicznego opartego o hermeneutyczny pluralizm oraz poznawcze równouprawnienie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Kolonialność, dekolonialność wiedzy, epistemiczna dominacja, uniwersalizm, hermeneutyka pluritopiczna, poznawczy pluralizm,

## Problem Formulation

One of the most prominent theoretical frameworks in contemporary studies on the nature and consequences of European colonialism is the concept of coloniality and decoloniality of knowledge. It comprises two principal analytical and practical components: first, recognising the epistemic dimension of colonial processes, and second, undertaking the specific task of liberating thought from the European, power-entangled epistemic legacy. The concept of coloniality as the concealed matrix of the processes of European territorial expansion and knowledge as its key element emerged in the last decade of the twentieth century in Latin America in a research group named "modernity/coloniality" (*El grupo de modernidad/colonidad*). Its central figures include Aníbal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Ramón Grosfoguel, Catherine Walsh, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres (Kubiaczyk, 2013). Mignolo himself has reconstructed the beginnings of the group, writing how, independently, a number of intellectuals in various parts of Latin America and the Caribbean read Quijano's works, until in 1998 Edgardo Lander organised two panels of the International Sociological Organization in Montreal, which marked the beginning of a joint intellectual effort that gradually, with successive conferences and events, attracted a growing cohort of interested parties, including scholars, artists, and activists - all

intrigued by this new way of reconstructing the epistemic side of colonialism (López-Calvo, 2014). Quijano's concept initiated a revolutionary paradigm for critical Latin American studies: one that was non-Western and non-Eurocentric in its approach to the region's own history, culture and identity (Arias, 2010).

The purpose of this article is to provide a concise overview of the key concepts of the decoloniality of knowledge project as proposed by Quijano (the author of the coloniality theory and the symbolic founder of modern Latin American decolonial studies) and Mignolo (currently one of the main theorists of the movement). The primary focus of this examination is their analysis of the influence of the foundational assumptions of European philosophy on the mechanisms of colonial domination. Additionally, it will address the ideas of overcoming a cognitive horizon constructed through these mechanisms. The fact that the following presentation is based on the work of these two authors does not imply that they are the only ones to have addressed issues of epistemic justice in the Latin American context – important analyses are also provided by many other representatives of the “modernity/coloniality” group, as well as other researchers.<sup>1</sup> The focus on Mignolo's project is motivated by his position within the field of decolonial studies and the substantial corpus of literature he has dedicated to this subject. In purely quantitative terms, no other scholar has produced as much written material on this topic. However, in

---

<sup>1</sup> In the context of Latin America, the evolution of this notion can be traced to its rudimentary stages in the movements of liberation theology and philosophy. Pioneering figures in these fields, including Leonardo Boff and Gustavo Gutiérrez in theology, and Ignacio Ellacuría and Enrique Dussel in philosophy, emphasised the significance of the correlation between the formulated theories and the epistemic milieu in which they were articulated. In the 1980s, Gloria Anzaldúa emerged as a major figure, and her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* became a landmark text in the study of cultural and epistemic identity. Within the modernity/coloniality group, each member introduced or developed their own significant concepts, which were then utilised by other authors (for example, Maldonado-Torres' coloniality of being or Castro-Gómez's zero-point). Outside the Latin American context, the most high-profile group in the Global South dealing with the issue of epistemic marginalisation is the South Asian collective known as Subaltern Studies, whose leading authors include Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In the field of African decolonial studies, which has its roots in the groundbreaking works of Frantz Fanon, the most influential author today is Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni.

order to present Mignolo's specific proposals in a satisfactory manner, it is necessary to make extensive references to Quijano's concepts. This is partly due to the fact that Mignolo himself, when formulating his own theses, repeatedly refers to the Peruvian sociologist, considering him to be his main source of inspiration. This does not suggest that Quijano's role is subsidiary to Mignolo in the subsequent presentation – their theses are presented as being equally significant to their joint project, and the proportion of citations corresponds to the extent to which they addressed particular subjects.

The present article is divided into three main parts. The initial section of the text provides an overview of the primary categories of decolonial discourse, including coloniality, decoloniality, modernity, and the coloniality of knowledge. In the second part, it demonstrates how, according to Quijano and Mignolo, specific philosophical categories shaped the consciousness of the European coloniser and his sense of both biological and cultural superiority over other ethnic groups. In the third section, it presents a decolonial proposal to overcome the Eurocentric cognitive perspective, the concepts of pluritopic hermeneutics and border thinking developed by Mignolo, as well as the issue of social engagement in knowledge production.

The presentation of Quijano and Mignolo's project of decolonising knowledge necessitates a particular distillation of epistemological theses and concepts from considerations that extend to a more encompassing research scope. Their analyses address numerous socio-political and cultural facets of colonial domination, of which epistemic colonialism constitutes merely one, albeit a particularly critical one. Neither Quijano nor Mignolo provide a systematic lecture on the coloniality of knowledge in any specific publication. The synthesis of these concepts in this article is, therefore, the result of compiling thoughts and proposals that are dispersed throughout their body of work. The text is further supplemented by the reflections of other decolonial authors and scholars, as well as their critical observations, which, although not always explicitly addressed to Mignolo or Quijano, can be applied to comment on or expand on the latter's proposals.

## 1. Main Categories of Decolonial Discourse

### **Colonialism and Coloniality**

It is first necessary to distinguish between colonialism, understood as a historical phenomenon, and coloniality. The latter term was introduced by Quijano (primarily in his widely discussed article *Colonialidad y Modernidad/Racionalidad* from 1992) and further developed by Mignolo (starting with his first significant book, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, published in 1995, to what is probably his most systematic interpretation, published jointly with Catherine E. Walsh in 2018, *On Decoloniality*) to reveal the concealed logic of colonial processes and elucidate the internal structure of colonial oppression, which they call the colonial matrix of power. An important aspect of this structure is that of knowledge, grounded in both philosophical and traditional theological concepts and designed from the outset to generate a cognitive perspective that would recognise the colonial social order as natural and historically desirable. For Quijano and Mignolo, coloniality, as the former states, “proved to be more profound and more lasting than the colonialism in which it was engendered and which it helped to impose globally.” (Quijano, 2007b: 45-46). This implies that the nexus of worldviews and social practices formed in colonial modernity did not disappear with the political decolonisation of Latin America and other continents but survived in the form of a particular cognitive perspective: an inherited way of conceptualising the world that preserves colonial divisions and inequalities (Barszczewski, 2022).

Analogically, it is also necessary to differentiate between decolonisation and decoloniality. The fundamental objective of decolonisation was the dissolution of the colonial institutional order and the establishment of independent, self-determining states in the Global South. Decoloniality sets itself a different task: its primary objective is to challenge the colonial epistemological legacy and liberate the Global South from the internal structure of colonialism that persists beneath the surface of political transformations (Mignolo, 2011b). Decolonising knowledge, which is at the centre of the decolonial project, is the only means by which

to guarantee a real disengagement from/deconstruction of the colonial matrix of power, the transformation of the colonised consciousness and thus fully achieving what political decolonisation has only partially accomplished (Mignolo, 2011c).

