Postcolonial Directions in Education

MODERN GLOBAL IMAGINARIES, MODERN SUBJECTS, ENDURING HIERARCHICAL RELATIONS AND OTHER POSSIBILITIES

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ABSTRACT This paper discusses selected dispositions and characteristics of the modern liberal/Cartesian subject observed in students' responses to a survey on internationalization of higher education in Canada. The data on which this paper draws is part of a larger database of surveys, interviews, policy analyses and case studies that were developed within the framework of the Ethical Internationalization in Higher Education (EIHE) research project. The EIHE project was funded by the Finnish Academy of Science and was conducted between 2012-2016. This paper draws on three key findings from the responses of students (1451) of seven participating Canadian universities to present a broader (theoretical) context that could be inferred from what was observed in the data. For this purpose the paper first discusses some of the theories related to the existence and prevalence of the modern global imaginary that could be considered as a meta-framework under which such relations between the (modern) subject and his/her Other are normalized. In the next step it draws on psychoanalytical strands of decolonial and postcolonial critiques of the modern subject in an attempt to sketch some of problematic (and often unacknowledged) characteristics of the modern liberal/Cartesian subject that lead to constant re-production of binary hierarchical relations grounded on epistemic violence and privilege.

Key words: modern subject, internationalization of higher education, epistemic violence, commodification of difference.

1. The EIHE survey project
The reflections in this paper were inspired by the analysis of student responses to a survey on internationalization of higher education that was developed and administered within the

Ethical Internationalization in Higher Education (EIHE) research project. This project was funded by the Finnish Academy of Science and the surveys were collected between 2013–2015. This paper draws on the responses to the survey (n=1451) from students of seven Canadian universities.

Although this paper reflects on data from Canadian universities its ambition is not to outline a country-specific profile of students and their dispositions towards internationalization, diversity and global citizenship. Rather, it attempts to use the examples from data as points of entry into deeper engagement with (critical) theory on some of the more visible general tendencies and characteristics that could be considered as constitutive elements of the modern liberal/Cartesian subject. For this particular purpose the paper discusses the findings from the analysis of the open-ended part of the questionnaire that collected students' responses to four main questions:

1. How does internationalization affect society in general?

2. How do you imagine global citizens should think, relate and/ or act in the world?

3. Apart from language difficulties, do international students or students with diverse background face challenges in your institution? Please explain your answer.

4. Can diversity enrich your university experience? Please explain your answer.

Reflections in this paper stem from a selection of findings and observations from a broader and more comprehensive analysis of the data (see Suša, 2016) that explored exceptionalist tendencies and articulation in students' responses. This broader research adopted a mixed-methods (Biesta, 2010, Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) approach to the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, grounded in multiple disciplines of critical scholarship (e.g. Balibar, 1991, Bhabha, 1994, Bonilla-Silva, 2006, Jefferess, 2008, Kapoor, 2014, Thobani, 2007, Zizek, 1997 and others). Standard tools for statistical analysis were used for examining quantitative date, while social cartography (Paulston, 1996, 1999, Paulston & Liebman, 1994) was used in the analysis of the qualitative data.

The research's ambition was to use social cartography as a *performative, post-representational* tool for analysis and clustering of qualitative data into non-normative categories. Such an approach makes possible a mutual comparison between different discursive orientations and their interstices – in the data observed – without claiming normative 'objectivity'. Two sets of analytical matrices were developed that produced two separate mappings. The first cartography clustered data according to three main discursive orientations (liberal, neoliberal, critical) and their interstices, while the second cartography mapped different dispositions and tendencies of Canadian exceptionalism. A visual image of the first (general) cartography is reproduced in Figure 1 below, while the presentation and discussion of the second (more specific) cartography is omitted due to spatial concerns. As the first cartography was deployed with the purpose of mapping general discursive orientations and their interstices, the findings discussed here are largely drawn from the use of this cartography.
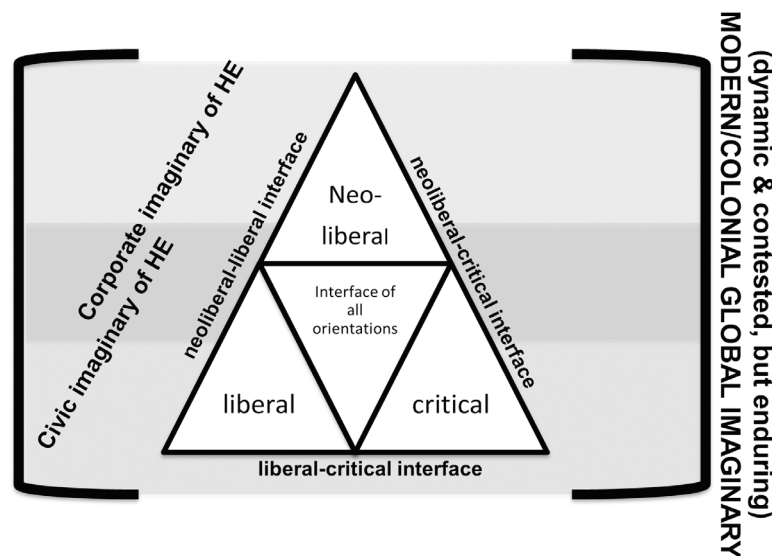

