

## Editorial: Disability and the Decolonial Turn: Perspectives from the Americas

Amy Reed-Sandoval<sup>a\*</sup> and Roberto Sirvent<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP); <sup>b</sup>Hope International University. Corresponding Author- Email: [areedsandoval@utep.edu](mailto:areedsandoval@utep.edu)

Describing life at the U.S.-Mexico border and its surrounding border lands, Gloria Anzaldúa wrote that ‘*los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of ‘the normal’ (2012:3). Such experiences undergird what Anzaldúa describes in terms of a *mestiza consciousness*- an ‘alien’ ‘consciousness of the borderlands’ which is the result of a ‘mixture of races [that], rather than resulting in an inferior being, provides hybrid progeny, a mutable, more malleable species with a rich gene pool’ (2012:99). It is also, Anzaldúa tells us, the particular consciousness of the *mestiza* woman (2012:99).

Showcasing the creative and transformative possibilities of the *mestiza* consciousness, Anzaldúa further writes that ‘*soy un amasamiento*, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings’. (2012:103). Reflecting on Anzaldúa’s work, particularly on the subject of disability, Tom R. Ramlow (2006:176) explains how ‘the *mestizaje* are all those variously embodied individuals who share a common marking as ‘other’, who are kicked out, disallowed, and disavowed. This shared experience establishes the conditions for connectivity and alliance’.

We introduce this special issue with Anzaldúa’s work- particularly her poetic, artistic and philosophical self-descriptions as a Chicana, lesbian/queer, working-class, disabled woman who ‘questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings’ in the colonized and heavily militarized U.S.-Mexico borderlands- because it compellingly illustrates the central themes that motivate this project. That is, disability not only intersects with racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies, but is also strengthened perhaps even by Western modernity and enduring coloniality. Because of this, we contend that decolonial thought should attend to the propagation of ableism and the simultaneous marginalization of disabled bodies and voices within the coloniality of power.

Indeed, we seek to explore questions surrounding the epistemological privilege of disabled people- especially as it relates to their unique position in the underside of modernity; the ways in which coloniality operates to make disabled bodies into invisible entities; questions of who gets to define ability and disability in a given context, and what is at stake in defining

such terms in a specific way; how decolonial thought can aid in challenging ideologies of body normativity; the humanizing modes of thinking and talking about disabled populations that are often overlooked in decolonial studies; questions how disabled bodies and spaces serve as sites for producing theory, knowledge, and philosophy; and the historical and colonial formations and manifestations of the ability-disability distinction.

Our goals for this special issue are as follows. First, we hope to demonstrate (particularly, but not exclusively, to decolonial theorists) ways in which decolonial theory may lend itself to the aforementioned analyses of disability. Second, we aim to provide an overview of some key themes of decolonial scholarship for disability studies scholars who may be unfamiliar with this literature. Third, we provide an overview of the collection of articles in this special issue, all of which are situated at the intersection of disability and decolonial theory.

It is unfortunately beyond the scope of this brief introduction to provide a survey of the important and vast disability studies literature that has been developed to date. Those unfamiliar with this literature can consult a number of excellent resources, such as the detailed entries on disability featured in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (on themes like ‘Disability: Definitions, Models, Experience’, written by David Wasserman, Adrienne Asch, Jeffrey Blustein, and Daniel Putnam (2016)). The ‘Discrimination and Disadvantage’ blog coordinated by Shelley T. Tremain and Kevin Timpe is also a very useful source of information. Note also, that while there is a significant gap in the literature on disability in the realm of decolonial thought, there is some existing, important work in this area, such as Jasbir A. Puar’s (2017) book *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*.

Finally, it is important to note that there is a robust extant literature on issues of race, gender, class and disability- some of which can be located in the resources listed above- which, while not written from an explicitly decolonial perspective,, is certainly ‘friendly in spirit’ to many theoretical aspects of the decolonial turn (see for instance, Susan Wendell’s (1996) *The Rejected Body: Feminist Reflections on Disability*).