### **Coloniality and Modernity**

Representatives of *El grupo de modernidad/colonidad* conceptualise coloniality as inextricably linked to modernity: it constitutes, as Mignolo states, “the hidden face of modernity and its very condition of possibility.” (Mignolo, 2000b: 722). Modernity could not have emerged without European colonial expansion; therefore, the concept itself requires further elaboration. Hence, the term ‘modernity/coloniality’ used by Mignolo and others, which, through semantic correction, reveals an unrecognised (or deliberately concealed) dimension of history. This dimension denotes the logic of oppression that lies beneath the narrative of variously modelled progress – depending on the cultural and intellectual trends dominant in Europe (Mignolo, 2006). The notion of modernity/coloniality thus delineates the rift between the self-perception of Eurocentric modernity and the experience of its victims in the Global South. Dussel draws attention to a fundamental discrepancy between what is narratively declared and what is actually happening in historical processes. He argues that modernity is developing a rational concept of emancipation, which simultaneously functions as an irrational myth that serves to justify genocidal violence (Dussel, 1993). Within this fundamental dissonance between the order of discourse and the order of practice, a transatlantic multidimensional network of connections has been established since the 16th century, organised around the self-justifying idea of progress, while producing an infinite number of victims – those at whose expense this progress is achieved (Mignolo, 2005).

Coloniality, regarded as the darker side of modernity, exerts a profound influence on global relations, shaping intercontinental and intracontinental political, cultural, and economic dynamics from the outset. Drawing on Immanuel Wallerstein’s world-systems theory (most fully elaborated in the now classic multi-volume work *The Modern World-System*

from 1974), Mignolo chronicles the emergence of the Atlantic commercial circuit in the 16th century as a pivotal moment in the global evolution of capitalism (Mignolo, 2001). Quijano's perspective on the structure of social relations, as they are organised around the capitalist economy, is that it is intrinsically linked to the dynamics of colonial transformations of power. Following the conquest of America, "all the forms of labor, production and exploitation were in ensemble around the axis of capital and the world market: slavery, serfdom, petty commodity production, reciprocity and salary." (Quijano, 2000: 216). One particular element, slavery, as Mignolo emphasises (Mignolo, 2001), established an unprecedented type of relationship between race and labour. This relationship, in turn, has permanently shaped global geopolitics, not only in terms of capital but also in terms of culture and identity.

The goal of the modernity/coloniality category is to analyse how a novel, distinctive pattern of articulation of power, encompassing nearly all fundamental aspects of human experience, has evolved historically. The authors from *El grupo de modernidad/colonidad* address the multifaceted nature of coloniality by dividing it into three areas of enquiry: coloniality of power, coloniality of being, and coloniality of knowledge. The latter is the primary focus of this article, a focus that arises from the central role Mignolo assigns to this area in his development of Quijano's theses. According to him, "one could say that modernity/coloniality is above all a question of knowing and knowledge and that coloniality is justified in and by the narratives of modernity ... that enact and transform existing knowledge systems and create a new one as the enterprise goes on." (Mignolo *et al.*, 2018: 173).

### **Coloniality of Knowledge**

It is crucial to highlight that both Quijano and Mignolo employ the term "knowledge" in a very broad sense. They refer to a historically (and geo-politically) shaped cognitive perspective equipped with theological, philosophical, and scientific concepts and categories, sanctioned by the relevant institutions. Knowledge thus understood becomes central to the analysis of colonial processes, not merely as an important element but

as a condition of their possibility. Mignolo (2018: 137) reiterates that European “expansion was not only economic and political but fundamentally epistemic.” He highlights the crucial role of transmitting a specific cognitive horizon in the history of colonialism.

The concept of the colonality of knowledge can be described as the European ability to manage cognition across other civilisations, which have their own traditions and bodies of knowledge, often comprising elaborate cosmologies and anthropologies. Quijano identifies two stages in the colonial modelling of perception: the first involved the suppression of ideas, modes of knowledge production, symbolic structures and forms of expression that shaped local ways of relating to reality; it was accompanied by the colonisers’ imposition of their own set of truths, cognitive patterns and discursive codes (Quijano, 2007a). This unveils the twofold nature of colonial epistemic violence, whereby the cultural destruction of local cognitive frameworks coincided with the fabrication of a new consciousness that was shaped according to a European model and, by extension, came to serve the objectives of the colonial powers (Kubiacyk, 2012). The rapid expansion of the epistemic perspective of the colonial Europe resulted in the invalidation of local, non-European knowledges and descriptions of reality, replacing them with European ones. In the view of the colonisers, the production of legitimate knowledge was confined exclusively to Europe. Any form of wisdom and cognition that developed outside the European tradition was not considered a source of relevant knowledge about the world but, at best, a primitive object of cultural research (Mignolo, 2000a).

Consequently, as Mignolo asserts, the world became “unthinkable” beyond the categories of European knowledge and epistemology. The extent of European rationality became the extent of thinking in general. Outside the parameters of European epistemology, there was no legitimate form of cognition, and apart from European science, there was no cognitively valuable description of reality. It was assumed that non-European knowledge was of no consequence in the process of learning and that it should be superseded by what was perceived as “true knowledge” or “true science.” (Mignolo, 2002). Quijano further elucidates the allure of such

management of cognition, which obscures its repressive nature. Over time, the possession of knowledge in the European sense became a source of attraction and aspiration for conquered cultures. This was due to the fact that it constituted a kind of initiation into the realm of the perfect way of thinking and being in the world, as well as into the realm of the prestige, social influence and power associated with it (Quijano, 2007a).

For Quijano and Mignolo, Eurocentric colonialism is the pivotal – if not exclusive – field of enquiry into the relationship between knowledge and power and the problem of epistemic violence. While this is understandable from the perspective of the geography of knowledge and local modelling of research problems, it may nevertheless entail the risk of drawing all phenomena related to epistemic injustice into this single interpretative framework. Consequently, any manifestation of cognitive marginalisation becomes perceived as a constituent element or by-product of the colonial matrix. Syed Farid Alatas (Alatas, 2022), for instance, opposes this approach, challenging the assumption that Eurocentrism is the primary problem in knowledge production in the Global South. He considers androcentrism, traditionalism, culturalism, ethnonationalism and sectarianism to be equally important hegemonic orientations. This, in turn, leads him to conclude that the decolonisation project itself, due to its fundamentally limited perspective on the problem, may be insufficient to solve the epistemic ills of the Global South (Alatas, 2022). In a similar vein, Boaventura de Sousa Santos critiques the tendency within the decolonial movement to conceptualise coloniality as the sole analytical category and the definitive factor shaping all other forms of domination. He suggests (2006) that this approach reproduces errors similar to those observed in orthodox Marxism. However, in the works of Quijano and Mignolo, such an element of self-evaluation is apparently absent. For them, coloniality constitutes the basis and condition for understanding all major forms of contemporary violence and marginalisation. This fundamental assumption, serving as the starting point and guiding principle of their research efforts, underlies their entire inquiry.

The colonial impact of the European cognitive perspective, as described in the works of Quijano and Mignolo, can be divided into two

issues. The first concerns the conscious and deliberate use of existing scientific theories (or the production of new ones) to provide a theoretical/ideological underpinning for specific colonial approaches. In this process, the authority of knowledge and science was employed to justify ethnic violence, legitimise the extermination of foreign religions, and rationalise and “normalize” the practice of, for example, human trade and slavery. The second issue relates to the conceptual frameworks and intellectual models developed and refined in Europe prior to and during the colonial era. These patterns and models of thinking, shaped over centuries, subsequently influenced the emergence and evolution of a distinct colonial consciousness during the different stages of colonial expansion. The analyses conducted by Quijano and Mignolo encompass the entire tradition of European philosophy, theology, and science, from antiquity to modernity, focusing on intellectual ideas that have various implications or direct consequences in modern colonial discourse, particularly those leading to the conviction of the alleged superiority of European knowledge and culture.

