

‘Delinking’ and Other Essential Moments in Walter Mignolo’s Decolonial Proposal. A Philosophical Perspective

Abstract: Walter Mignolo’s studies cannot be reduced to one single field, characterised as they are by a strong semiotic, sociological and philosophical quality. In this study I have attempted to focus on their philosophical trait. Specifically, I have tried to measure how many and what are the essential margins that allow Mignolo’s thought to distance itself from the tradition of the European thought. Its geo-political connotation inscribes his research on a ‘pluriverse’ dimension, which is at the same time characterized by a certain body-politics in his understanding of human things.

Keywords: *decoloniality, postcolonial theory, body-politics, border studies, philosophy*

1. On the Concept of ‘Modernity’: A Denaturalizing Premise

Walter Mignolo’s philosophical project programmatically lies beyond any possible critical line drawn by the Frankfurt school and by Max Horkheimer in particular.¹ Indeed, the issue is philosophically more complex, because Walter Mignolo’s studies go beyond the critical theory from the early version of the Frankfurt School to later poststructuralists (Derrida) and post-modernists (Jameson), all of these lacking a critical awareness of what ‘colonial wound’ meant and still means. In any case and to put us in the right order of ideas, Frantz Fanon and Gloria Anzaldúa can provide another departure point for a critique of Horkheimer’s original critical theory.

This being said, it may seem trivial in itself if we do not specifically measure ourselves with Walter Mignolo’s writing and research. Since the very beginning of his research, his project has been characterised by a double movement. On the one hand, Mignolo engages in a study with strong sociological and anthropological connotations that essentially puts Latin America at the centre of a deconstructive and destructuring discussion. In other words, Mignolo’s writing was and is a struggle for an epistemological and historical liberation aimed at restoring a truer face to a continent, the South American one, outside a dialectic projection whose coordinates are only European. On the other, in many moments of his most recent research, Mignolo has speculated from a political point of view, looking at the liberation of Latin America from the economic and capitalist shoals of a world that is foreign to this continent and that has seen its multiple soul humiliated and interrupted in its growth by the so-called *pachakuti*.² *Pachakuti* or, for want of a better translation, the upsetting of time and space, was brought about by the so-called ‘discovery of America’ and the contextual European ‘Renaissance’, which on that colonial foundation built its economic and intellectual leap.

The reasons that explain the decolonial turning point in Mignolo’s studies are different and yet one of the most important ones is the ‘de-naturalization’ of the concept of ‘modernity’. ‘Modernity’ cannot be judged in a universal historical sense, regardless of time and space, from the ‘loci of enunciations’ in

¹ Even more in the contemporary philosophical strait, for Mignolo the initial comparison is between Alain Badiou, *Manifeste pour la philosophie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1989) and Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderland/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987). As Mignolo states: “Now, Fanon and Anzaldúa can provide another departure point for taking Horkheimer’s original critical theory to the terrain of de-linking and to the decolonial shift”. Walter D. Mignolo, “Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-coloniality”, *Cultural Studies*, 21.2-3 (2007), 498.

² For a careful understanding of the term ‘pachakuti’, see Walter D. Mignolo, *L’idea di America latina* (Milano: Mimesis, 2013), 45.

which it was originally conceived. On this point, on this denaturalization of some concepts and the corresponding expressions, Mignolo’s commitment has to do with semiotic issues, because he primarily poses a terminological question: ‘the terms of the conversation’ as he claims, in order to restore a correct philological, historical and political dimension of the order of things. To summarize, a problem that has some Foucauldian traits, Mignolo uses the expression ‘linguaging’, to give meaning to a question that has its different semiotic variants, almost all political in nature.