An excellent point of departure for our present purposes is the groundbreaking work of Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano. Quijano’s work is noteworthy, among other things, for its efforts to broaden discussions on the harms of *coloniality*- which can be broadly understood in terms of the harms associated with various patterns and configurations of power that survive colonial conquest, even after formal colonial regimes have been officially overthrown by colonized peoples. Walter Mignolo (2007:450) helpfully explains, in a discussion of Quijano’s contributions to decolonial theory, that ‘Quijano’s intellectual experience was shaped in the early years of his involvement in the heated debates ignited by dependency theory, in the seventies’. Dependency theory emphasized the ways in which economic resources moved from ‘peripheral’ nations to core or ‘center’ states in a way that is ultimately highly exploitative to peripheral nations and their peoples. He further explains that

‘dependency theory, however, maintained the debate in the political (e.g. state, military control and intervention), and economy, analyzing the relationships of dependency, in those relationships, between center and periphery’ (2007:450). As Mignolo points out, we must go beyond (though not exclude) political and economic concerns and focus on the decolonization of the mind, the ‘imaginary’, and ‘knowledge and being’ (2007:450).

Indeed, Quijano’s work pushes us to stretch the conceptual limits of dependency theory in order to understand the ways in which coloniality impacts and even distorts the mind, the imaginary, being, and knowledge itself. He does this, in part, through his detailed account on the development of the concept of ‘coloniality of power’. Coloniality of power, he explains, involves the ‘colonization of the imagination of the dominated’- a type of repression that ‘fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of signification, over the resources, patterns, and instruments of ... expression’ (Quijano, 2007:169). We see in this quote that for Quijano, the coloniality of power is not limited to the political and economic spheres- much more than that, it is also a robustly *epistemological* phenomenon. Quijano goes on to describe coloniality as ‘the most general form of domination in the world today’ (2007:170).

For Quijano, coloniality- a general yet complex form of domination- came about through a clearly identifiable historical process. It began under European colonial and capitalist expansion, with the imposition of the category of ‘race’ as an organizing principle for human bodies (2000:132). Through this process, Quijano explains, diverse Indigenous peoples and identities of the Americas were subsumed under the category of ‘Indian’. Quijano notes how this process generated exploitative labor conditions and gender roles, as colonial powers set out to govern sex, sexuality, and sexual resources under a Eurocentric framework. Europeans- the ‘white race’- were established as dominant, and the written word was taken from Indigenous peoples (typically through physically violent acts of erasure). Colonized peoples were simultaneously dominated in the aesthetic sphere, Quijano explains, as they were deprived of opportunities to engage in traditional/Indigenous forms of creative expression (instead, they were forced to imitate the aesthetics of the colonizer). Furthermore, colonized peoples were forced to abandon their religious practices and submit- at least publicly- to the religious ideologies of their oppressors. Some traditions were, of course, preserved, but Quijano explains that they had to be seriously modified. As previously noted, this oppression did not end with the formal dissolution of colonial regimes; these injustices have endured to the present day, under coloniality. All of these historical occurrences brought about what Quijano describes as the ‘coloniality of power’. In addition to being dominated politically and economically, colonized peoples, and those currently oppressed under coloniality, were/are caught in a Eurocentric ‘epistemic trap’ (Quijano, 2000:149). This makes it very difficult for dominated groups to generate and claim fresh (and, in particular, non-Eurocentric) modes of knowing, images, symbols, and perspectives- but such is the hard

work of decolonization.

A final and key component of Quijano's analysis of coloniality that we shall explore here is his discussion of *totality*. The colonial European order, Quijano explains, became a totality that was normalized and thus rendered invisible. Once such a totality has been established, non-Europeans are rendered non-subjects. Quijano argues that '...the ideas of totality, which elaborated images of society as *a closed structure articulated in a hierarchic order with functional relations between its parts*, presupposed a unique historic logic to the historical totality, and a rationality consisting in the subjection of every part to that unique logic' (2007:176). As Walter D. Mignolo (2007) explains, 'for Quijano, totality negates, excludes difference and the existence of other Totalities' (451). In other words, Eurocentred, colonialist totality renders invisible other ways of knowing, forms of social understanding, lived experiences, and aesthetic productions. Quijano argues that while non-European cultures possess a conception of totality, they allow for alterities that Eurocentric epistemologies do not.

