

Nelson Maldonado-Torres

ON THE COLONIALITY OF BEING

Contributions to the development of a concept¹

The concept of coloniality of Being emerged in discussions of a diverse group of scholars doing work on coloniality and decolonization.² More particularly, we owe the idea to Walter D. Mignolo, who reflected on it in writing as early as 1995.³ I do not remember exactly when it was that I heard or read the term for the first time – I believe that it was in 2000 in a talk given by Mignolo at Boston College – but I do know that since I heard it, it caught my attention in an unusual way.⁴ The reason was that when I heard it I had already spent some time working on the thought of Martin Heidegger and some of his critics who engaged his work from the perspective of questions related to race and the colonial experience. Heidegger, who is considered by many one of the two most original European philosophers of the twentieth century (the other being Ludwig Wittgenstein), left an indelible mark in European philosophy by continuing Nietzsche's frontal attack of modernity and epistemologically-centered philosophy with an elaboration of what he referred to as fundamental ontology. Heidegger's formulation of a new starting point for philosophy consisted in a rearticulation of the question of Being, which influenced many other intellectuals thereafter, the most notable perhaps being the French-Algerian philosopher Jacques Derrida.

I was introduced to Heidegger by Joan Stambaugh who spent some time working with him in Germany. She translated several of his works in English, including Heidegger's *magnus opus* *Being and Time*.⁵ After I read Heidegger with her, I began to engage the phenomenological tradition and particularly the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, Edmund Husserl, and eventually also Jacques Derrida. I gradually became aware, at least to the extent that a young scholar can be, of the varied accents, the original approaches, and the different questions that were at the center of these and other philosophers who drew ideas from phenomenology. But it was not until I read the work of the Lithuanian Jewish thinker Emmanuel Lévinas that I woke up from what I would call my 'phenomenological and ontological slumber'. Lévinas's work was not only a variation of European philosophy or the phenomenological theme. In Lévinas I found a more radical subversion of Western philosophy. He thought through not only Greek and European, but also Judaic sources. Jewish concepts and ideas replaced Greek and Christian concepts in key parts

of the philosophical *armoire*. This subversion allowed him to present a different picture of philosophy and conception of the vocation of the human: instead of the act of thinking or the encounter between human beings and nature, it was ethics and the face-to-face (the subject-Other) encounter which became the starting point for his philosophy. His work also makes explicit reference to Jewish ideas and illustrates the difference of thinking with sources that have been to some extent marginalized by the West. I was fascinated and surprised. After having read with some detail key works of the masters of suspicion (Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud), my horizon of conceptual possibilities did not contain the idea of a rupture such as his. I wanted to know more about Lévinas, but my main interest did not reside so much in becoming an expert of sorts in Lévinas's intellectual work, but in learning in some way more about his method and approach. I was sure that the path that he opened for himself was as rich and productive as the Euro-Christian and Euro-secular traditions that he contested, and that it was necessary to expand it by discovering new themes and other thinkers who would make similar kind of heretical interventions.

In addition to Levinas's heretical gesture, there were other elements in his project which resonated with interests that I had. Lévinas was a survivor of the Jewish Holocaust, an event that marked all his thinking. Heidegger, on the other hand, had been a supporter of the Nazi regime and saw in the *Führer* a leader that would take the people (*Völk*) to the path of national authenticity.⁶ While Heidegger's affiliation with the Nazi regime was not long, it was firm and strong, and while his alliance apparently did not extend to the years of the Jewish Holocaust, he never made an apology to the Jewish people for his support of whom it was clear from the beginning that was an anti-Semitic leader.⁷ Lévinas, who became enchanted with Heidegger's thought while he spent a year in Freiburg in the 1920s, later became perhaps the most radical opposer of Heideggerianism. He made the point that Heidegger's affiliation with the Nazi regime was not only a matter of personal preference, but that in some way involved his philosophical project as well. A dark cloud encompassed for Lévinas Heidegger's ontological project. Ontology became equal for him to a philosophy of power.⁸ That is, ontology as *first philosophy* is for Lévinas ultimately complicit with violence. Conversely, a new starting point presented itself for him, one that would make by all means sure that philosophy would not lead, be complicit, or provoke blindness in respect to dehumanization and suffering. That is another reason why ethics and the face-to-face occupies center stage in Lévinas's thought.