These two issues are also closely intertwined; it is impossible to analyse some scientific theories of the time without considering the pre-conceptions that made their emergence possible. In fact, they are two sides of the same coin. In this work, I refer mainly to Quijano’s and Mignolo’s analyses of the second issue. Their objective is to determine what aspects of European intellectual history (especially within the European philosophical tradition) facilitated the colonial marginalisation of non-European epistemological traditions, ultimately resulting in the devaluation of cultural identities and the individuals associated with them. They identify three particular philosophical intuitions: first, a demand for the universality and common validity of knowledge and truth; second, a binary distinction between the rational subject and the object of its perception; and third, an ontological paradigm according to which what is enunciated about a given entity constitutes its objective nature. These philosophical issues presented below have their origins in both classical European philosophy and the Cartesian revolution that followed. Within the proposed approach, they are regarded as the foundational elements of the Eurocentric cognitive orientation as delineated by Quijano and Mignolo.

## 2. The Philosophical Foundations of the Coloniality of Knowledge

### **Universality and Common Validity of Knowledge**

The principle of universality and common validity of theoretical conclusions has been a fundamental tenet of European thought since ancient Greek philosophy, further reinforced by the medieval philosophical tradition. This principle creates a framework that permits the recognition of only those concepts that are general, universal, and abstracted from a specific location and time. For something to be considered true, it must be universally applicable. Truth is not contingent upon locality and is not subject to the limitations of a specific place or time. This paradigm, traceable to Parmenides, holds that the particular is merely the source of worthless misperception, while truth must always be universal.

In the context of colonialism, philosophical tenets of universality and common validity are responsible for the phenomenon Mignolo describes as the “totality of knowledge.” Mignolo’s theoretical approach diverges from that of Quijano insofar as the latter analyses the category of totality mostly in the broader context of society, while Mignolo focuses on its epistemic dimension. According to him, the term “totality” signifies a certain completeness or comprehensiveness of cognition. The knowledge produced in Europe presents itself as total-universal, meaning it is applicable in all contexts, including those where other forms of knowledge and wisdom emerged in the past. Such universality of European knowledge entails that it encompasses all valid forms of discourse about the world, obviating the need for any additions from or agreements with non-European sources. Mignolo, following Quijano, emphasised the immanent imperative of the European perspective to deny cognitive value to anything different from itself. He characterised this as the appropriative-defensive quality of European knowledge, whose expansiveness goes hand in hand with suspicion and mistrust of anything external to it (Mignolo, 2007)

The assumption of totality evolved into totalitarianism of knowledge, defined by Mignolo as the unyielding pursuit of absolute authority over all other forms of knowledge and the relentless subjugation of

all things that deviate from the established order. Historically, the postulate of the absolute universality of knowledge led to the complete negation and invalidation of any traditions distinct from the European intellectual heritage. Anything that did not fit within the system of European rationality, built upon philosophical, theological, and scientific categories, had to be eradicated and replaced by what was perceived as the only true and cognitively valuable knowledge (Mignolo *et al.*, 2018).

This way, the European epistemic perspective was to become – through the mediation of languages and institutions of knowledge – a universal world perspective (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). However, from a decolonial standpoint, the fundamental problem with the principle of universality is that it ignores the local rootedness of any cognitive perspective – including the European one – and, by extension, of the knowledge that emerges from its horizon. It is only by disregarding this elementary aspect of cognition that European knowledge could present itself to the rest of the world as delocalised knowledge, removed from its own historical-cultural-geographical context, and consequently overwrite any other cognitive perspective, which it, in turn, would consider as local and therefore invalid. Castro-Gómez has described this self-positioning of European knowledge as a zero-point hubris: “invisibilization of the particular locus of enunciation and its transformation into a place without a place” (Castro-Gómez, 2021: 46). As Mignolo contends, such zero-point epistemology, despite being inherently illusory in character, effectively served the crucial colonial function of masking specific interests under the guise of universal truths (Mignolo, 2011b). In terms of decolonial theory, European knowledge remains a local phenomenon which exists within the global horizon of numerous other local forms of knowledge. Its historical claim to be universally valid, to transcend its own locality, and to replace all other knowledges, reveals its hidden totalitarian tendencies.

Concurrently, Mignolo observes that the pursuit of an exhaustive and comprehensive representation of reality is not inherently problematic, as it is a fundamental aspect of all epistemological approaches. Every world description, whether theological, scientific, or philosophical, aims to encompass the entirety of things. The issue arises when a particular

regional perspective becomes totalitarian in its approach to other holistic forms of knowledge (Mignolo, 2018). Mignolo (2018: 195) writes:

Obviously, Western Christian Europeans had the right to build their own image of the world, like anybody else who had done so before them. But it was an aberration to pretend and act accordingly as if their specific image of the world and their own sense of totality was the same for any- and everybody else on the planet. Their strong belief that their knowledge covered the totality of the known brought about the need to devalue, diminish, and shut off any other totality that might endanger an epistemic totalitarianism in the making.

However, this acknowledgement of the natural pursuit of complete knowledge does not prompt Mignolo to conduct a more nuanced analysis of the category of universality as such. It appears that by interpreting the philosophical postulate of universality as one of the foundations of Europe's epistemic totalitarianism, Mignolo effectively precludes the possibility of recognising any inherent value in the universal. A more balanced and analytically in-depth approach is presented by Castro-Gómez (2020), who places the burden of responsibility for the coloniality of knowledge not on universality itself, but on Eurocentrism, understood as a special relationship between universality and particularity. The crux of the issue, he contends, lies in the fact that within a Eurocentric framework, the universal does not emerge as a product of a specific particularity (European); rather, it is perceived as preexisting this particularity: it is discovered and transmitted by it to other particularities (non-European). Castro-Gómez's standpoint is that it is not universalism but Eurocentrism – a misguided approach to understanding the relationship between the universal and the particular – that represents the fundamental element of coloniality of knowledge (Castro-Gómez, 2020).

### **The Rational Subject and the Object of Its Perception**

The second philosophical pillar of the coloniality of knowledge is the distinction between the subject and object of perception, a concept well-known in modern European thought. Here, Mignolo adheres closely to Quijano's position, according to which the defining aspect of differentiating the subject from the object (as exemplified by Descartes) is not their separation (for example, spatial separation) but the fundamental

distinction between their modes of existence. According to Quijano, Descartes' unique – and problematic from the point of view of its implications – concept was the radical separation of the activity of reason constituting subjective reality from all other phenomena determining object reality. Quijano states that within this dichotomy “the ‘object’ is a category referring to an entity not only different from the ‘subject’ ... but external to the latter by its nature.” (Quijano, 2007a: 172). The core of the presented distinction in nature is rationality. Only the subject is rational, which substantially determines its dominant position in relation to the object. The subject thus assumes the role of the bearer of divine reason, while the object is diminished, reduced to the order of nature, the natural world, which is devoid of this sacred element (Quijano, 2007a).

This division has proven critical to the coloniality of knowledge. Based on it, the colonial epistemic perspective posits that only European knowledge is rational, thereby rendering those who possess this knowledge the subjects of knowing. All entities and individuals situated beyond the boundaries of European epistemology are considered irrational and thus relegated to the status of mere objects of description and denied equality as subjects of knowing. Consequently, non-European forms of knowledge, and by extension, cultures and people, can be presented as having a fundamentally different nature and belonging to nature. This implies that they are unequal, lesser, and stand lower in the hierarchy. They are relegated to the status of mere objects of study, which is exemplified by the development of disciplines such as ethnology and anthropology. This epistemological approach establishes a fundamental relationship between Europe and the colonised territories, which can be described as an asymmetric relationship between subject and object, with the objectification of the other being an inherent aspect of this relationship. As Quijano (2007a) asserts, this epistemological orientation has precluded the possibility of cross-cultural communication and knowledge exchange, given the irreconcilable divide between the subject and the object.