Fig. 1 Main EIHE social cartography (Andreotti et al., 2016, 91. Reproduced under Creative Commons Attribution Licence 4.0)

The conceptualization of these different discursive orientations and their interstices has been discussed in more detail elsewhere (see Andreotti et al., 2016, Suša, 2016), but, in brief, a neoliberal orientation refers to positionalities (and students answers) that emphasize the benefits of

internationalization and increased diversity (of student population and teaching staff) as contributing positively to economic growth and to students' opportunities for career (and personal) development.

A liberal discursive orientation refers to notions of internationalization and global citizenship that emphasizes (a need for) increased tolerance, acceptance, and respect of human rights, social inclusion and non-discrimination, among other social or public-benefit oriented propositions. Both liberal and neoliberal orientations emphasize the importance of individual agency over systemic change. Answers mapped as belonging under a critical orientation would exhibit, to varying extent, an understanding of global power relations, structural injustices, systemic discrimination and personal complicity in systemic harm.

Answers at the intersections of these main orientations would be mapped as belonging to either neoliberal-liberal, liberal-critical, neoliberal-critical or neoliberal-liberal-critical interstices. Answers in the neoliberal-liberal interstice would combine notions of individual (personal) and social (public) benefit, while the answers in the three critical interstices would indicate a recognition of various forms of discriminatory practices, related to internationalization and increased diversity of student population. However those would be interpreted as either generally attributable to 'misbehaviour of mal-adjusted individuals' (liberal-critical interstice), as oppression of the majority population by the minorities (neoliberal-critical) or as an internally contested combination of the two (neoliberal-liberal-critical). In the mapping, the main difference between a mainly critical orientation and these three interstices was drawn according to the visible recognition of *structural (systemic)* inequalities, discrimination, personal complicity and vested power relations. In all three interstices (liberal-critical, neoliberal-critical, liberal-neoliberal-critical) there was no visible recognition of power relations, structural inequalities and/or personal complicity. These were however observable (in varying degrees) in the answers that were mapped under the mainly critical orientation.

The answers that could be mapped as belonging either to a liberal, neoliberal main orientation or, alternatively, to

the neoliberal liberal interstice comprised the overwhelming majority (between 61 and 88 %) of all answers, while answers that were mapped as 'critical' were found in less than 5 % of all cases (to all four questions). Answers considered as belonging to either a liberal-critical or a neoliberal-liberal-critical interstice accounted for the rest.[1]

While these numbers can give us an initial rough impression as to which main orientations and interstices could be considered as the most dominant and which as the most under-represented in students' responses, there are certain other observations that are more pertinent to the subject of this paper. Before proceeding with the discussion about these other observations, I would wish to emphasize that the analysis adopted in this research argues for a *post-representational* reading of the engagement with data that is interested in mobilizing *different* relationships with the production of knowledge, rather than attempting to claim 'objective neutrality'. Indeed, one of the cartographies that was used for a deeper analysis of data was conceptualized as a

> mirror that denaturalizes what is perceived as normal and desirable and amplifies unflattering traits in order to open possibilities for different conversations and to make visible otherwise hidden assumptions and interpretations (Suša, 2016, p. 287).

In this regard this paper aims to follow de Sousa Santos's proposition that in an *ecology of knowledges,* "knowledge-as-intervention-in-reality is the measure of realism, not knowledge-as-a-representation-of-reality" (Sousa Santos, 2015, p. 201). Further, Sousa Santos argues that the credibility of cognitive construction (i.e. knowledge production) "is measured by the type of intervention in the world that it affords or prevents" (ibid). Sousa Santos also makes a very clear distinction between "analytic objectivity" and "political neutrality", and while I will attempt to comply with the requirements of the first by making my interpretative rationales as clearly explicated as possible, I do not believe that attempting to achieve "political neutrality", is in any way desirable or even possible.