Little did I know at that point that a similar encounter with Lévinas stood behind the emergence of liberation philosophy in Latin America with Enrique Dussel and Juan Carlos Scannone, among other young Argentineans. Lévinas also woke up Dussel from his ontological slumber and inspired him to articulate a critical philosophy of Being as Totality that not only considered the

experience of anti-Semitism and the Jewish Holocaust, but also that of colonized peoples in other parts of the world, particularly Latin America. If Levinas made the link between ontology and power, Dussel made the connection between Being and the history of colonial enterprises, thus leading to the door of the coloniality of Being. It was, however, as I mentioned before, a different Argentinean (Mignolo), who came up with the concept years later for the first time. The concept of coloniality of being was born in conversations about the implications of the coloniality of power in different areas of society.⁹ The idea was that colonial relations of power left profound marks not only in the areas of authority, sexuality, knowledge and the economy, but on the general understanding of being as well.¹⁰ And, while the coloniality of power referred to the interrelation among modern forms of exploitation and domination (power), and the coloniality of knowledge had to do with impact of colonization on the different areas of knowledge production, coloniality of being would make primary reference to the lived experience of colonization and its impact on language. Mignolo makes it clear in his own reflections on the topic:

‘Science’ (knowledge and wisdom) cannot be detached from language; languages are not just ‘cultural’ phenomena in which people find their ‘identity’; they are also the location where knowledge is inscribed. And, since languages are not something human beings have but rather something of what humans beings are, coloniality of power and of knowledge engendered the coloniality of being [*colonialidad del ser*].¹¹

The emergence of the concept ‘coloniality of Being’ responded to the need to thematize the question of the effects of coloniality in lived experience and not only in the mind. From here that the idea resonated so strong with me, who was working on phenomenological and existential philosophy and critiques to such approaches from the perspective of racial and colonial ‘sub-alterity’. When one reflects on the term ‘coloniality of being’ in the context of Lévinas and Dussel’s debate with Heidegger, it provides an important clue to clarify the specific ties between what Heidegger referred to as Being and the colonial project.

There is still a crucial figure that I was studying whom I have not mentioned, and whose work offers demand an elucidation of coloniality in connection with the question of lived experience and language: Frantz Fanon.¹² Fanon’s critique of Hegel’s ontology in *Black Skin, White Masks* not only provide the basis for an alternative depiction of the master/slave dialectic, but also contributes to a more general rethinking of ontology in light of coloniality and the search for decolonization. If Dussel spells out the historical dimension of the coloniality of Being, Fanon deploys the existential expressions of coloniality in relation to the colonial experience in its racial and, to some

extent as well, its gendered dimensions. And if Lévinas's point of departure is the anarchic moment of the constitution of subjectivity in its encounter with the Other, Fanon concentrates his attention in the trauma of the encounter with the imperial and racist Other. 'Look a Negro!' That is the point of departure for Fanon to begin to elaborate what might be referred to as the existentialia of the 'subject' of the coloniality of Being. A consistent effort in this direction would lead to an exploration of language, history, and existence. Coloniality of Being raises the challenge of connecting the genetic, the existential, and the historical dimensions where Being shows most evidently its colonial side and its fractures.¹³ Hopefully I can make some steps here in this direction. This essay is divided in four main sections, each of which focuses on answering a question. The first is What is coloniality?, the second is What is being?, the third is What is the coloniality of being?, and lastly What is the decolonization of being and the *des-gener-acción del ser*?

What is coloniality?

Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations.¹⁴ Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breath coloniality all the time and everyday.

Coloniality is not simply the aftermath or the residual form of any given form of colonial relation. Coloniality emerges in a particular socio-historical setting, that of the discovery and conquest of the Americas.¹⁵ For it was in the context of this massive colonial enterprise, the more widespread and ambitious in the history of humankind yet, that capitalism, an already existing form of economic relation, became tied with forms of domination and subordination that were central to maintaining colonial control first in the Americas, and then elsewhere. Coloniality refers, first and foremost, to the two axes of power that became operative and defined the spatio-temporal matrix of what was called America. According to Anibal Quijano these two axes were:

The codification of the differences between conquerors and conquered in the idea of 'race', a supposedly different biological structure that placed some in a natural situation of inferiority to the others. The conquistadors

assumed this idea as the constitutive, founding element of the relations of domination that the conquest imposed The other process was the constitution of a new structure of control of labor and its resources and slavery, serfdom, small independent commodity production and reciprocity, together around and upon the basis of capital and the world market.¹⁶

The project of colonizing America did not have only local significance. Quite the contrary, it became a model of power, as it were, or the very basis of what was then going to become modern identity, inescapably framed by world capitalism and a system of domination structured around the idea of race. This model of power is at the heart of the modern experience. Modernity, usually considered to be a product of the European Renaissance or the European Enlightenment, has a darker side, which is constitutive of it.¹⁷ Modernity as a discourse and as a practice would not be possible without coloniality, and coloniality continues to be an inevitable outcome of modern discourses.

How did the coloniality of power emerged? Quijano locates it in discussions about whether the Indians had souls or not. New identities were created in the context of European colonization: European, white, Indian, black, and mestizo.¹⁸ A characteristic feature of this type of social classification is that the relation between the subjects is not horizontal but vertical in character. That is, some identities depict superiority over others. And such superiority is premised on the degree of humanity attributed to the identities in question. The 'lighter' one's skin is, the closer to full humanity one is, and viceversa.¹⁹ As the conquerors took on the role of mapping the world they kept reproducing this vision of things. The whole world was practically seen in the lights of this logic. This is the beginning of 'global coloniality'.²⁰

It is true that in 1537 the Pope declared the Amerindians as human. Yet as Quijano points out 'from then on, the idea that non-Europeans have a biological structure that is not only different from that of Europeans but also inferior, was imprinted on intersubjective relations and social practices of power'.²¹ It is clear that the meaning of race has changed throughout the centuries, and that 'raza' did not mean in the sixteenth century what it came to mean at the height of the biological revolution in the nineteenth century that produced taxonomies based on a formal biological category of race. Yet, there was a commonality between nineteenth century racism and the attitude of the colonizers in regard to differences in degrees of humanity. In some ways, scientific racism and the very idea of race were the most explicit expressions of a widespread and general attitude regarding the humanity of colonized and enslaved subjects in the Americas and Africa in the sixteenth century. I'd like to suggest that what was born in the sixteenth century was something more pervasive and subtle than what at first transpires in the concept of race: it was an attitude characterized by a permanent suspicion. Enrique Dussel states that Hernán Cortés gave expression to an ideal of subjectivity that could be defined

as the *ego conquiro*, which predates René Descartes's articulation of the *ego cogito*.²² This means that the significance of the Cartesian *cogito* for modern European identity has to be understood against the backdrop of an unquestioned ideal of self expressed in the notion of the *ego conquiro*. The certainty of the self as a conqueror, of its tasks and missions, preceded Descartes's certainty about the self as a thinking substance (*res cogitans*) and provided a way to interpret it. I am suggesting that the practical conquering self and the theoretical thinking substance are parallel in terms of their certainty. The *ego conquiro* is not questioned, but rather provides the ground for the articulation of the *ego cogito*. Dussel suggests as much: 'The 'barbarian' was the obligatory context of all reflection on subjectivity, reason, the *cogito*'.²³ But the true context was marked not only by the existence of the barbarian, or else, the barbarian had acquired new connotations in modernity. The barbarian was a racialized self, and what characterized this racialization was a radical questioning or permanent suspicion regarding the humanity of the self in question. Thus, the 'certainty' of the project of colonization and the foundation of the *ego conquiro* stand, just like Descartes's certainty about the *cogito*, on doubt or skepticism. Skepticism becomes the means to reach certainty and provide a solid foundation to the self. The role of skepticism is central for European modernity. And just like the *ego conquiro* predates and precedes the *ego cogito*, a certain skepticism regarding the humanity of the enslaved and colonized sub-others stands at the background of the Cartesian certainties and his methodic doubt. Thus, before Cartesian methodic skepticism (the procedure that introduced the heuristic device of the evil demon and which ultimately led to the finding of the *cogito* itself) became central for modern understandings of self and world, there was another kind of skepticism in modernity which became constitutive of it. Instead of the methodical attitude that leads to the *ego cogito*, this form of skepticism defines the attitude that sustains the *ego conquiro*. I characterize this attitude as racist/imperial Manichean misanthropic skepticism. It could also be rendered as the *imperial attitude*, which gives definition to modern Imperial Man.²⁴