Mignolo (2000a) argues that epistemic colonialism, together with other forms of colonial domination, is made possible by positioning one party as the knower, asserting a particular perspective on the world, and

the other as the known entity, subjected to that perspective. Furthermore, the object of study is not permitted to participate in articulating statements that directly concern them. Their epistemological horizon is invalidated, and their accumulated body of wisdom is replaced with the knowledge produced by those deemed competent. This process of epistemological objectification has directly led to the emergence of specific colonial attitudes, characterised by conducts and practices of domination and subjugation. The paradigm of the rational subject slowly became a constituent of the structure of power and European colonial domination over the rest of the world (Quijano, 2007a).

Furthermore, the Cartesian radical dematerialisation of the subject meant that it was isolated from the context in which it formulated its assertions - the *cogito* had no connection whatsoever with the world around it. This, in turn, became another factor enabling the construction of the zero-point epistemology mentioned in the previous section, with its central assumption of universal, locally unconditioned, and, therefore, all-encompassing knowledge. The subject's positioning in a non-place indicated that its pronouncements, free from particularistic constraints, were applicable in every place (Kubiacyk, 2013). In the context of the coloniality of knowledge, Cartesian's *cogito* complemented and reinforced the prevailing paradigm of the universality of knowledge, thereby further valorising the European cognitive perspective and devaluing any discourses that were constituted outside of it.

Quijano (2000, 2007a, 2007b) and Mignolo (2000a) recognise the dominant position of the dematerialised and delocalised *ego cogito* as one of the foundations of the coloniality of knowledge. Enrique Dussel (2000) also refers to the problem of *cogito*, but analyses it not from the perspective of its hegemonic-epistemic reach, but from that of its historical antecedents. According to him, the practical prototype of the modern European ego can be identified in the Spanish-Portuguese *ego conquiro* (I conquer), which, from the first intercultural encounter, imposed its will on the indigenous American population (Dussel, 2000). For Dussel, this "conquistador self" constitutes the "protohistory" of the Cartesian self: it forms its own subjectivity as the will to power, with everything external to it regarded as

subordinate matter – the matter of conquest, colonisation, modernisation or civilisation (Dussel, 1995). What connects *ego conquiro* and *ego cogito* is the modern “I”, which expresses its relationship to reality through mechanisms of objectification and domination. Dussel’s concept demonstrates – and thus complements the theses proposed by Quijano and Mignolo – that Cartesian subjectivity, with its colonial entanglement, constitutes a component of a more extensive and preceding practice of European self-definition: prior to the emergence of the dematerialised, epistemic subject, there had already been a conquering imperial subject (Stromback, 2024).

### The Ontological Paradigm

The coloniality of knowledge was established not only on the subjectivity of the *cogito* but also on that which is arguably independent of the knowledge-constructing subject. The final element of the analysis, conducted primarily by Mignolo but drawing upon Quijano’s reflections on the role of the category of race in colonial processes, refers to the ontological paradigm in European thought: a version that can be attributed primarily to classical, pre-Cartesian philosophy (Mignolo himself does not attribute it to any particular thinker). Mignolo departs from the tension between ontology (the order of being/existence) and epistemology (the order of knowing/describing reality). In the most simplistic terms – and this is precisely how the Argentinean semiotician puts it – in the classical European philosophical tradition, epistemology was secondary to ontology, which means that cognition referred only to what factually existed; it was conditioned by a reality that was independent of it. According to Mignolo, the attribution of cognition to being has proved useful in the coloniality of knowledge. On this basis, he argues, colonial discourses “make us believe that ontology is represented by epistemology” (Mignolo *et al.*, 2018: 147), which in the practice of knowledge production meant that any colonial description of the external world was seen as an objective representation of the truth about it, an accurate reflection of the reality of the thing itself.

Mignolo argues that the colonial legacy of this primacy of ontology was most evident in the processes of classifying different cultures, conducted from a Eurocentric perspective and pseudo-scientific in nature. In

these hierarchical classifications, non-European civilisations consistently occupied a subordinate position to Europe. A crucial factor in this outcome was the mechanism for transforming differences into values (Mignolo, 2000a). What was axiologically neutral, such as geographical location or ethnic group membership, became the basis of a symbolic structure where “non-European” meant “primitive” and “barbaric.” This method of classification, encompassing all known cultures and groups, entrenched the Eurocentric viewpoint all around the world (Mignolo *et al.*, 2018). According to Mignolo, the ontological paradigm embedded in European thought led to a widespread belief in these classifications as objective realities rather than socially and politically conditioned narratives. It entailed the conviction that the world was intrinsically hierarchical, with races, genders, religions, cultures, languages, and epistemologies occupying specific positions within this hierarchy due to their inherent nature (Mignolo, 2011b).

Over time, the mechanism of classification became fundamental to colonial discourse. Furthermore, as an “objective” representation of reality, hierarchisation became the foundation upon which knowledge about the world – particularly scientific knowledge – was constructed. As Quijano (in advance of Mignolo’s own work) observed, the fundamental criterion for establishing hierarchical classifications and consequently assigning specific groups their perceived “natural” roles within a given social structure was the concept of race (Quijano, 2000). According to the Peruvian sociologist, colonial discourse conceptualised race as a biological phenomenon that naturally determined and legitimised the relationship of domination and subordination between different groups. Reaching back to the famous dispute in Valladolid between Bartolomé de las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1550-1551), Quijano wrote that “at the very beginnings of American history, there took root the idea that there are biological differences within the world’s population that are decisively linked to the capacity for mental and cultural development.” (Quijano, 2007b: 51).

Theological deliberations on race were gradually replaced by scientific treatises, which, between the 17th and 19th centuries, flooded both academic and public debate. Carl Linnaeus’ 1735 classification of human

types or Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's 1776 work *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind*, in which he considered other races to be degenerations of the original Caucasian race, laid the groundwork for an emerging anthropology (Fredrickson, 2015). Professor Ibram X. Kendi of Boston University provides an extensive overview of numerous publications on this subject and the notions widely adopted by intellectuals at that period (Kendi, 2017). One popular notion was the climate theory, which postulated that it was Africa's intense sun that transformed humans into "uncivilised beasts of burden." This theory implied that relocating such individuals to a different environment and providing them with proper care and supervision would eventually "rehumanise" them. Another hypothesis related by Kendi and put forth by the renowned American physician Benjamin Rush claimed that all persons of African descent were afflicted with leprosy, which, he believed, could explain the perceived "ugliness" of their skin. Rush suggested that the high prevalence of leprosy among Africans was due to their poor diet and savage customs (Kendi, 2017) and posited that removing them from their "contaminated" environment would eventually result in shedding the disease and regaining pale skin colour, thus integrating them into a healthy social fabric of White Western society.

In hindsight, the evident absurdity of such theories distinctly accentuates their ideological underpinnings, as Quijano asserts: they did not, in reality, tackle the biological characteristics of the human species, nor did they aspire to systematically analyse them, yet instead they offered a conceptual apparatus to narrate the mechanisms of power and domination (Quijano, 2007b). As Mignolo goes on to point out, building on the concept established by Quijano, the entirety of colonial knowledge based on classification mechanisms was never meant to describe the objective state of reality. In the manner of Michel Foucault's writings, he arrives at the conclusion that it was designed to serve only one purpose: to entrench domination; it was not a source of knowledge about the world but a function of power. Scientific theories, particularly those concerning race, justified violence by giving it the appearance of morally legitimate action, grounded in supposed science, reason, and, primarily, objective reality. Mignolo's analyses indicate that the effectiveness of such theories was

founded on the ontological paradigm, which was the philosophical condition of their possibility. This paradigm provided the groundwork for the development of a worldview based on a basic cognitive misconception – the identification of a properly formalised narrative about reality as reality itself (Mignolo *et al.*, 2018).