A simple explanation of the term ‘linguaging’ is not easy, because rather than to a determined linguistic phenomenon, it refers to a semiotic dimension with strong pragmatic connotations, which in some way testifies to the existence of a semiotic common and frayed fault from which each defines the linguistic boundaries to which it decides to belong. In short, ‘linguaging’ occurs when there is the possibility of speaking English, French, Spanish, and maybe Nahuatl, with all the colonial nuances that certain semiotic mixtures entail within the framework of ‘mestizo’ and border considerations. This is another passage by Aníbal Quijano, endorsed by Mignolo: what should one look for, first of all, if one proposes a decolonial project? Quijano: “En primer término, la decolonización epistemológica, para dar paso luego a una nueva comunicación inter-cultural, a un intercambio de experiencias y de significaciones, como la base de otra racionalidad que pueda pretender, con legitimidad, a alguna universalidad”.³ And again, and in a different perspective on the problem of “inhab[ing]t the language”, let us read the following passage by Gloria Anzaldúa, also endorsed by Mignolo in a semiotic perspective: “Images are more direct, more immediate than words, and closer to the unconscious. Picture language precedes thinking in words; the metaphorical mind precedes analytical consciousness”.⁴

To go back to an issue related to the so-called ‘modernity’, we know how on the basis of the lessons provided by Hegel and Schmidt⁵ modernity itself was founded on three well-defined historical events, that is, the Renaissance, the Reformation and the discovery of the New World. Indeed, these should be the foundations to be *denaturalised* and *provincialized* in thinking ‘modernity’. Conversely, as a side of the same coin, ‘coloniality’ is a complex phenomenon, which is political, social, economic and above all philosophical in that it has to do with (the reproduction of) knowledge. Mignolo concludes: “From the Caribbean, you see that modernity not only needed coloniality but that coloniality was and continues to be constitutive of modernity”.⁶

2. The Decolonization of Time (and Space)

In short, if we side with Mignolo in an order of considerations made of overturning historical plans, the discovery of America is but an invention, because it was a continent that has always been there since the dawn of time. The same idea of ‘Middle Ages’ would be an artificial construct, aimed at putting modern Renaissance man at the beginning of an era, according to an idea of ‘the end’ (Middle Ages) and the beginning of time (Renaissance), which is inscribed in European ‘colonial grammar’ thanks to an authentic ‘colonization of time’.

From a ‘spatial’ point of view, the issue is equally complex. To have an idea of what a colonization (exploitation) of space means, it would be enough here to consider coordinates such as the ‘old and new world’ or also ‘the internal and the external’, since it always concerns phenomena that are understood geographically as such, starting from a European colonial perspective. In short, according to Mignolo,

³ Aníbal Quijano, “Modernidad, colonialidad y América Latina”, *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1.3 (2000), 447. Another constant reference point throughout his research is Enrique Dussel, *Filosofía de la liberación* (México: Editorial Edivol, 1977).

⁴ Anzaldúa, *Borderland/La Frontera*, cit. in Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton U.P., 2000), 228.

⁵ Georg W. Friedrich Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956); Carl Schmitt, *Le Nomos de la terre* [1950] (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2001).

⁶ Mignolo, “Delinking”, 466.

statements like the following should be reversed to obtain a decolonial effect: “Let me repeat so the reader cannot be confused by old habit of thinking taking for granted that the West is a geography and not a language-memory conceptual apparatus then penetrated directly or indirectly billions of consciousness all over the world: in Greek, Latin and the six imperial modern/colonial European languages”.⁷

As for the ‘colonization of time’, let us think of the all-European vision artfully built to conquer and prey on the Amerindian populations as ‘primitive’, according to a determined ‘temporal before’ in the Renaissance perspective. A European and Christian perspective, founded on a Greek and Roman historical axis in which the Amerindian populations lack a ‘history’ because of the non-trivial fact that they do not have a writing system which is able to tell it.⁸ This idea represents the core of Bartolomé de Las Casas’s thought, according to which primitives who inhabited the West Indies, lost as they are over time, are ‘barbaric’ because they do not avail of a writing system, they do not have a religion, nor can they rely on a system of sciences, precisely, engrained in Greek and Latin legacy.⁹ This is obviously a discourse produced by the ‘rhetoric of modernity’, which draws a distinction between what is ‘science’ and what is simply ‘culture’, in any age, according to the different latitudes of the colonial extension of the issue. In short, from a decolonizing perspective, the very idea of ‘progress’ enrolls in a time horizon and asserts its temporal ‘differential’ at different times in European and world colonial history. According to Mignolo, this takes place thanks to a holy alliance of capitalism and Christianity. The system of alliances between capitalism, colonialism and Christianity is historically complex and capitalist and industrial revolution were not possible without a corresponding and founding coloniality.¹⁰