Unlike Descartes's methodical doubt, Manichean misanthropic skepticism is not skeptical about the existence of the world or the normative status of logics and mathematics. It is rather a form of questioning the very humanity of colonized peoples. 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*. The very relationship between colonizer and colonized provided a new model to understand the relationship between the soul or mind and the body; and likewise, modern articulations of the mind/body are used as models to conceive the colonizer/colonized relation, as well as the relation between

man and woman, particularly the woman of color.²⁵ This difference translates itself into European and non-European and into lighter and darker peoples, or what W.E.B. Du Bois refers to as the color-line.²⁶ If the *ego conquiro* anticipates in some ways the subjective turn and solipsism of the *ego cogito*, then Manichean skepticism in some ways opens the door and shapes the reception of Cartesian skepticism. This point of view also leads to the idea that it would be impossible to provide an adequate account of the crisis of modern Europe without reference, not only to the limits of a Cartesian view of the world, but also to the traumatic effects of Manichean misanthropic skepticism and its imperial ethos.

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. That is why the idea of progress always meant in modernity progress for a few and why the Rights of Man do not apply equally to all, among many other such apparent contradictions. Misanthropic skepticism provides the basis for the *preferential option for the ego conquiro*, which explains why security for some can conceivably be obtained at the expense of the lives of others.²⁷ The *imperial attitude* promotes a fundamentally genocidal attitude in respect to colonized and racialized people. Through it colonial and racial subjects are marked as dispensable.

Ideas of war, conquest, and genocide here bring up another fundamental aspect of coloniality.²⁸ The question about whether the indigenous peoples of the Americas had soul or not was framed around the question of just war. In the debates that took place in Valladolid in the sixteenth century Sepúlveda argued against Las Casas that the Spanish had the obligation to engage in a just war against subjects who, in their inferiority, would not adopt by themselves the superior Christian religion and culture.²⁹ Once more, just like it happens in respect to the question about the humanity of the so called Amerindians, the outcome of the discussion is not as important as the question itself. The 'discovery' and conquest of the Americas was no less than an ontological event with many implications, the most dramatic of which were established by the attitudes and questions that emerged in the context. By the time when the question about engaging in a just war against the Amerindians was answered the conquerors had already established a particular way of relating to the peoples that they encountered. And the way in which they pursued such relations did not correspond to the ethical standards that were followed in their countries of origin. Indeed, as Sylvia Wynter argues, Columbus's redefinition of the purpose of land as being one *for us*, whereby *for us* meant *for*

us who belong to the realm of Man vis-à-vis those outside the human oecumene, already introduces the exceptional character that ethics is going to take in the New World.³⁰ As we know, such exceptional situation gradually lost its exceptionality and became normative in the modern world. But before it gained such a widespread acceptance and became constitutive of a new reigning episteme, the exceptionality was shown in the way in which colonizers behaved in relation to the indigenous peoples and black slaves. And this behavior coincided more with the kind of actions shown at war, than with the ethics that regulated live with other European Christians.

When the conquerors came to the Americas they did not follow the code of ethics that regulated behavior among subjects of the crown in their kingdom.³¹ Their actions were regulated by the ethics or rather the non-ethics of war. One cannot forget that while early Christians criticized slavery in the Roman Empire, later Christians considered that vanquished enemies in war could legitimately be enslaved.³² Indeed, in the Ancient world and the Middle Ages it was for the most part legitimate to enslaved some people, particularly prisoners of war and the vanquished. What happens in the Americas is a transformation and naturalization of the *non-ethics of war*, which represented a sort of exception to the ethics that regulate normal conduct in Christian countries, to a more stable and long-standing reality of *damnation*. Damnation, life in hell, refers here to modern forms of colonialism which constitute a reality characterized by the naturalization of war by means of the naturalization of slavery, now justified in relation to the very physical and ontological constitution of people – by virtue of ‘race’ – and not to their faith or belief.³³ That human beings become slaves when they are vanquished in a war translates in the Americas to the suspicion that the conquered people, and then non-European peoples in general, are constitutively inferior and that therefore they should assume a position of slavery and serfdom. Sepúlveda draws on Aristotle to justify this position, but he was more than anything translating into categories ideas that were already becoming common sense. Later the idea was going to be solidified in respect to the slavery of people from Africa and become stable until today under the tragic reality of different forms of racism.