### 3. Projects for the Decolonization of Knowledge

#### **Liberation of Knowledge**

The examination of the philosophical underpinnings of the coloniality of knowledge constitutes a pivotal component of the initial phase of epistemic decolonisation, with the objective of unravelling the intricate network of geo-political relations between knowledge and power. Stage two involves developing epistemic practices that are capable of disengaging from this network once and for all. A radical break with colonial-modeled thinking is a prerequisite for the reconstitution of local cognitive perspectives (Mignolo, 2021). The establishment of a novel global cognitive order, functioning not within the colonial matrix of power, but founded upon epistemic equality, signifies, according to Quijano and Mignolo (with particular relevance to the latter, given the frequency with which this theme is present in his writings), the necessary climax of the anti-colonial thought and politics, and the essential condition for its ultimate and complete success.

The theoretical underpinnings of this project, as articulated by Mignolo, draw from a long intellectual tradition of epistemic disobedience to cognitive violence and thinking beyond the Eurocentric paradigm. Mignolo recognises the earliest proponents of this ideological shift in the 16th and 18th centuries, namely Felipé Guamán Poma de Ayala, an indigenous American author of *El primer nueva cronica y buen gobierno* (1615), and the abolitionist Ottobah Cugoano, who published *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* in 1787. Mignolo regards both of these literary works as exemplary illustrations of the decolonial shift. Poma de Ayala and Cugoano, despite residing within a socio-political space moulded by

Eurocentric colonialism, exhibited a remarkable ability to disengage from its prevailing structures. They demonstrated an intellectual capacity to articulate their reflections from the perspective of those subjected to the colonial regime, thereby offering a distinct and alternative viewpoint (Mignolo, 2011a)<sup>2</sup>.

Inspirations closer to Mignolo's times concern the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly the liberation theology and philosophy movements. First, decoloniality of knowledge assumes the distinctive value of a local cognitive perspective. As Leonardo Boff noted - long before Mignolo and Quijano's writings - "theologians do not live in the clouds" (Boff, 2023: 265), highlighting the grounding of any intellectual reflection in the social situation and cutting himself off from the demands of Eurocentric universalism. Gustavo Gutiérrez, who did not recognise the possibility or sensibility of separating discourse from its historical context, argued similarly (Gutiérrez, 2020). Secondly, it situates historical victims of oppressive systems and violence at the core of theoretical reflection - a central theme of contemporary thought on the continent. In Dussel's view, the fate of historical victims is the most important philosophical issue, based on the criteria of its reality, relevance, urgency and the sheer number of people it affects (Dussel, 2003). Third, it demands historical justice and the construction of a new order that would mark a departure from previous inequalities. In doing so, it follows a tradition of engagement with liberatory *praxis*, including collaborating with grassroots social movements, without which, as Ignacio Ellacuría has argued, theorising loses its social reference (Ellacuría, 2013). Mignolo (2018) explicitly advocates for the liberation of knowledge and the affirmation of what has been devalued under epistemic colonialism. He asserts that such liberation paves the way for the full emancipation of entire social groups and their accumulated traditions of thought. He draws a parallel between this process and 20<sup>th</sup>-century decolonisation, which allowed Global South peoples to determine their own political future (Mignolo *et al.*, 2018).

---

<sup>2</sup> The relevant article by Walter Mignolo was published in Polish as: Mignolo, W. (2020). Epistemiczne nieposłuszeństwo i dekolonialna opcja: Manifest (T. Szerszeń, Trans.). *Konteksty*, 4, 15–28.

For such liberation to be possible, it is necessary to recognise that it cannot be achieved through tools and methods of Eurocentric discourse, nor can it uncritically adopt its assumptions and conceptual matrix. Mignolo acknowledges the inherent danger of postcolonial reflection which consists in the incoherence of the substance (subject matter) and form (method) of discourse. Although the substance of the postcolonial discourse critically engages with particular aspects of colonialism, the form of its critique may remain entangled in Eurocentric epistemological categories and assumptions, thus *de facto* maintaining a colonial perspective. Accordingly, a prerequisite for the decolonisation of knowledge is the readiness to question the very foundations of the European epistemological and ontological tradition – like the philosophical tenets presented above. This implies a qualitative change not only in substance but also in the form of postcolonial reflection. “It is not enough to change the content of the conversation ... on the contrary, it is of the essence to change the terms.” (Mignolo *et al.*, 2018: 149). In other words, merely critically assessing the colonial legacy by the new intellectual mainstream is inadequate. Instead, postcolonial reflection must be conducted from the epistemological margins, with the Global South reclaiming its own voice. Quijano concluded that only by decolonising knowledge in this manner could intercultural communication be facilitated, which he described as an honest exchange of experiences and meanings (Quijano, 2007a).

### **Epistemological Pluralism and Border Thinking**

The essential objective of epistemic decolonisation as proposed by Mignolo (2000a) is to elucidate the contextual and local nature of all forms of cognition. It consequently leads to the negation of both the universality and common validity of European knowledge. Moreover, from the decolonial viewpoint, the very postulates of universality and common validity appear as local ideas with strictly defined geo-cultural roots and determinants. The only universality acceptable in the decolonial horizon is the universal recognition of epistemic pluralism (Mignolo, 2000a).

Mignolo, along with other prominent figures in this intellectual movement, such as Santos (2016, 2023), advocate for the coexistence of

diverse local epistemic frameworks. These multiple perspectives need not remain in impenetrable isolation from each other; instead, they can engage in mutually beneficial dialogue, where none seeks to dominate the others. Such cognitive pluralism is defined by its capacity to establish and sustain multiple, distinct ontological realms, which coexist in an interdependent manner (Błahut-Prusik, 2021). The emerging epistemology, predicated upon the acknowledgement of the diversity of culturally conditioned forms of knowledge, as well as the incompleteness of individual local perspectives – consequently necessitating the requirement for mutual exchange – serves as a response to colonial, hegemonic, universalist patterns of cognition, and a path towards epistemic justice (Santos, 2016). Castro-Gómez (2020) offers a noteworthy perspective on this matter. He issues a warning against the adoption of a decolonial or anti-colonial particularism, which he contends would lead to epistemic isolationism. He emphasises that cultural identities do not exist in isolation, but rather as part of a system of references and differences. With regard to the aforementioned distinction between universalism as such and its Eurocentric degeneration, he postulates a decolonial, emancipatory universalisation of interests, which he contrasts with the unproductive glorification of particularisms (Castro-Gómez, 2020).