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1 For a more nuanced analysis see Suša (2016).

Indeed, I believe that is precisely the very ideas or possibility of neutrality, normative 'objectivity' and epistemic innocence, related to the logocentric tendencies of the liberal/Cartesian subject, that deserve to be seriously questioned and deconstructed, as they can be found at the very heart of what Balibar (1991) and Maldonado-Torres (2004, 2007) refer to as *epistemic* or *academic racism.*

Observations from the data

The first observation from the data is related to a finding that across all three main orientations and their respective interstices the students responses seemed to construct an image of a particular kind of relationship towards their Other(s) (international students, migrants, people from minority communities) that seemed to be predominantly predicated upon their possession of knowledge about these Other(s).[2] In the responses the Other(s) were largely constructed as a (homogenized and/or essentialized) category, and the underlying assumptions in these answers seemed to be that establishing (at least provisionally equivocal) relations between students and their Others required *first* an increased understanding about each other.

While such an observation may be at first sight considered 'normal' or 'unremarkable', as we generally find people from similar background as more easily 'relatable', this research is committed to exploring precisely these unremarkable 'normalities' that could be considered as indicative of larger, very widely shared patterns of dispositions, assumptions and beliefs that may seem to be universal in value due to their omnipresence. However, authors such as Mignolo (2002) and Quijano (1999) would argue that the problem of the continuation of coloniality (or colonial dispositions) lies precisely in the ways how (once) local (Western, Enlightenment-based) structures of being came to be seen as universal through centuries of colonial subjugation.

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2 Although this research uses the concepts of the subject and his/her Other, these two concepts should not considered as necessarily (or at all) ontologically or epistemically distinction. Those individuals and groups that are in the students responses constructed as *different* as Others may well share many (if not all) of the students' existential propositions – as part of the same widely shared forms of modern liberal/Cartesian subjectivity.

Answers such as: "The more perspectives people are exposed to the more tolerant and open-minded they will be, allowing society to move to a more egalitarian society", "People get chances to experience other cultures and gain knowledge. By sharing cultural values, goals and practices countries can become more familiar with each other and unite as a whole" or "I think it's important to learn from other cultures. Especially as a teacher being knowledgeable about other cultures is important for making all students feel welcome" could be considered as indicative of a disposition that requires a possession of knowledge of Other(s) *before* engaging in (less hierarchical) relations with them.

In many of these responses, the students did not seem to be interested into getting to know (about) *actual people* – they were rather much more interested in learning about their *culture.* In this regard such answers could be considered as indicative of what Balibar (1991) refers to as *differential* or alternatively *cultural racism*, where culture replaces nature as the explanatory principle for racialized differentiation. Regardless of whether it is nature (biology), culture, ethnicity or any other differentiating principle, the relationship between the subject and its Other remains constructed through essentialized knowledge about the Other.

In this relationship the subject remains in the position of epistemic privilege that allows him/her to be the one doing the *knowing.* The Other is alternatively constructed as a (passive) subject *to be known,* or subjected to the dominant subject's gaze. I believe that it is important to emphasize that this "will to know, a violent desire for immediate knowledge of social relations" (Balibar, 1991, p. 19) is not necessarily exercised with the purpose of denigrating the Other. It rather seems to be oriented towards increasing the subject's capacity for inclusion, acceptance and tolerance, thus affirming his/her superiority through elevation of his/her moral and ethical status. The research attempted to conceptualize two categories of responses (relational-liberal and relational-critical) that would be marked by the primacy of relationality *before* knowledge and by a recognition of an existential re-orientation that challenges the onto-epistemic ground of the dominant liberal / Cartesian subject. However, less than 1 % of all answers could be considered as (potentially) indicative of such orientations.

The second observation is related to the ways in which students constructed both themselves and their Other(s), in other words what *kind of difference* was constructed in students' responses. In general it was possible to observe that students would predominantly describe themselves, the institutions they were in, or the Canadian society in general as open, tolerant, welcoming, benevolent and accepting. Answers such as: "Canada is accepting of all cultures and we are essentially known for that. It's good to know people from around the World", "We are very accepting. We are already diverse, so visitors normally find people they can easily relate to" or "I am Canadian, but view myself as being open minded and accepting toward other nations / cultures" could be considered as indicative of this stance.