Coloniality, I am suggesting here, can be understood as a radicalization and naturalization of the non-ethics of war. This non-ethics included the practices of eliminating and slaving certain subjects – e.g., indigenous and black – as part of the enterprise of colonization. The hyperbolic expression of coloniality includes genocide, which is the paroxysm of the *ego cogito* – a world in which the *ego cogito* exists alone. War, however, is not only about killing or enslaving. War includes a particular treatment of sexuality and of femininity: rape. Coloniality is an order of things that put people of color under the murderous and rapist sight of a vigilant *ego*. And the primary targets of rape are women. But men of color are also seeing through these lenses. Men of color are feminized and become for the *ego conquiro* fundamentally penetrable

subjects.³⁴ I will expand more on the several dimensions of murder and rape when I elaborate the existential aspect of the analytics of the coloniality of Being. The point that I want to make here is that racialization works through gender and sex and that the *ego conquirio* is constitutively a *phallic ego* as well.³⁵ Enrique Dussel, who submits the thesis of the phallic character of the *ego cogito*, also makes links, albeit indirectly, with the reality of war.

And thus, in the beginning of modernity, before Descartes discovered . . . a terrifying anthropological dualism in Europe, the Spanish conquistadors arrived in America. The phallic conception of the European-medieval world is now added to the forms of submission of the vanquished Indians. ‘Males’, Bartolomé de las Casas writes, are reduced through ‘the hardest, most horrible, and harshest serfdom’; but this only occurs with those who have remained alive, because many of them have died; however, ‘in war typically they only leave alive young men (*mozos*) and *women*.’³⁶

Joshua Goldstein complements this account by depicting conquest as an extension of the rape and exploitation of women in wartime.³⁷ He argues that to understand conquest one needs to examine: (1) male sexuality as a cause of aggression; (2) the feminization of enemies as symbolic domination, and (3) dependence on exploiting women’s labor. My argument is that these three things come together in the idea of race that began to emerge in the conquest and colonization of the Americas. Misanthropic skepticism posits its targets as racialized and sexualized subjects. Once vanquished, they are said to be inherently servants and their bodies come to form part of an economy of sexual abuse, exploitation, and control. The ethics of the *ego conquirio* ceased to be only a special code of behavior for periods of war and becomes in the Americas – and gradually the modern world – by virtue of misanthropic skepticism, the idea of race, and the coloniality of power, a standard of conduct that reflects the way things are – a way of things whose naturalization reaches its climax with the use of natural science to validate racism in the nineteenth century. The way things supposedly are emerge from the idea of how a world is conceived to be in conditions of war and the code of behavior that is part of it. What happens in modernity is that such a view of the world and code of conduct is transformed – through the idea of race – and becomes naturalized. Thus, the treatment of vanquished peoples in conditions of war is perceived as legitimate long after war is over. Later on, it won’t be their aggression or opposition, but their ‘race’ which justifies continued serfdom, slavery, and rape. This represents a break with the European medieval tradition and its ethical codes. With the initial exploitation of Africa and the colonization of the Americas in the fifteenth century, the emerging modernity comes to be shaped by a paradigm of war.³⁸

Building on the work of Dussel, Gordon, Quijano, and Wynter I articulated in this section what I see as three contributions to the understanding of coloniality and race: (1) the understanding of race as misanthropic skepticism, (2) the interrelation of race and gender, and (3) the understanding of race and gender conceptions in modernity as the result of the naturalization of the ethics of war. The lived experience of racialized people is deeply touched by the encounter with misanthropic skepticism and by the constant encounter with violence and death. The language that they use has also already being shaped by understanding of the world as a battle field in which they are permanently vanquished. Now that we have an idea about the basic conditions of life in the colonial side of the modern world or in the dark side of the color-line we can try to find a more precise philosophical articulation of these experiences and thus to lay out the fundamentals for a discourse about the coloniality of being. But, while we have explored to some extent the meaning of the idea of coloniality, we haven't done the same with the idea of 'being'. We shall do that next.