Mignolo formulates his project as pluritopic hermeneutics, a term he derives from Raimono Panikkar's concept of diatopic hermeneutics, which he interprets as "the art of understanding by means of crossing spaces or traditions (*dia-topoi*), which do not have common models of understanding." (Mignolo *et al.*, 2009: 16). Panikkar's vision was of a hermeneutics that did not involve a Gadamerian pre-understanding but was open to encountering that which operates in a cognitive field other than our own. According to Mignolo, this approach has the potential to facilitate the crossing of cultural boundaries without the risk of epistemically colonising the Other with a set of preconceived notions and pre-formed categories (Mignolo *et al.*, 2009). The pluritopic nature of Mignolo's hermeneutics is intended to emphasise the multidimensionality of the epistemic situation, in which there is not so much an encounter between two different cultures, but rather the coexistence of a vast multiplicity of

localities of expression, each with its own historical and geopolitical contexts. Mignolo proposes a paradigm of “interactive knowledge and understanding,” predicated, firstly, on the epistemological principle that cognition is inseparable from one’s own locus of knowing and, secondly, on the practice of engaging in intercultural dialogue with an awareness of the cognitive possibilities and limits of such localism (Mignolo *et al.*, 2009). Mignolo’s approach to hermeneutics emphasises the situatedness of the subject, offering a decolonial alternative to the “monotopic” hermeneutics that characterises colonial culture. The latter is based on homogeneity of understanding practices, thereby condemning any cognitive subject to operate within only one tradition and sign system. The objective of Mignolo’s hermeneutics is to transition from the colonial paradigm of a single centre of expression towards a plurality of autonomous centres, each endowed with its own subjectivity (Krupecka, 2018). The Cartesian notion of *cogito ergo sum*, which delocalises the subject, is superseded by the concept of *estar aquí*, which conveys a local nature of being and thinking (Kubiacyk, 2013).

Alongside formulating the concept of pluritopic hermeneutics, Mignolo develops the idea of local thinking in the context of a particular type of locality, one established by colonial encounter. He characterises the perspective engendered by this interaction as “border thinking,” a concept primarily, albeit not exclusively, modelled on the Chicano/a experience theorised by Gloria Anzaldúa. Border thinking is defined as the epistemic experience of individuals whose local organic cognitive perspective lies outside the boundaries of the Eurocentric modernity project, yet who are drawn into that project through colonialism. Operating inside a discourse that was not their own, they begin to recognise themselves as existing and thinking both within and outside of it. This phenomenon aligns with W.E.B. Dubois’s concept of “double consciousness,” which he described as a dual cognitive perspective encompassing both the individual’s own viewpoint and that of the oppressor. Mignolo, in reference to Dubois, characterised double consciousness as “the necessary condition for border thinking” (Mignolo *et al.*, 2006: 211), conceiving it as a prerequisite for unveiling a particular decolonial perspective.

Those who have experience of dual perspectives can sense, identify and locate the epistemic border line. Consequently, their thinking and actions become acts performed precisely from that border (Mignolo, 2021). Once again, this evokes themes of liberation theology and philosophy concerning the unique epistemic advantage of victims, who, as a result of their own oppression, possess the capacity to discern nuances in the fabric of reality that remain obscured to those around them. Indeed, these borders were formed as a result of marginalisation and degradation within the contact zones created by modernity/coloniality. In these zones, by design, no encounter between equal subjects could occur. One side of the contact zone was the one that controlled and managed the discourse, while the other was the side that was epistemically and existentially dominated (Mignolo, 2014). Border thinking disrupts the established relationship of subordination and the concomitant epistemology of zero point, thereby bringing a range of cognitive perspectives out of the shadows of marginalisation and returning control of the discourse to those who have been deprived of it. This opens up a new space for decolonial enunciation at the cognitive intersection between the colonial categories of Eurocentric epistemology and the languages and epistemologies that were previously invalidated by the former and are now regaining their voice (Mignolo *et al.*, 2006). “Border thinking and border epistemology emerge among colonial subjects ... who realize that their knowledge has been disavowed and denied. That realization is the starting point of becoming decolonial subjects” (Mignolo *et al.*, 2018: 207).

However, the appreciation of local cognitive perspectives in all their diversity, which is the focus of Mignolo’s project, requires a more critical examination of some of his own analyses concerning Eurocentric hegemony, an observation made by Iwona Krupecka (2018). She asserts that Mignolo’s approach, marked by its anti-universalising and anti-classifying stance, does not encompass his presentations of Europe, at least the part of it that he associates with the legacy of colonialism. While he emphasises geo-historical diversity within the Global South, legitimising the multiplicity of decolonial projects, he does not make similar distinctions within Western Europe. Instead, he limits himself to a simplified and

elementary periodisation of its main modern eras, which he subsequently reduces to a common denominator. Western Europe, with its intellectual heritage, constitutes a compact monolith in Mignolo's works – a standpoint that, as Krupecka notes, means Mignolo himself reproduces the old colonial myth of the internal cohesion and uniformity of European culture (Krupecka, 2018).

### **Similar Projects and the Quest for Social Engagement**

Mignolo's project is one of many decolonial options that emerged in Latin America around the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Therefore, it is also important to mention other prominent proposals in this field. These include Enrique Dussel's trans-modernity, which Mignolo describes as a general orientation towards decolonisation understood as a project of coexistence among many worlds (Mignolo, 2007). He states: "the trans-modern ... brought to the foreground the historical and intellectual presence of the outside of Europe" (Mignolo *et al.*, 2009: 18). Dussel's trans-modernity aims to provide a decolonial alternative to the prevailing hegemonic modernity practised in Europe and North America. In the author's own words, it is a task "whose point of departure is that which has been discarded, devalued, and judged useless among global cultures, including colonized or peripheral philosophies. This project involves the development of the potential of those cultures and philosophies that have been ignored, upon the basis of their own resources." (Dussel, 2009: 250). Drawing on the philosophy of liberation, Dussel establishes as his theoretical starting point the epistemic perspectives of the periphery, which were invalidated or marginalised in the process of colonisation. His objective is to cultivate their potential, drawing upon their own philosophical resources and engaging in constructive dialogue with European modernity (Dussel, 2009).

Another project is Boaventura de Sousa Santos' epistemologies of the South (2016, 2023), an endeavour that seeks to legitimise forms of knowledge rejected by colonial modernity, encompassing both scientific and non-scientific knowledge. To achieve this end, Santos proposes a shift away from the hegemonic epistemology characteristic of the

Northern Hemisphere, offering an alternative epistemology that acknowledges the existence of cultural diversity in both the cognitive processes and the forms of expression that result from them (Błahut-Prusik, 2021). This acknowledgement of cognitive pluralism – the formation of knowledge that operates not through domination but through solidarity – seeks to establish a foundation for promoting a diverse range of existential practices and forms of social organisation. These, in turn, could present genuine alternatives to a future characterised by various forms of coloniality (Santos, 2016). The epistemology of the South project is predicated on two key procedures: the ecology of knowledges and intercultural translation. The ecology of knowledges challenges the monocultural nature of scientific knowledge, indicating the presence of alternative types and criteria of cognition that function effectively within social practices. It operates on the assumption of the inherent limitations of each individual type of knowledge, thereby intending to raise awareness and protect cognitive practice from totalizing tendencies. Intercultural translation, on the other hand, challenges both abstract universalism and the assumed incompatibility of different cultures. It examines the intertwining problems and underlying motifs in intercultural contact, recognising both similarities and differences, and developing hybrid forms of understanding and communication. This, in turn, is intended to facilitate an encounter within a horizon of diversity that is unconstrained by a single unifying perspective (Santos, 2016).

The variety and diversity of decolonisation projects do not imply mutual exclusion or competition for the title of the most effective plan to overcome Eurocentric modernity. On the contrary, it is congruent with the assumptions and objectives of each individual author. As Mignolo asserts, the formulation of a universal decolonisation strategy is inherently implausible. In the event of its existence, such a strategy would be predicated on domination and exclusion, thereby perpetuating the issue rather than resolving it (Mignolo, 2017).