Although the particular notion of Canada or Canadianness as a self-explanatory principle for the subjects' inherent human(ist) virtues is considered as one of the defining traits of Canadian exceptionalism (see Thobani, 2007, Jefferess 2008, 2011 Suša, 2016), the notions of personal innocence and benevolence should hardly be taken as an exclusively Canadian trait, albeit they may be more pronounced in the Canadian context. Inversely, the Other(s) were in students' responses often constructed as somehow lacking, inferior, even violent or ungrateful (for the offered acceptance and tolerance). Answers, such as: "Most of the international students that I have met do not attempt to make conversation despite the efforts of myself and my friends. We try to get to know them, but they don't make the effort to know us", "Some students are not willing to socialize and step out of their comfort level, leaving them to stick with only other international students", or "Different cultural beliefs can be 'backwards' or 'opposite' from the majority and cause conflicts" might illustrate this disposition.

Such constructions are consistent with Bhabha's (1994) proposition that the subject (or more precisely the subjects' self) and his/her Other are always constructed in an ambivalent relationship where the Other is repeatedly constructed as both an innocent and helpless victim in need of salvation (thus offering the subject a chance at redemption), and at the same time as constant threat (to the subject's privileged position).

The third observation is related to indications of a commodified nature of the relation between the subject and his/

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her Other(s). In several answers it was possible to observe how the Other(s) got constructed in relation to the perceived value they can contribute to subject's (or alternatively the nation's) project of self-actualization and personal growth. Answers such as: "More than half the friends I made are international students. They are amazing people and will definitely change the world. Being with them helps you reach your potential and goals in life", "I take every encounter as an opportunity to grow and learn; this is especially possible when the people I interact with are different from myself in terms of ethnical background", or "It must be difficult to find yourself in a completely different context among people who have probably been socialized in a different way.

It is important for these international students to remember that their perspectives provide a refreshing change of scenery for other students", could be considered as indicative of this commodified disposition. It could be argued that an observable lack of the capacity to examine one's own onto-epistemic grounds could be seen as reflected in these unproblematic and non-challenging conceptualization of diversity/difference, where the Other's difference is largely understood as mere addition rather than as a potential disruptions of the subject's existing knowledge. Further, such a disposition seems to re-affirm a notion that the Other only deserves to be included (or engaged with) *as long as* his/her difference does not threaten the onto-epistemic security of the subject. When the Other refuses to 'play by the book', when he/she refuses to have his/her difference made available for the subject's consumption and personal self-development, this failure to comply with the subject's demand to have his/her epistemic privilege re-affirmed, would likely result in the vilification of the Other – as discussed above.

In the next sections of this article I present a broader (theoretical) context that could be inferred from the observations presented so far. For this I first outline some of the theories related to the existence and prevalence of the modern global imaginary that could be considered as a meta-framework under which such relations between the (modern) subject and his/her Other are normalized. In the next step I draw on psychoanalytical, decolonial and post-colonial critiques of the modern subject in attempt to sketch some of problematic (and

often unacknowledged) characteristics of the modern liberal/Cartesian subject that lead to constant re-production of binary hierarchical relations grounded on epistemic violence and privilege.

2. The dominant modern global imaginary
According to Scott (1999), the questions we ask are situated and contingent and they need to be understood in relation to cognitive-political spatial temporalities that are dynamic in nature (see also Andreotti 2014). Scott proposes that we need not only a reading of the past to better understand the present, but also a reading of the present to re-evaluate the demands for the future. For him, this reading is an articulation of a 'problem space', which he defines as "conceptual-ideological ensembles, discursive formations and language games" (Scott, 1999, 4).

Scott (2004) argues that the delineation of problem spaces helps historicize both our questions and our answers and shows that, depending of where we come from, our perspective, priorities, questions and answers will change. My reading of Scott is that both our questions and our answers should always be considered as inhabiting a historically and socio-politically constructed space, meaning that they should never be taken at face value, but always in relation to the particularities of their context.

Similarly, Bhabha (1994) and Mignolo (2002) assert that our 'locus of enunciation' makes a difference in the kind of knowledge production that we happen to engage in. Ever since the psychoanalytical turn in critical theory, several authors (Lasch, 1991, Bhabha, 1994, Kapoor, 2014, Seshadri-Crooks, 2002, Zizek, 1985, 1989, 1991 and others) have argued from various standpoints that the modern (political) subject should not be considered as a rational, self-transparent, autonomous individual, but rather as a complex, often self-unaware subject, mostly driven by unconscious desires, attachments and fantasies.