Quijano's efforts to move past the conceptual limitations of world systems theory, and to focus far more broadly on the coloniality of power, pave a path for potentially fruitful discussions on the ways in which ableism, and the simultaneous control and marginalization of disabled bodies, are perpetuated under the coloniality of power. The notion of 'coloniality of power', then, is a possible conceptual entryway for scholars interested in exploring disability and the decolonial turn.

It is important to note, however, that in her discussion on heterosexism and what she calls the 'colonial/modern gender system', María Lugones (2007) has argued for what can be construed as an even deeper and more radical expansion of Quijano's discussion of coloniality. Lugones's work may, in turn, generate even greater conceptual space for an analysis of the relationships between disability and decolonization. While she agrees with Quijano that coloniality (and modernity, which is necessarily infused with coloniality) acts as a 'structural axis' that 'governs all spheres of human life' (Lugones, 2007:191), she disagrees with Quijano's claim that gender and gender domination under coloniality should be understood strictly in terms of 'sexual access' (2007:189). She argues that Quijano 'assumes patriarchal and heterosexual understandings of the disputes over sex, its resources, and its products', and in so doing, 'accepts the global, Eurocentred, capitalist understanding of what sex is about' (2007:190).

Instead, Lugones argues that colonialism and coloniality created and perpetuates the hegemonic, Eurocentred gender framework that we know today. Indeed, she argues that 'as global, Eurocentred capitalism was constituted through colonization, gender differentials were introduced where there were none' (Lugones, 2007:196). Supporting this claim, Lugones engages Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí's arguments that 'gender was not an organizing

principle in Yoruba society prior to colonization by the West' (2007:196) and Paula Gunn Allen's analysis of the ways in which colonization transformed 'Indian tribes from egalitarian and gynocratic to hierarchical and patriarchal' (2007:199). With this in mind, Lugones argues that while the colonial/modern gender system and the coloniality of power are, indeed, mutually constitutive, 'to think of the scope of the gender system of global, Eurocentered capitalism', we must 'understand the extent to which the very process of narrowing of the concept of gender to the control of sex, its resources, and its products constitutes gender domination' (2007:202). Instead, we must strive to understand gender systems and relationships (and even the absence thereof) in precolonial societies, and explore the ways in which coloniality itself creates and sustains gender.

Even more specifically, in the colonial/modern gender system, Lugones explains, women of color are positioned very differently from white women. White European women are oppressed in that they are 'characterized as fragile and sexually passive' (2007:203). However, she argues that under colonialism, women of color were rendered non-women- 'understood to be animals in a sense that went further than the identification of white women with nature, infants, and small animals' (Lugones, 2007:202). We might say that colonized women of color were thus *gendered inferior* to white women- and therefore greatly distanced from the gender-status of white women.

Applying Lugones's analysis to our present discussion of disability and the decolonial turn, we might ask whether and how the coloniality and the colonial/modern gender system not only reinforces ableism, but also serves to *create* disability and disabled bodies themselves. This question brings to mind Ramon Grosfoguel's (2007) argument- configured once again in response to Quijano- that we should:

...[C]onceptualize the coloniality of power as an entanglement or, to use a US Third World feminist concept, intersectionality of multiple and heterogeneous global hierarchies of sexual, political, epistemic... etc. forms of domination and exploitation where the racial/ethnic hierarchy of the European/non-European divide transversally reconfigures all of the other global power structures (217).

In other words, we should continue to expand our understanding of the coloniality of power such that it includes multiple and often intersecting forms of oppression that are perpetuated and perhaps even generated by pervasive coloniality. This 'broadening tendency' and increased intersectionality creates space for- indeed, it calls for- philosophical discussion on disability under and as a result of coloniality.