However, the heterogeneity of decolonial initiatives and the plurality of epistemic centres – including both those that continue to operate within the paradigm of European modernity and those that are experiencing

a decolonial shift – that these initiatives all presuppose, introduces the issue of the logical compatibility of diverse discourses and the verifiability of the assertions made within them. As D.A. Woods observes, projects of decolonising knowledge are essentially predicated on the possibility of establishing an analogy between the experience of cultural pluralism and the cognitive pluralism they postulate. Within the paradigm of cultural diversity affirmation, it is recognised that all human beings are entitled to the same treatment. Therefore, from the perspective of decolonial politics, all the theoretical propositions produced within this diversity should also be entitled to the same egalitarian status. In Wood’s opinion, this signifies the transposition of the moral argument advocating intercultural respect to the epistemic imperative of acknowledging the plurality of potentially exclusive claims. Consequently, “the more pluralist one’s epistemology the better, since being exclusionary of diverse knowledges breaks the moral norm of being inclusive and welcoming of difference.” (Wood, 2020: 156). Should Wood’s line of argumentation be accepted, it is first necessary to consider whether the application of ethical principles to epistemology is inherently unacceptable and disruptive to the analysis of cognition. Or, as demonstrated, for example, by considerations of epistemic justice in liberation theology, is the ethical dimension a prerequisite for a correct and comprehensive epistemology (thanks to the inclusion of the cognitive perspective of marginalised people, who have special insight into the order of social structures)? Secondly, from a decolonial perspective, epistemology practised in isolation from ethical reflection becomes, de facto, a tool of power and domination. Therefore, assuming a formal separation of these spheres, Wood’s argument would lead to the preservation of the cultural *status quo*, which, in fact, perpetuates the coloniality of knowledge. Attempting to answer these questions would require a separate, detailed analysis. Nonetheless, the issue of identifying the relationship between the ethical and cognitive orders during a period of emancipation for people and cultures in the Global South is, without doubt, one of the most philosophically challenging issues.

It is essential to note that philosophical analyses represent only a fraction of the decolonial undertaking. It is critical to acknowledge that

none of the aforementioned decolonial projects should be regarded as a mere academic construct; rather, they should be recognised as part of a multifaceted social phenomenon. As Mignolo observes, non-European, local cognitive practices have not been entirely eradicated by colonial imperialism. In many regions of the Global South, marked by colonial histories, these local epistemic practices are experiencing a “renaissance” and are gradually but steadily emerging. This phenomenon is part of a broader trend of recovering and reclaiming identities by various social and ethnic groups in post-colonial contexts (Mignolo *et al.*, 2018). As Mignolo states: “people (are) organising themselves all over the world to delink from the fictions of modernity and the logic of coloniality.” (Mignolo, 2017: 44). The theoretical reflections constructed by decolonial thinkers such as Quijano, Mignolo, Dussel, Santos, and many others are, in their opinion, elaborations of these grassroots cultural-epistemic movements and initiatives. Their theorising remains in contact with these movements, draws inspiration from them, and essentially would not be possible without them.

The cooperation between academia and society is typically an organic process, primarily because, as Mignolo asserts, the research itself is conducted by individuals engaged in the struggle for their own emancipation. It is precisely these scholars who are responsible for introducing new disciplines and research areas related to the discrimination and marginalisation of different social groups (López-Calvo, 2014). Committed academics can also collaborate in their own research with those who, by distancing themselves from the project of modernity/coloniality, are searching for their own heritage and way of life (Mignolo, 2017). Another approach would be to utilise one’s own academic knowledge of Amerindian cultures and memories to bring them out of the purely museal context and implement them in the social one (Mignolo, 2000a). But above all, from the perspective of academics, the focus must be on learning from those who, as part of a cultural awakening, are taking their fate into their own hands and challenging the socio-political order managed by coloniality. One example is the actions of some indigenous representatives who, since the 1990s, have “disputed the societal negations of their historicity, perseverance, and self-determination as millennial nations

and peoples, and they made visible their presence and intellectual sovereignty as social protagonists and historical and political subjects.” (Mignolo *et al.*, 2018: 26). Catherine Walsh provides a comprehensive account of her personal journey of unlearning coloniality and acquiring alternative modes of existence through her involvement in *Escuelita Zapatista* in Mexico. There, “the ‘teachers’ were the Zapatista communities themselves and most particularly the youths, those born, raised, and educated in the Zapatista struggle.” (Walsh, 2023: 119). Such experiences of decolonial pedagogy, as Walsh recognises in her own example, are a key basis for the development of decolonial thought. Once enriched and consolidated, decolonial thought can contribute to the social effort by giving back what it has received.

## Conclusions

Decoloniality of knowledge is a project and methodology which seeks to effect a rupture with five centuries of epistemic violence and the ideological deprivation of the world. It was initiated by Anibal Quijano and then adopted and developed by numerous Latin American thinkers, some of them associated in the “modernity/coloniality” group – including Walter Mignolo, who frequently references Quijano as his main source of influence. Mignolo, adopting the category of coloniality introduced by Quijano, develops its strictly epistemic dimension, focusing not on a single issue but on a multitude of different factors, both in relation to Eurocentric epistemic domination and to the liberation of knowledge. The thematic scope and multi-threaded nature of his analyses render his work arguably the most elaborate development of Quijano’s proposal, but also the most challenging in terms of systematic interpretation. The overarching concept that underpins Mignolo’s theoretical framework is the elimination of the uniformity of thought imposed by colonial processes, with the objective of recovering the richness of cognitive diversity. The manner of implementing this idea, the direction of the analyses, the conclusions, and even some of the assumptions differ in certain, sometimes significant, respects from the proposals of other authors from the Global South. The

works of these authors, even if they do not directly criticise Mignolo himself, allow us to see certain problematic moments in his narrative.

The first step of Quijano and Mignolo's project is to critically analyse the Eurocentric cognitive perspective and uncover the hidden mechanisms of domination that contributed to the construction of the colonial matrix of power. This analysis reveals that at the root of epistemic colonialism lie the most fundamental assumptions and categories of European philosophy: the universality and common validity of theoretical propositions, the subject/object dichotomy of cognition, and the status of thinking as an act of adequately describing objective reality. These philosophical premises, ostensibly neutral with regard to the relationship between knowledge and power, were, in colonial practice, a means of devaluing cultures and exercising domination over native populations. The universalisation of European knowledge resulted in the invalidation and cognitive irrelevance of the intellectual output of other continents; the division between subject and object facilitated the objectification of non-European ethnic groups, denying them rationality and, consequently, the fullness of humanity; and the ontological paradigm, assuming the subordination of cognition to objects, led to the acceptance of hierarchical colonial classifications as a description of the natural, substantial order of being. According to Quijano and Mignolo, the philosophical principles of European culture thus became the central driving force behind the processes of colonial oppression.

The second step in this decolonial project is the establishment of a new epistemic order which Mignolo anchors in a pluritopic hermeneutics and the border thinking. Pluritopic hermeneutics secures the primacy of the locus of enunciation that guarantees a balance between the European cognitive perspective – now recognised as one of many and their equal – and the diverse perspectives of the Global South. On the other hand, border thinking defines a specific place on the map of discourse, constituted by a double consciousness formed at the intersection of colonial and dispossessed experiences. These decolonial proposals remain in creative contact with grassroots movements working for social justice and the inclusion of marginalised voices, whether in academic education or

simply in public debate. This dimension of social activism is frequently emphasised by Mignolo and practised by him and other decolonial intellectuals. The relationship between the decolonisation of knowledge pursued within academic institutions and the broader social movement is so profound that the success or failure of the latter may serve as the primary criterion for evaluating the merits of the former's theoretical propositions.