To sum up, the colonization of time and space takes place on two axes: a temporal one developing from the presumed end of an era, the Middle Ages and the corresponding recovery of a beauty that belongs to Greek and Roman classicism (the Renaissance); along with a geographical/spatial axis constituted by America as the land of overseas ‘barbarians’, a new space (compared to Europe) that is reduced to the unique logic of a European ‘same’. As Mignolo states: “The European Renaissance and New World were two fundamental anchors of the modern/colonial world held together by the complicity between the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality”.¹¹ Hence, in an intellectual and cultural sense, the project of a complete exploitation which is not only natural but also spiritual is interpreted differently in colonial America: appropriation of lands¹² and exploitation of work, governmental and authoritarian control, but above all control of gender and sexuality (the Christian family and its conduct, with all its sexual values). All of them contributed to the control over the ‘being’ of human beings, that it is to say, an articulated government of their subjectivity.¹³

⁷ Ibid., 509.

⁸ Again, here we find a new circumstance of a semiotic order as discriminating in Mignolo’s philosophy.

⁹ As an example, see Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Brevissima relazione della distruzione delle Indie* (San Domenico di Fiesole: Edizioni Cultura della Pace, 1999).

¹⁰ Aníbal Quijano is once again the point of reference for Mignolo’s research. See, for example, Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, “Americanness as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World-System”, *International Social Science Journal*, XLIV, 4 (1992), 549-557 and Aníbal Quijano, “Modernidad, colonialidad y América Latina”, *Neplanta: Views from South*, 1.3 (2000), 533-580.

¹¹ Mignolo, “Delinking”, 477.

¹² In this circumstance, which coincides with the colonial exploitation of the lands, according to Carl Schmitt the transition from the pre-global to the global era takes place. Schmitt, *Le Nomos de la terre*.

¹³ Mignolo: “The control of subjectivity (the Christian faith, secular idea of subject and citizen) and knowledge (the principles of Theology structuring all forms of knowledge encompasses in the Trivium and the Quadrivium; secular philosophy and concept of Reason structuring the human and natural sciences and the practical knowledge of professional schools; e.g., Law and Medicine, in Kant’s contest of the faculties)”. Mignolo, “Delinking”, 478. The reference here to a colonial mix of cultures is once again to Enrique Dussel. In any case, see Aníbal “Modernidad, colonialidad y América Latina”.

3. For a Philosophy of History Liberation

In this light, a ‘philosophy of liberation’ (Enrique Dussel) could represent a possible solution for Mignolo. This philosophy of liberation is in turn possible only provided that it is filled with geopolitically determined contents: in other words, every time we speak, write, we make politics starting from the context in which the gesture of talking, writing, making politics takes place. Space and time (*loci enunciationis*) play a pivotal role in the determination of every single thing. If these epistemological and philological parameters are taken into account, then an ‘analytic’ political philosophy is possible, never allowing dialectical temptations of synthesis: ‘analysis vs. synthesis’, for a solution that corresponds to an openness of the sense of things towards “pluriversality”.¹⁴

In any case, we need to put aside the idea linked to the possibility of a historical macro narration of human things. We must therefore free ourselves from the idea of a unique and linear history. We must go beyond the semiotic dimensions traced by the hegemonic languages (English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese), and their Greek and Roman foundations, because there are many ‘beginnings’ beyond Adam and Eve and Greek civilization: it is all about recovering them beyond the silence to which they were forced by the narration that culminates in an alleged modern turn. The Tupac Amaru uprising in Peru (1781), the Haitian revolution (1804), and the decolonization of Africa and Asia in the twentieth century are all examples that demonstrate that another world and another history are possible, because the beginning of human things is not unique and exclusive, and certainly a solution today can be found even without resorting to neoliberal or socialist/Marxist variables on the same ‘modern’ theme.