Moving on, another important point of focus in decolonial theory has been what decolonization actually requires of us, not merely at a conceptual/abstract level, but also at a practical/active level. On this front, several themes have emerged in the literature. First, there

is emphasis on the importance of listening to the voices of those who are themselves oppressed under coloniality in one's efforts of decolonization. Enrique Dussel (2003:3), in his discussion on the philosophy of liberation, argues that 'philosophical intelligence is never as truthful, clear and precise as when it is generated in oppression and is without privilege to defend, because it has none'. Along similar lines, Ramon Grosfoguel (2007:213) has argued for the importance of 'situated knowledge' and a 'body-politics of knowledge' to decolonization efforts, highlighting as examples the phenomenological decolonial work of Franz Fanon and Gloria Anzaldúa.

Second, Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008) has argued for the cultivation of a 'decolonial attitude' with regard to the ravages of coloniality- an attitude that is not purely academic. For Maldonado-Torres, the very idea of decolonization comes from facing a world of death created by colonizers. Illustrating part of what such a 'decolonial attitude' requires- at least in the context of liberation- Enrique Dussel (2003:3) has argued that 'liberation is possible only when one has the courage to be an atheist with regard to the empire, the Center, facing the risk of suffering its power, its economic boycotts, its armies and master agents of corruption, assassinations and violence'. Walter Dignolo (2007:453), meanwhile, has described these epistemic efforts in terms of a 'delinking' that requires 'a move toward a geo and body politics of knowledge that on the one hand denounces the pretended universality of a particular ethnicity (body politics) located in a particular part of the planet (geopolitics), that is, Europe where capitalism accumulated as a part of colonialism'. The words of Maldonado-Torres, Dussel and Dignolo remind us that decolonization requires a type of epistemic virtue that is not merely intellectual and academic, but also social, political, and even intimate.

Third, scholarship on decolonization has also focused on what Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) has termed 'decolonizing methodologies' that should govern research about Indigenous peoples and others who are oppressed under coloniality. While Tuhiwai Smith is focused on academic research, her analysis and recommendations offer a significantly broadened understanding of what ought to count as academic research and its goals. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, she identifies a list of 'critical questions that communities and indigenous activists often ask, in a variety of ways' (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012:10). These questions include: 'Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will the results be disseminated?' (2012:10). Asking and answering such questions is necessary in efforts to delink research (particularly on Indigenous peoples) from coloniality and European imperialism. A decolonizing methodology demands attentiveness to situated and embodied knowledge, empire, histories of genocide and violence, and concerns about who is speaking for whom.

In sum, throughout this introduction we have explored prominent theories and ideas that have emerged as in the context of the decolonial turn. Let us summarize this discussion here-

paying explicit attention to the ways in which extant decolonial scholarship seems to invite analysis, narrative, and exploration of disability (even though a significant gap in the literature currently exists in terms of disability studies). First, we saw that Quijano's foundational discussions of coloniality move past the strict focus on politics and economy that characterized World-systems theory of the 1970's in order to focus on coloniality of knowledge, explicit concerns and issues of race and racism, and the ways in which coloniality permeates all aspects of life in an invisible but ever-present Totality. While Quijano does not explicitly engage questions of disability, it is clear that such questions should have a place in an analysis of coloniality. For if coloniality does, indeed, pervade all aspects of our existence, then it surely pervades our conceptions of ability and disability as well.

Second, we explored María Lugones's (2007) analysis of the colonial/modern gender system. Lugones has argued, contra Quijano, that in terms of gender, coloniality does not merely govern sexual resources. Rather, she argues that Eurocentered coloniality effectively created the modern gender system and imposed it upon colonized peoples. While white women were subordinated under the colonial/modern gender system, women of color were denied the status of 'woman' and likened to non-human animals. Deemed hypersexual and unfeminine (where the standard of 'femininity' was ascribed to their white/European counterparts), women of color were oppressed by the 'dark side', rather than the 'light side', of the colonial/modern gender system. Returning our discussion to disability, Lugones's analysis invites us to consider whether, to what extent, and how coloniality may have *created*, and may *perpetuate*, disability itself.