In order to respond to these propositions, this paper tries to make 'the locus of enunciation' visible. It could be argued that 'the loci of enunciation' of one (the author) and the other (the students) are significantly different, shaped by very different patterns of socialization and by significantly different

experiences of life in Central Europe (the author) and in Canada (the students). As such, they might seem to be separated not just by considerable temporal, geographical, historical and ideological disjunctions, but also by differences of professional and personal dispositions and interests. However, regardless of these potential differences, they could also be considered as framed within a generally shared and widespread modern *global imaginary* (Steger, 2008, see also Andreotti et al., 2016, Stein and Andreotti, 2016, Stein et al., 2016) that cuts across these many differences. This global imaginary refers to the way we imagine, or construct, the *normality* of relations between different groups of people, cultures, and states, and the projected, normalized expectations about the nature of these relations on a global scale.

It is an anthropocentric, logocentric, hierarchical, patriarchal, racialized, heteronormative imaginary that elevates certain groups of people, depending on their origin and social status, as fit for leading humanity, and others as fit for following that lead. It is related to specific and singular ideas about progress, development and human evolution (Andreotti 2016) that have historic roots in European colonial expansion and in the European Enlightenment movement, and that have – through multiple forms of (neo)colonial violence now widely spread across the world.[3]

For Steger the global imaginary "is nobody's exclusive property. It inhabits class, race, and gender, but belongs to none of these" (Steger, 2008, p. IX). Steger suggests that the modern global imaginary frames and circumscribes the way we imagine our relations as well as our past, our present and our future – irrespective of our background. Although we may be prone to challenge it, our a priori position in the world is already determined by it, and perhaps more importantly, it is being determined globally. Similarly to the way this global imaginary structurally elevates certain groups of people above others, it

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3 Although Steger (2008) traces the origins of the global imaginary to the Enlightenment period and Destutt de Tracy's work on *ideology* (in the late 18th/early 19th century), other authors (e.g. Dussel et al., 2000 , Mignolo, 2002, Stein and Andreotti, 2016) have argued that its origin (or more precisely the origin of modernity) could be followed much further back in history – at the very least to the period of Hispanic colonial expansion at the turn of the15th century.

also elevates certain knowledges (epistemologies) and ways of being (ontologies) as superior to others.

Within the EIHE project and for the purpose of this inquiry, this modern global/colonial imaginary is conceptualized as a meta-narrative that "naturalizes Western/European domination and capitalist, colonial social relations and projects a local (Western/European) perspective as a universal blueprint for imagined global designs" (Andreotti et al., 2016, p. 88). Drawing on the works of scholars who criticize the presumption of a single, unilineal path of human (social) progress, development and evolution and the ensuing epistemic violence that results from this presumption (Grosfoguel, 2012, 2013, Kapoor, 2014, Mignolo, 2007, 2011, de Souza Santos 2007), this paper concurs with the approach of such authors in considering this imaginary as contested, and certainly contestable, but nevertheless widespread, and generally upheld across the globe.

Although subject to the criticism of conflating colonial and anti-colonial imaginaries under one common denominator (see Kamola, 2014), Steger's notion of a global imaginary "that finds its political articulation in the ideological claims of contemporary social elites who reside in the privileged spaces of our global cities and also fuels the hopes, disappointments, and demands of migrants who traverse national boundaries in search of their piece of the global promise" remains a useful concept, especially when discussing the subject of internationalization (of higher education) (Steger, 2008, p. IX).[4] In particular this refers to the unexamined and seldom challenged notions of global university rankings that explicitly profile certain universities as 'better' than others – a notion that many students are quite eager to buy into.

The "global promise" in this regard is that a graduate or postgraduate degree from one of the higher ranking universities will provide the students with better opportunities for employment and career development, thus increasing their chances for social mobility and existential stability. To what

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4 A more nuanced critique of how Steger renders elites culpable for the spread of the global imaginary could be developed through the works of Žižek (1997) and Balibar (1991).

extent (and for which groups of students) these promises still hold is subject to further debate.

It may be argued that what Kamola calls Steger's "undervalue[ing] of the very real contradictions, tensions, exclusions, violence, and class struggles that defined colonial rule and its resistances" could be taken as a certain kind of proof its dominant nature (Kamola, 2014, p. 7). By this I mean that the notion of *global* could be considered as referring to an understanding that even resistance strategies and struggles against the global imaginary are already shaped and infused by it. If these resistance struggles were to avail themselves of the use of referents and signifiers that are *outside* of the global imaginary, then they would cease to be intelligible, or seen as meaningful and relevant, to those *within it*. It may be that from *within* the imaginary they would likely not be considered as resistance at all.