Mignolo’s distance from the Marxist tradition is not a trivial circumstance throughout his research; like the Foucauldian philosophy, such tradition is accused of a lack of analysis concerning the colonial aspects of capitalism.¹⁵ It is worth providing an example of Mignolo’s observations on Marx, which are interesting and very frequent in his decolonial approach, regardless of the ideological dimension. He argues: “However, as a German Jew (his early writings were devoted to the Jewish question), Marx may have felt the racial differential inscribed in his body and his persona. He translated the racial differential that made the Jews the *damnés* within Europe into the subaltern position of the proletariat in class differential”.¹⁶ And then, as if it were not enough, Mignolo explicitly writes that: “the emancipation of the proletariat in Europe (and the US) cannot be taken as a model-for-export ... In other words, the new and extended working class is not just oppressed because it is a working class but because the majority of the most exploited workers belong to the ‘wrong’ racial group”.¹⁷

The dynamics regulating the occurrence of events are not and cannot be traced back to a single historical philosophical logic of Hegelian matrix: to provide a classic example of Mignolo’s philosophy, the Haitian revolution was an unthinkable historical phenomenon if we accept certain European historiographic parameters as universal.¹⁸ Or even let’s think of the rhetoric of ‘salvation’, as it was understood by the Spaniards during the conquest of the so-called new world, and how it was interpreted lived and touted in the ‘salvation / civilization / liberation’ trail in the last Iraqi campaigns or in Afghanistan with all the possible variations on the theme. This rhetoric is senseless, if it is applied to

¹⁴ However far away in time and culturally ‘other’ than the discourse Mignolo tries to set, we are not far from him with an intention of openness like the one imagined by Herbert Marcuse, when at the time he contested from his point of view ‘the one-dimensional man’.

¹⁵ To Karl Marx, Mignolo explicitly opposes Frantz Fanon.

¹⁶ Mignolo, “Delinking”, 486.

¹⁷ Ibid. Here the critical reference in the Marxist sense is to Paul Virno, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.

¹⁸ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

phenomena that seem identical, but have been differently lived and propagated in different times of different histories.¹⁹

In order for us to be able to make decolonial considerations, first and foremost it is necessary to denaturalise the concept of ‘modernity’, by providing this presumed universality with a de-colonial project of liberation. Strictly speaking, an authentic political de-colonization and liberation occurred between 1947 and 1970 in Africa and Asia. Notwithstanding this historical decolonising process, a different de-colonization is still necessary, which is much more radical because it is practised in an epistemological and cultural sense, which Ramon Grosfoguel has described as a “second decolonization”;²⁰ this project has never materialised and would be determined every time at a spiritual level insofar as it is a matter of theoretically managing each subject of study with the disposition to unmask what is “the logic of the coloniality” that founded it. In a nutshell, Mignolo’s stance appears to be characterized by a specific radicality, if authentic examples of decolonializing thoughts are for him those clearly formulated, in the sixties and seventies, by radical Arab-Islamic thinkers (Sayyid Qutb, Ali Shariati, Ayatollah Komeini), by the philosophy of liberation in Latin America and by the indigenous intellectuals and activists in Latin America, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. In short, we should follow a trend of things that proceeds “from the Zapatistas to the World Social Forum to progressive Muslims intellectuals and Southern European critical voices toward a pluri-versal world. The struggle for epistemic de-coloniality lies, precisely, here”.²¹

To some extent, by continuing the project of a decolonization of knowledge, he goes beyond the same liberation program to which Dussel referred, because a true decolonization of knowledge implies such a broad horizon that we could speak about an “even larger project that encompasses both, as Fanon puts it, the colonized and the colonizer”.²² Of course a truly decolonial project must abandon all forms of abstract universalism: Christianity, Liberalism, Marxism, and Islamism, if considered in a general sense without any further specification, respond to “the same fundamentalist and imperial logic”.²³ Fundamentalism is both Islamic and differently Christian (assuming that there is only one Christianity), it is as liberal as it is differently Marxist. This depends on when each judgment was applied unilaterally or as a universal project for the implementation of the various political structures, which would always be considered from a horizon that is certainly global but always also local. Moreover, the discussion is utterly political, as it concerns every possible alternative which is put forward with respect to the current politically determined state of affairs. It is not a matter of replacing a right-wing speech with a left-wing one, an ‘American’ with a ‘European’ one because it is more progressive. Making such hypotheses at the planetary level (in a universal and abstract way) does not make sense: each has its own specific ‘place of enunciation’, with all that this entails in pragmatic terms at the semiotic level and not only.²⁴ The *damnés* (Fanon) “as its central philosophical and political figure” play an important role: each their own *damnés*, depending on the times and spaces, the political places where this ‘damnation’ takes place.