## Bibliography

- Alatas, S. F. (2022). Knowledge Hegemonies and Autonomous Knowledge. *Third World Quarterly*, pp. 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2022.2124155>
- Arias, A. (2010). Cultural Studies. In S. Nuccetelli, O. Schutte, & O. Bueno (Eds.), *A Companion to Latin American Philosophy* (pp. 425-438). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Barszczewski, J. (2022). *Mysleć inaczej, ucząc się od Globalnego Południa: Socjologia Boaventury de Sousa Santosa na tle współczesnych sporów w ramach nauk społecznych*. Kraków: Zakład Wydawniczy "Nomos".
- Błahut-Prusik, J. (2021). Pomiędzy zachodnią tradycją epistemologiczną a niesprawiedliwością społeczną. Wokół koncepcji epistemologii Południa Boaventury de Sousa Santosa. *Teksty Drugie*, 3, pp. 183-200. <https://doi.org/10.18318/td.2021.3.13>
- Boff, L. (2023). *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Time* (P. Hughes, Trans.). Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Castro-Gómez, S. (2020). Co zrobić z zachodnimi uniwersalizmami? Rozważania wokół zwrotu dekolonialnego (I. Krupecka, Trans.). *Konteksty*, 4, pp. 31-38.
- Castro-Gómez, S. (2021). *Zero-Point Hubris: Science, Race, and Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century Latin America* (G. Ciccariello-Maher & D. T. Deere, Trans.). London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Dussel, E. (1993). Eurocentrism and Modernity (Introduction to the Frankfurt Lectures). *Boundary 2*, 20(3), pp. 65-76. <https://doi.org/10.2307/303341>
- Dussel, E. (1995). *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the other" and the Myth of Modernity* (M. Barber, Trans.). New York: Continuum.
- Dussel, E. (2000). Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism (J. Krauel & V. Tuma, Trans.). *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1(3), pp. 465-478.
- Dussel, E. (2003). *Philosophy of Liberation* (A. Martinez & C. Morkovsky, Trans.). Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- Dussel, E. (2009). A new age in the history of philosophy: The world dialogue between philosophical traditions. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 35(5), pp. 499-516. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453709103424>

- Ellacuría, I. (2013). The Liberating Function of Philosophy (M. Wilde & M. E. Lee, Trans.). In M. E. Lee (Ed.), *Essays on History, Liberation, and Salvation* (pp. 93-122). Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Fredrickson, G. M. (2015). *Racism: A Short History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gutiérrez, G. (2020). *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (C. Inda & J. Eagleson, Trans.; rev. ed with a new introd., 32. printing). Maryknoll: Orbis Books.
- Kendi, I. X. (2017). *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America*. New York: Bold Type Books.
- Krupecka, I. (2018). Hermeneutyka pluritopiczna Waltera Mignolo a historia filozofii. In M. Woźniczka & M. Perek (Eds.), *Toposy (w) filozofii. Filozofia i jej miejsce w doświadczeniu kulturowym* (pp. 423-438). Wydawnictwo im. Stanisława Podobińskiego Uniwersytetu Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczego im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie.
- Kubiacyk, F. (2012). *Racism and Violence. The Image of a Colonised Human in the Eyes of Frantz Fanon and Enrique Dussel*. *Studia Europaea Gnesnensia*, 6, pp. 83-94.
- Kubiacyk, F. (2013). *Nowoczesność, kolonialność i tożsamość: Perspektywa latynoamerykańska*. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza.
- López-Calvo, I. (2014). "Coloniality is not over, it is all over." Interview with Dr. Walter Mignolo (Nov. 2014. Part I). *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 6(1), pp. 175-184. <https://doi.org/10.5070/T461030930>
- Mignolo, W. (2000a). *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.cttq94t0>
- Mignolo, W. (2000b). The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism. *Public Culture*, 12(3), pp. 721-748. <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-12-3-721>
- Mignolo, W. (2001). Coloniality at Large: The Western Hemisphere in the Colonial Horizon of Modernity (M. Ennis, Trans.). *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 1(2), pp. 19-54. <https://doi.org/10.1353/ncr.2003.0057>
- Mignolo, W. (2002). The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101(1), pp. 57-96.
- Mignolo, W. (2005). Prophets Facing Sidewise: The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference. *Social Epistemology*, 19(1), pp. 111-127. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02691720500084325>
- Mignolo, W. (2006). Citizenship, Knowledge, and the Limits of Humanity. *American Literary History*, 18(2), pp. 312-331. <https://doi.org/10.1093/alh/ajj019>
- Mignolo, W. (2007). DELINKING: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-coloniality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), pp. 449-514. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601162647>
- Mignolo, W. (2011a). Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto. *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World*, 1(2), pp. 44-66. <https://doi.org/10.5070/T412011807>

- Mignolo, W. (2011b). *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Mignolo, W. (2011c). The Global South and World Dis/order. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 67(2), pp. 165-188. <https://doi.org/10.3998/jar.0521004.0067.202>
- Mignolo, W. (2014). Spirit out of bounds returns to the East: The closing of the social sciences and the opening of independent thoughts. *Current Sociology*, 62(4), pp. 584-602. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392114524513>
- Mignolo, W. (2017). Coloniality Is Far from Over, and So Must Be Decoloniality. *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, 43(1), pp. 38-45. <https://doi.org/10.1086/692552>
- Mignolo, W. (2018). Decoloniality and Phenomenology: The Geopolitics of Knowing and Epistemic/Ontological Colonial Differences. *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 32(3), pp. 360-387. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jspecphil.32.3.0360>
- Mignolo, W. (2021). *The Politics of Decolonial Investigations*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Mignolo, W., & Tlostanova, M. (2006). Theorizing from the Borders: Shifting to Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9(2), pp. 205-221. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431006063333>
- Mignolo, W., & Tlostanova, M. (2009). On Pluritopic Hermeneutics, Trans-modern Thinking, and Decolonial Philosophy. *Encounters*, 1, pp. 10-27.
- Mignolo, W., & Walsh, C. E. (2018). *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America. *International Sociology*, 15(2), pp. 215-232.
- Quijano, A. (2007a). Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), pp. 168-178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353>
- Quijano, A. (2007b). Questioning "Race." *Socialism and Democracy*, 21(1), pp. 45-53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08854300601116704>
- Santos, B. de S. (2006). *Conocer desde el Sur: Para una cultura política emancipatoria*. Lima: Fondo Editorial de la Facultad de Ciencias Sociales.
- Santos, B. de S. (2016). *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide*. London: Routledge.
- Santos, B. de S. (2023). Epistemologie Południa. Ameryka Łacińska. *Kwartalnik analityczno-informacyjny*, 31(3 (121)), pp. 5-40. <https://doi.org/10.7311/20811152.2023.121.01>
- Stromback, D. (2024). The Ego Conquiro as the Paradigm of Modern Imperialism and its Violence Against the Struggle for Epistemic Justice. *TRANSMODERNITY*, 11(2), pp. 24-43. <https://doi.org/10.5070/t431026>
- Walsh, C. (2023). *Rising up, living on: Re-existences, sowings, and decolonial cracks*. Durham: Duke University Press.

---

Wood, D. A. (2020). *Epistemic Decolonization: A Critical Investigation into the Anticolonial Politics of Knowledge*. Springer International Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-49962-4>

### Author's Note

Michał Zalewski, a doctoral student in the Department of Philosophy at Ignatianum University in Cracow. Graduated in philosophy, cultural studies, and theology in Poland and the United States. His research interests include decolonisation of knowledge, epistemic injustice, peripheral philosophies, philosophy and theology of liberation, philosophy of race, the history of colonialism, and the history of racial and ethnic violence.  
E-mail: [michal.zalewski@student.ignatianum.edu.pl](mailto:michal.zalewski@student.ignatianum.edu.pl)