The key assumption here is that any political struggle against an imaginary (global or not) is already always defined and circumscribed by the very imaginary one struggles against. A psychoanalytical reading of this relationship between the subject of critique and the critique itself would emphasize the mutual co-constitution of the two. Zizek for instance, offers an example of "the ascetic, who exhibits his dependence on the material world by his very obsession with getting rid of it" to illustrate this point. (Zizek, 1991, p. 149) Steger develops his conceptualization of the global imaginary by drawing on Taylor's understanding of social imaginaries as

> the ways people "imagine" their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go between and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations (Taylor, 2004, p. 23).

Taylor's understanding of social imaginaries is taken here as reference to a framework that delineates and circumscribes our spontaneous, normalized relationship to the world and the people around us. In the last part of this paper, I explore what kind of normalized assumptions, dispositions and tendencies of the modern liberal/Cartesian subject have

historically emerged under the framework of the dominant global imaginary. I offer some insight into the question of how these dispositions and tendencies get reproduced and/or contested in students' responses to the survey on internationalization.

3. The modern liberal/Cartesian subject

In their discussions on different kinds of constitutive violence(s) that accompany the unfolding of modernity, authors, such as Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2004, 2007), Walter Mignolo (2002, 2007, 2011), Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2001, 2007, 2015), Gayatri Spivak (2002, 2011) and others have explored how the continuation of colonial logic through patterns of hegemonic (institutionalized) knowledge production serves as the underlying onto-epistemic ground for the continuation of modernity's multiple violences. Mignolo argues that a strategy of de-linking with the project modernity and its constituent – coloniality, primarily through the decolonization of knowledge, would involve a

> constant double movement of unveiling the geo-political location of theology, secular philosophy and scientific reason and simultaneously affirming the modes and principles of knowledge that have been denied by the rhetoric of Christianization, civilization, progress, development, market democracy (Mignolo, 2007, p. 463).

For Mignolo, (Christian) theology, secular philosophy and scientific (instrumental) reason constitute the "three macro-narratives of Western civilization" that could likewise be considered as the three pillars of modernity. (Mignolo, 2007, p. 455) Similarly Stein and Andreotti (forthcoming) identify global capital, the nation-state and humanism as the key actants in the history of colonial violence. For Mignolo:

> Time and [colonial] history allowed global designs to emerge (religious, economic, social and epistemic) as responses to the need of a given place that were assumed to have universal value across time and space. [...] However, this project is no longer convincing. (Mignolo, 2002, p. 69)

de Sousa Santos argues that modernity has created a particular form of subjectivity, characterized by what he refers to as *abyssal thinking*:

> Modern Western thinking is an abyssal thinking. It consists of a system of visible and invisible distinctions, the invisible ones being the foundation of the visible ones. The division is such that 'the other side of the line' vanishes as reality becomes nonexistent, and is indeed produced as non-existent. […] What most fundamentally characterizes abyssal thinking is thus the impossibility of the co-presence of the two sides of the line. To the extent that it prevails, this side of the line only prevails by exhausting the field of relevant reality. Beyond it, there is only nonexistence, invisibility, non-dialectical absence (de Sousa Santos, 2007, p. 45).

Further, de Sousa Santos suggests that the modern Cartesian subject is not merely *incapable* of establishing equivocal relations – that is, acknowledging the value, relevance and importance of non-Enlightenment ways of knowing (epistemologies) and being (ontologies), but that this subject's dispositions towards these other ways are *actively* rendering them invisible and non-existent. This process is not conscious (as other authors below labour to show), but it is nevertheless constitutive for both – the modern subject's existence and the other's suppression into non-dialectical absence.

Mignolo (2002) uses Ramonet's concept of *la pensée unique* and Marcusean notion of *one-dimensional man* to refer to a very similar notion of totalizing (or totalitarian) forms of knowledge production that constructs a particular kind of subject – considered as in possession of universal (totalizing) knowledge. Mignolo traces the origins of dominance of Western epistemology to the period of transition between Theo-logy to *secular Ego-logy* (referring to the Cartesian "I think, therefore I am") and he makes quite clear that for him *la pensee unique* is:

> Western in toto, that is, liberal and neo-liberal but also Christian and neo-Christian, as well as Marxist and neo-Marxist. La pensee unique is the totality of the three major macro-narratives of Western civilization

with its imperial languages (English, German, French, Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese) and their Greco and Roman foundations (Mignolo, 2007, pp. 455, 456).