4. Struggles for Emancipation and Struggles for Liberation. The Power Differential

Given certain philosophical assumptions it is possible at this point to understand an important passage in Mignolo’s philosophy. Its decolonial project has no emancipatory objectives: it is not a struggle for

¹⁹ Here Walter Mignolo’s references are classic in a decolonial sense: Aimé Césaire, *Discourse sur le colonialism* (New York, London: MR, 1972), Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952).

²⁰ Ramón Grosfoguel, “Developmentalism, Modernity and Dependency in Latin America”, *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1.2 (2000), 347-374.

²¹ Mignolo, “Delinking”, 500.

²² *Ibid.*, 457.

²³ *Ibid.*, 458.

²⁴ Susan George, *Another World Is Possible if...* (London: Verso, 2003).

the emancipation of a people or a region, because the very concept of ‘emancipation’ has a European history, which is closely linked to the Enlightenment and the Reformation, the latter being an emancipatory movement with respect to the Catholic Church. A whole philosophy of emancipation is historically based on a series of unavoidable passages that are also exclusively European. Mignolo often speaks of a shift from a divine to an earthly dimension in the foundation of human freedom. This shift on which we will come back ahead from “theo-politics” to “ego-politics”²⁵ leads to the liberal foundation of man through a sequence of constitutions up to the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Napoleonic Code. All of them are conjugated with a “principle of freedom of will against historically preexisting law as the substantive basis of the state”²⁶ but also with all the modern and liberal, western and aggressive variants that this propaganda of freedom entails.

The emancipatory discourse in the course of western history has had its variants in both liberal and marxist traditions. Once again Enrique Dussel and his *Philosophy of Liberation* (1977) represent the turning point for Mignolo’s research: according to him, it is always a matter of fighting a struggle for ‘liberation’ which includes “the social movements of ‘national liberation’ in Africa and Asia, as well as in Latin America”.²⁷ When it comes to ‘emancipation’ things change, and its historical landmarks change too: the 1668 Glorious Revolution in England, the independence of the colonists in America from the emerging British Empire in 1776 and the French Revolution in 1789. To these three, in an obviously different variant, the Russian Revolution (1917) is to be added. So, it is a socialist or liberal perspective on a history that would otherwise develop in a decolonial sense, according to parameters that are not shared by Europe and North America.

In any case, this is not a trivial circumstance, as every project based on a desire to carry out an authentic ‘liberation’ has precise racial connotations according to Mignolo. In short, it should not be overlooked how the same struggle for a complete European emancipation took place at the expense of the freedom of entire continents and their populations (the ‘others’ of Europe). This historical process constitutes the backbone of the whole thought promoted by Mignolo: European modern age has their “darker side”,²⁸ that face which cannot and must not be shown because it is fierce and unrepresentable. The genocide of the Amerindian and African populations in the slave trade as well as the Asian colonization on a different side are what made a certain passage to Modernity, capitalism and the Industrial Revolution possible. The price of my emancipation as a westerner was, is and will be (if things do not change) the freedom of another: a mechanism that renews itself over time because the ‘colonial matrix’ of things is the same despite its different variations over time. This is probably the meaning of the recurring expression ‘power differential’ in Mignolo’s thought. In mechanics the ‘differential’ is a particular type of gear train that allows the simultaneous occurrence of different speeds in the motion of a rotating torque. In automobiles the ‘differential’, while transmitting motion to the drive wheels, makes them independent from each other, so that they can make a different number of turns in the corners. This is what happens in the colonial field where certain modern speeds have been possible, certain emancipations have become practicable, because the world has gone at different speeds and in curves the wheels of Europe and the United States have turned at a certain speed, because the movement has been slowed down or accelerated functionally (Africa, South America, the Middle East and so forth).

Compared to this state of affairs, there are no possible mediations for Mignolo: the project must be cultural and political and cannot go through adjustments. For all these reasons, his proposal remains ‘de-colonial’ and not ‘post-colonial’: he reminds us, that another time and another space are always possible

²⁵ Habermas: “The world of the divine was changed in the solitude of subjectivity into something posited by ourselves”. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Boston: MIT, 1987), 17.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Walter Mignolo’s reference point besides Enrique Dussel is Juan José Hernández Arregui, ed., *Nacionalismo y liberación* (Buenos Aires: Peña Lillo, 1969).