Third, we saw how the decolonial turn calls upon us to do decolonization work outside of a purely academic context- through the cultivation of a 'decolonial attitude' that is 'atheistic' with regard to empire, Eurocentrism, and coloniality. This is, we have seen, similar in spirit to the work of many disability studies scholars who have long synthesized activist and scholarly work. Finally, we explored the sorts of questions one should ask in an effort to employ decolonizing methodologies in one's research. Many of these questions pertain to the positionalities of various stakeholders in the research itself, and the purposes of research. All of these issues are, once again, similar in spirit to those that have been raised by disability studies scholars in connection to work on disability.

The essays featured in this issue, convey a range of diverse perspectives (disciplinary and otherwise) and methodological frameworks. All of them are situated at the intersection of disability and decolonial theory. In her article 'Disability, Decoloniality, and Other-than-Humanist Thought', Suzanne Bost explores unpublished documents from the Gloria Anzaldúa archive- particularly some of her autobiographical writings on and artistic renderings of disability- to show how, as she claims, they 'defy the logics of identification and differentiation that underlie colonial hierarchies'. Juliann Anesi in her article 'Decolonizing Schools: Women Organizing: Disability Advocacy, and Land in Sāmoa',

explores the work of Sāmoan women organizers in the 1970's and 1980's in two educational institutions in the independent state of Sāmoa that supported students with intellectual and physical disabilities. Anesi explores how the colonialist school system that the women organizers were confronting, excluded students with disabilities, and how the organizers engaged in decolonizing efforts to reform the schools. In particular, she argues that 'the women organizers used Sāmoan concepts of "*fa'a Sāmoa* (culture), *fanua* (land), and *tautua* (service) as ways to redefine the commitment of the education system'.

In 'Adapting an Education Program for Parents of Children with Autism from the United States to Columbia', Sandy Magaña and colleagues reflect upon and analyze a program they created in both the US for Latino families, and also in Bogotá, Columbia, to 'empower parents of children with ASD [Autism Spectrum Disorder] through peer education to help their children to realize their potential'. The authors focus, in particular, on the challenges of avoiding paternalism throughout this process, and on possible ways in which colonialism may have impacted the manner in which their program was adapted from the United States to Colombia.

Beth E. Jörgensen in her article 'Globalized Food and Pharma: The South Bites Back in Lina Meruane's *Fruta Podrida*', examines Meruane's novel 'and the challenge it poses to the globalization of food production and pharmacological research in the global South'. Meruane represents disability 'unconventionality', Jörgensen explains, and presents narratives of subjects from a variety of subject-positions in order to challenge readers to grapple with disability and health inequities under globalization. Meanwhile, Carolyn Ureña, in her article 'Decolonial Embodiment: Fanon, the Clinical Encounter, and the Colonial Wound', engages the work of Franz Fanon to theorize 'the clinic as an important location from which revolutionary thought can emerge', providing 'a decolonial framework for how a sustained encounter between critical race and disability studies can generate new conceptions of health and healing that requires thinking about a different kind of pain and suffering not captured by current rhetoric...'. Ureña uses Fanon's work as it exposes ways in which coloniality generates 'hegemonic epistemologies of the body' and limited paradigms of pain and suffering. Finally, in 'Literary Fiction Under Coloniality and the Relief of Meditation in Guadalupe Nettel's *Después del Invierno*, Carla Faesler's *Formol*, and Laisa Jufresa's "La Pierna es Nuestro Altar', Emily Hind reviews the fiction of the three aforementioned Mexican writers to argue by example that 'literary fiction might begin to listen to its own science and contemplate environmental disaster through a more mindful dialogue of poetic thought, a perceptive thinking that does not automatically accept the conventions established for the rational as the only 'realistic' aesthetic'.

In compiling these articles we hope to confront the lacuna of scholarship concerning disabled bodies in decolonial studies while also highlighting important important ways in which decolonial theory is, in fact, already challenging ableist ideals of body normativity under

ongoing coloniality.

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