I believe that Mignolo is trying to draw our attention to the fact that many forms of critique are built upon very similar epistemic and ontological assumptions. Maldonado-Torres (2004) speaks of *epistemologies of ignorance*, *will-to-ignorance* and *forgetfulness of coloniality* in his discussion of how Western philosophy and contemporary social theory (including the authors that scholars draw on – most notably Zizek) all too often remain silent on the subject of coloniality and how by not discussing this subject they remain implied in its continuation.

This forgetfulness could be related to Cartesian subject's doubt or "scepticism regarding the humanity of the enslaved and colonized sub-others [that] stands at the background of the Cartesian certainties and his methodic doubt" (Maldonando-Torres, 2007, p. 245). Drawing on Dussel, Maldonado-Torres (ibid) argues that the Cartesian *ego cogito* was historically preceded by the colonial *ego conquiro* and that if we are trying to understand how Cartesian form of subjectivity emerge, we must examine its origin against this colonial backdrop. In his words, "the practical conquering self and the theoretical thinking substance are parallel in terms of their [epistemic] certainty" (Maldonando-Torres, 2004, p. 245).

Maldonado-Torres discusses how the interplay between certainty and doubt produces the binary hierarchical relation between the self and the other. Thus the *certainty* of the conquering self (about the justifiability of his actions and violence) could only be possible through simultaneous projection of *doubt* about the humanity of the subjugated others. Similarly the Cartesian *certainty* about *cogito* is established against its *methodological doubt* about what may be merely an illusion of the external world (*res extensa*):

The Cartesian idea about the division between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* (consciousness and matter) which translates itself into a divide between the mind and the body or between the human and nature is preceded and even, one has the temptation to say, to

some extent built upon an anthropological colonial difference between the *ego conquistador* and the *ego conquistado* (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 245).

For Maldonado-Torres the modern colonial subject is constituted by an *imperial attitude* that is permanently sceptical about the humanity of the other, and always certain about the humanity of the self. Maldonado-Torres refers to this disposition as *misanthropic scepticism* of the modern subject:

> Misanthropic skepticism doubts in a way the most obvious. Statements like 'you are a human' take the form of cynical rhetorical questions: Are you completely human? 'You have rights' becomes 'why do you think that you have rights?' Likewise 'You are a rational being' takes the form of the question 'are you really rational?' Misanthropic skepticism is like a worm at the very heart of modernity. The achievements of the ego cogito and instrumental rationality operate within the logic that misanthropic skepticism helped to establish (ibid).

However, Lacan, and consequently Zizek (1991, 2000) have questioned the ontological certainty of the Cartesian *cogito* by arguing that – contrary to Descartes' understanding, the *cogito* is the subject of the unconscious. Summarizing Lacan's Seminar XI, Zizek argues that because:

> the terms of the *cogito* are defined by a forced choice between thought and being he [Lacan] now claims that the subject is condemned to a choice of *being*. [...] Lacan's new paraphrase of *cogito ergo sum* is therefore: *I* (the subject) *as in so far as it* (*Es*, the Unconscious) *thinks.* The Unconscious is literally the "thing which thinks" and as such inaccessible to the subject: in so far as I am, I am never where "it thinks" (Zizek, 1991, p. 147).

Although the statement above could be interpreted as suggesting that the Cartesian subject is thus liberated from the determinism of (presumably universal) rational thought, Zizek (ibid.) is quick to point out that "the being chosen by the subject has of course its support in *fantasy*: the choice of being

is the choice of fantasy which produces frame and consistency to what we call 'reality', whereas the 'unconscious' designates scraps of knowledge which subverts this fantasy frame." In other words: "as a subject, I never *am* where I *think*" (Zizek 1991, p. 148). While the intricacies of Lacanian understanding of the Cartesian subject would far exceed the purpose of this paper, one could argue that perhaps the most relevant insight for the ensuing discussion is that regardless of one's assumptions of self-transparency, coherence and capacity for deliberate, rational choice, the Cartesian subject is much guided by a logocentric fantasy, whereby his descriptions (or assumptions about) reality get conflated with reality itself. This has important ramifications for the subject's self-perceptions and the constructions of his/her self-image, as well as for the ways the subject imagines his/her others.

Several authors that have explored the complexities and ambivalences of the relationship between the modern subject and his/her others (e.g. Ahmed, 2000, Bhabha, 1994, McAllan, 2014, Thobani, 2007) would argue that in order for the modern Cartesian/liberal subject to maintain his ontological security (certainty), (epistemic) privilege and resulting affirmation of his/her superiority, the other has to be constructed as permanently lacking, undeserving and inferior. Drawing similarly on Lacan, Bhabha (1994) argues that what threatens the modern subject most, is the potential equality of the other. This superiority of the other is (within a liberal imaginary) constructed through narratives about the subjects' many (humanistic) virtues, such as: openness, tolerance, acceptance, non-discrimination, compassion, benevolence, innocence and extolment of other, inherently positive virtues.