²⁸ Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (Ann Arbor: Michigan U.P., 2003).

compared to the colonial one imposed over the last five centuries. Moreover, for him, there are too many assonances between the ‘post-colonial’ and the ‘post-modern’: the political project that Mignolo has in mind cannot and must not remain in the western context to which the postmodern discourse (and to some extent the postcolonial) belong.²⁹

5. What Does ‘Delinking’ Mean?

Be as it may, whether it is ‘liberation’ or ‘decolonization’, a ‘delinking’ from the colonial matrix of power or ‘desprendimiento’ (as Quijano would have it), must be carried out every time. Indeed, the concept of ‘delinking’ was first introduced by the Egyptian sociologist Amin:³⁰ his idea responded to a political and economic development traced in a wake of the Marxist reasoning, where the question for Mignolo (and Quijano) is not the content (either political or economic) but the terms of the conversation, i.e. an epistemic question. If you can achieve an authentic ‘delinking’ from a cultural matrix, then you can open the way towards a different ‘pluriversality as a universal project’, which is very close to an American-Latin idea of inter-culturality. In a nutshell, according to Mignolo delinking is “learning to unlearn”.³¹ As Mignolo states: “Delinking from what? From the Totality of Western epistemology, grounded in Latin and Greek and expanded around the globe by means of the six imperial and vernacular European languages of modernity”.³²

It is well worth making a clarification at this stage: the result of a possible ‘delinking’ from a dominant European and North American colonial culture does not lead to a ‘polycentric’ solution, but rather to a different way of conceiving the world because it is characterized at all times and space as a ‘pluriverse’: not so many different centres but a widespread ‘pluriversality’ starting from different *loci enunciationis*,³³ each of which with its own pragmatic diversity/alterity (in all these cases, Mignolo speaks of ‘diversality’). It is precisely this intercultural openness that can put aside a unique concept of modernity because it is “an essentially or exclusively European phenomenon”.³⁴ Modernity remains a phenomenon that is constituted in a necessary way starting from a non-European otherness and precisely this otherness represents its ultimate colonial content. “The myth of modernity is an irrational myth” because it is based on a ‘justification for genocidal violence’:³⁵ the ‘dark side’ of the modern world, its irrational, inhuman, ferocious aspect, ‘the horror of modernity’, consist precisely in the foundation of their modern emancipation on the blood of the others.

Beyond the Nazi concentration camps, the whole European and North American political project is based on the accomplishment of a perpetrated genocide which continues to be perpetrated in the name of the superiority of the western civilisation, which declares itself more civil with respect to the ‘primitive’ populations deserving a process of civilization, even at the cost of an authentic extermination.

²⁹ For a comparison of postcolonial (and non-decolonial) and postmodern stances, see Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Design*, 172-216.

³⁰ Samir Amin, *Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World* (London: Zed Books, 1985).

³¹ Madina V. Tlostanova and Walter D. Mignolo, *Learning to Unlearn: Decolonial Reflections from Eurasia and the Americas* (Ohio: The Ohio State U.P., 2012).

³² Mignolo, “Delinking”, 493.

³³ On the semiotic meaning of the expression Mignolo is explicit in his reference once again to Enrique Dussel, when he writes that Dussel was “shifting the attention from the enunciated to the very act of enunciation”. Mignolo, “Delinking”, 490. Indeed, as we have mentioned several times, there are many pages by Walter Mignolo with a semiotic flavor. Let us consider his philosophical debut only as an example, in Elizabeth Hill Boone and W. Mignolo, eds., *Writing without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica & the Andes* (Durham-London: Duke U.P., 1994), and, again, Mignolo’s concluding *Afterword to Local Histories/Global Designs*, significantly titled “An Other language, an Other logic, an Other Thinking” (Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 313-338).

³⁴ Mignolo’s reference here is once again to Enrique Dussel, “World System and “Trans-Modernity”, *Neplanta: Views from South*, 2.3 (2002), 221-245.

³⁵ Mignolo, “Delinking”, 454.