The superiority of the modern Cartesian/liberal subject is thus no longer affirmed through the sheer force of colonial conquest and subjugation (as in Maldonado-Torres's *ego conquiro*), but rather inversely through an emphasis on the subjects' capacity and commitment to social inclusion and acceptance. However, in order for the subject to keep his/her elevated position, the nature of this relationship has to be denied and fundamentally suppressed. As the subject's *phenomenal experience* is inaccessible to our attempts to bring such notions to light (to the level conscious cognitive engagement) it will likely contribute very little to their disruption as we simply

derive too much *enjoyment (jouissance)* from this double-bind. Zizek (1991) and others (e.g. Lacan, 2000, McGowan, 2004, Kapoor, 2014) have argued persuasively that we often enjoy the most precisely in the things that are forbidden and/or transgressive.

In order to protect one's positive self-imagine and to continue to enjoy in the privilege of constructed (or imagined) ethical/moral superiority, certain protective mechanisms, such as *denial* (Bonilla-Silva, 2006, Mignolo, 2011, Zizek, 1991)*, autoimmunity* (Derrida, 2005, McAllan, 2014) and *willful ignorance* (Maldonado-Torres, 2004, Tuana, 2004) can be deployed to enable the subject to persist in his/her self-centred fantasy. In this regard any attempts to disrupt the subject's onto-epistemic privilege are highly likely going to be perceived either as yet another 'resource' (or therapy) to be appropriated and cannibalized (McAllan, 2014); or as very dangerous existential threat, that has to be removed and/or rendered 'safe'.

4. Where from here?

In order to interrupt our satisfaction (Biesta 2013) with our socially constructed narrativization of the world, where our multiple privileges are disguised through notions of 'normalcy', benevolence, innocence and deservedness, it will likely take much more than a mere cognitive attempt at describing and critiquing one's position. Lacan and Zizek have shown that the modern *Cogito* is simply not in the position where it would be able deconstruct itself. Similarly, de Souza Santos (2007) explains that crossing the abyssal line within the hegemonic imaginary that is being constructed through modernity's project is not possible due to modernity's constitutive denial of existence of anything beyond the abyss. This means that however hard we may try to struggle to dismantle modernity's inherent violence we remain bound in what Andreotti et al. (2015) refer to as *metaphysical entrapment.* In their exploration of different responses to modernity's violence they contend that

> if even our relationship to reality is mediated though modernity's grammar, and our categorical ideas of what constitute justice are articulated from within the same ontoepistemological registers and regimes of knowledge that have produced great injustice, then it may not be possible to articulate a different

relationship to modernity from within its frames of reference (Andreotti et al., 2015, p. 14).

However, although we have, in our thinking, reduced ourselves to the Cartesian *cogito/conquero*, this is just one part of our collective existence. Our individuated selves are just one facet of the multiple ways in which we *already* exist in the world, just as the Cartesian reason represents merely one kind of rationality. This article does not propose that we should somehow attempt to try to abolish or suppress the *cogito,* quite inversely it rather proposes that its capacity to take us the *edge of our thinking* has been in general under-utilized. While the *cogito* cannot deconstruct itself, it can be a very powerful tool for taking us to that edge. Although it cannot take us beyond the limits of our imaginations, it can show us what and where these limits are. And if we muster enough courage, stamina and strength to look into the abyss created by our thinking, than we might have a chance of our self-containment being interrupted.

The deep learning that happens at the edge, the learning *from the abyss*, is likely to be considered as profoundly disruptive of the kind of structures of being we have been socialized into, as it is a learning where we are *being taught* by that which is beyond what our reason can contain. This requires an awakening (or a re-membering) of other kinds of reasoning that are not impossible or non-existent, but are merely *rendered unimaginable* by our dominant ways. Taking cues from indigenous (non-Enlightenment-based) ontologies this requires (among other things) a remembering of how to reason with our other senses, in order to clean up the mess we have created. It is not by any means a comfortable journey to have one's onto-epistemic grounds shaken and disrupted, but it is a necessary one. As these grounds are inherently violent it is about time that we break the addiction to our satisfaction with them. Their promises of ontological security and stability are empty anyhow.

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