The reference to what is ‘other’,³⁶ different, cannot be univocal, nevertheless, it is very common in Mignolo’s studies to refer to an almost mythical figure like the indigenous Waman Puma de Ayala.³⁷ Reductive as it might seem here, with his historiographic work *Waman Puma de Ayala* has represented for Mignolo the option for another world to be again possible, specifically another way of telling the story, of telling a truth, which is not Spanish, which is not ‘Spaniards’, but indigenous, independent and going back to *pachakuti*, before the ‘discovery of America’, before a ‘new world’ was discovered/invented by an ‘old’ one. The one promoted by Waman Puma de Ayala is a literary and historical example that responds to a ‘pluriverse’ logic of telling the story according to a model that corresponds to a *nueva corònica*. In short and bringing things to their extreme consequences for Mignolo, a possible decolonial overturning of the plans would be possible, if a comparison that would sound more or less like this were admitted, with all the distinctions that still need to be made: “Waman Puma and Quobna Ottobah anchored both the geo and body-politics of knowledge and they shall become for the decolonial shift what Plato and Aristotle were for the foundation of the theo- and ego-politics of knowledge”.³⁸

6. Beyond the Theo-Logical Towards the Ego-Logical Politics of Knowledge and Understanding

Hence, the issues that have always been at the centre of Mignolo’s studies are of a philosophical nature: the path that was taken during the modern era in the political constitution of Europe first and then of the United States, as presumed hegemonic centres worldwide, went from a ‘theo-logical’ to an ‘ego-logical’ politics of knowledge and understanding (with respect to which Cervantes, Bacon, Shakespeare, Descartes represent for Mignolo as many representative moments of this passage). In this sense, a whole path within an emancipation of European and North American thought is necessary. This emancipation takes place in two different ways which are not necessarily in succession, nor do they necessarily have to be in close relationship: on the one hand, western European man emancipates himself from his state of nature and thus evolves in a civil sense (Rousseau); on the other, his process of emancipation takes place on a spiritual level at the moment of his contextual passage to an enlightened secular dimension, that is to say to an ego-logics and politics of knowledge and understanding, no longer linked to theology according to a typical movement from God to the Ego that took place at least in a certain part of the world.

It is obvious at this decolonial point of things that what we have just mentioned should be considered within the framework of anthropological and metaphysical studies that is, in a semiotic perspective (not by chance Mignolo speaks of a ‘grammar of de-coloniality’) which belongs to Greek, Latin and then Christian dynamics. Think about the ways in which an emancipation from a ‘state of nature’ can make sense for all those African and Amerindian populations with a ‘relationship with the same nature’ that

³⁶One should not underestimate the fact that in this race for the decolonialization of thoughts, Emmanuel Levinas alone is saved (even if only to some extent) in Mignolo’s philosophical project in a European study landscape.

³⁷ Alongside the name of Waman Puma de Ayala (for a seminal study of the decolonial meaning of the work of Waman Puma de Ayala see Rolena Adorno, *Guaman: Writing and Resistance in Colonial Peru* (Austin: Texas U.P., 2000)), Mignolo in other circumstances refers to other totem poles of his decolonial literature such as Mahatma Gandhi and Frantz Fanon.

³⁸ Mignolo, “Delinking”, 469. From Wikipedia: “Ottobah Cugoano, also known as John Stuart (c. 1757 – after 1791), was an African abolitionist, anti-imperialist, and natural rights philosopher from Ghana who was active in England in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Captured in present-day Ghana and sold into slavery at the age of 13, he was shipped to Grenada in the Lesser Antilles, where he worked on a plantation. In 1772 he was purchased by an English merchant who took him to England, where he was taught to read and write, and was freed following the ruling in the *Somerset Case* (1772). Later working for artists Richard and Maria Cosway, he became acquainted with British political and cultural figures. He joined the *Sons of Africa*, African abolitionists in England.” Certainly, one of his most important works turns out to be his 1791 *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999).

must not be of emancipation and detachment but of constitutive foundation. On this point in particular, i.e., on the political issue according to which the relationship with Nature must not be a state from which one has to emancipate himself, Mignolo is utterly confident, and the reference is once again semiotic. Indeed, Mignolo endorses José Maria Arguedas, who wrote: “Palabras delò quechua contienen con una densidad incomparables la materia del hombre y de la naturaleza y el vinculo intenso que per fortuna aùn existe entre lo uno y l’otro el indiígena està abrigado, consolado, iluminado, benedicto por la naturaleza: su odyo y su amor, cuando son desencademados, se precipitan, por eso, with toda vesa materia, y tambien su lenguaje”.³⁹

Mignolo goes further and does it in a philosophical sense, when he remembers how it is not only a theological or differently egological question at issue in the determination of relationships between people and populations. This applies not only from a linguistic (semiotic) point of view but also from a cybernetic perspective, where we find an open struggle between the preservation of the individual value of people and the growth of a thought that enhances what works in an overall sense (the social machine) and not in an individual/personal one. Mignolo argues: “Implemented in conjunction with imperial/global designs, the emancipating possibilities offered by cybernetics were used and applied ‘instrumentally’ in software and / or hardware, in the design of social and managerial of interpersonal systems. Thus, the corporate values and orientation of the university corresponds to the growing dominance of Organo-logy as overarching imperial metaphor”.⁴⁰ Basically, you have to work in depth every time in order to achieve a decolonial goal, which is “the unveiling of the geo- and biopolitical embodiment that has been concealed in modern epistemology from the Renaissance, under the name of God (Theo-logy), the Reason of the emancipated individual (Ego-logy), and the supremacy of the Organization (e.g., in the sense of cybernetics, kubernetes, knowledge of the organization and the organization of knowledge) over the individual (Organo-logy)”.⁴¹

We have said it and we repeat it now. Mignolo’s political project is complex and there are many risks which need to be considered: the temptation of a theoretical assimilation of some of his positions with other traditional ones in Europe are on the agenda. To give just one example, think of what Mignolo means by the expression ‘body politics’, an expression which should not be confused with Foucault’s ‘biopolitics’. According to Mignolo, ‘body politics’ in an epistemological sense is possible when such an attempt is not made to establish what the ‘biopolitical’ presuppositions are for a certain management of public health, but rather to what extent a historical truth is asserted in a racial way, despite the fact that it is the expression of a white, male, heterosexual and western mentality. The contact points with Foucault are then evident, as his points of divergence are. In short, Mignolo’s body politics has a very precise racial historical background, which Foucault’s ‘biopolitics’ does not have, a racial background that can be appreciated if you have the theoretical spirit to compare Kant’s *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* with a *Critique de la raison nègre* by Achille Mbembe,⁴² just like Waman Puma de Ayala and Quobna Ottobah on the one side and Plato and Aristotle on the other: we keep on repeating that such an operation is evidently not simple. It goes without saying that the theoretical axis around which Mignolo’s political and philosophical confrontation with European philosophy moves is summarized in a “conflictive coexistence of the theo- and ego-politics of knowledge on the one hand and the geo (and body) on the other”⁴³ in an intercultural intertwining that cannot be dissolved because it is basically *mestizo* in a broad

³⁹ Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Design*, 224. José Maria Arguedas, *Tupac Amaru Kamaq Taytanchisman* (Lima: Edicionmes Salqantay, 1962), 5.

⁴⁰ Mignolo, “Delinking”, 509.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Achille Mbembe, *Critique de la raison nègre* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2013).

⁴³ Mignolo, “Delinking”, 465.

sense and according to different possible latitudes. In the end, much would consist in a modern, European and Western philosophical sense in a complex political recovery of the so-called ‘secondary qualities’ of man, otherwise excluded in a philosophy of human science that proceeds through too much essential traits.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Again, and in a decolonial sense, Mignolo’s positions go from right to left, without any discrimination, if Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama, such as David Harvey, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, are still involved in the same criticism in terms of a theo- and ego-politics of knowledge. See Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilization and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1996), *Who Are We* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 2004), Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992), Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Impero* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2002). This lack of political awareness of their *loci enunciationis* is an accusation that Mignolo addresses to almost a whole century of European philosophy from Heidegger to Levinas, Derrida, to Žižek (Nelson Maldonado Torres, “The Topology of Being and the Geopolitics of Knowledge”, *City*, 8.1 (2004), 29-56. Conversely, Mignolo is careful as he points out his *locus enunciationis*, when he writes: “To universalize the Black or the Lesbian/Chicana experience would be to fall back into the same logic that caught Islamic fundamentalism”. Mignolo, “Delinking”, 497.