What is being?

As I made clear at the outset, Heidegger's fundamental ontology informs the conception of Being that I want to elaborate here. His work, particularly his 1927 magnum opus, *Being and Time* is not the point of departure to think about the coloniality of Being but it is, at least when spelled out in the context of the phenomenological tradition and its heretic expressions, an inescapable reference point. I do not think that Heidegger's conception of ontology and the primacy that he gives to the question of being necessarily provide the best basis for the understanding of coloniality or decolonization, but his analyses of being-in-the-world serve as a starting point to understanding some key elements of existential thought, a tradition that has made important insights into the lived experience of colonized and racialized peoples.³⁹ Returning to Heidegger can provide new clues about how to articulate a discourse on the colonial aspects of world making and lived experience.

Heidegger's ontology is characterized by the idea that Being is not a being, an entity, or a thing, but the Being of beings, that is, something like the general horizon of understanding for all beings.⁴⁰ He refers to the distinction between Being and beings as the *ontological difference*.⁴¹ According to Heidegger, Western philosophy, particularly Western metaphysics, is characterized by the forgetfulness of Being and by a denial of the ontological difference. Western metaphysics has equally betrayed the understanding of Being by conceiving Being in terms of the godhead or divinity. He calls this tendency onto-theology, which is for him what fundamental ontology needs to overcome.⁴²

In addition to arguing for the crucial importance of the ontological difference, Heidegger makes the point that the answer to the question of the

meaning of Being necessitates a new radical point of departure. God cannot stand as the beginning of ontology anymore. Things as such are of not much help either, since their meaning is partly independent of them, and surely they do not grasp their own meaning. In fact there is only one being for whom the question of Being is significant: the human being. Since Heidegger's aim is to begin philosophy anew, he does not want to use Man or any known concept to refer to human beings. They all carry the trace of metaphysics and of epistemologically-centered philosophy, which would vitiate his efforts to escape from them. The concept that he uses to refer to human beings-qua-beings for whom their own being is in question is *Dasein*. *Dasein* literally means 'being there'. Thus, *Dasein* is simply the being who is there. For Heidegger, fundamental ontology needs to elucidate the meaning of 'being there' and through that, articulate ideas about Being itself.

Heidegger's first reflection about *Dasein* is that it ek-sist, which means that it is projected to the future.⁴³ But *Dasein* is also 'thrown there'. *Dasein* ek-sist in a context which is defined by a history and where there are laws and established conceptions about social interaction, subjectivity, the world, and so on. Now, through the analysis of *Dasein*, Heidegger discovers that for the most time its subjectivity takes the shape of a collective anonymous figure: the One or the They. The They could be compared to what Nietzsche referred to as the herd or the mass of people.⁴⁴ Once Heidegger has elaborated his view of the They the rest of part I of *Being and Time* takes on the question of how can *Dasein* relate authentically to itself by projecting its ownmost possibilities – not those defined by the They. Heidegger's response is that authenticity can only be achieved by resoluteness, and that resoluteness can only emerge in an encounter with the possibility which is inescapably one's own, that is, death. In death one is fully irreplaceable: no one can die for one, or one for another. Death is a singular individualizing factor. The anticipation of the death and the accompanying anxiety allow the subject to detach herself from the They, to determine her ownmost possibilities, and to resolutely define her own project of ek-sistence.⁴⁵

While the anticipation of death provides the means for the achievement of authenticity at an individual level, a *Fuhrer* or leader became for Heidegger the means to achieve authenticity at a collective level. Resoluteness at a collective level could only emerge by virtue of a leader. From here that Heidegger came to praise Hitler's role in Germany and became an enthusiastic participant in the Nazi administration. War in some way provided a way to connect these two ideas: the wars of the *volk* (people) in the name of their leader provide the context for a confrontation with death, and thus, to individual authenticity. The possibility of dying for the country in a war becomes a means for individual and collective authenticity.⁴⁶ This picture, to be sure, seems to reflect more the point of view of the victor in war, than that of the vanquished. But it could be said that the vanquished can also achieve authenticity through the confrontation with death in war. Anybody can. Yet, the missing factor here

is the following: if the previous account of coloniality in relation to the non-ethics of war is plausible then it must be admitted that the encounter with death is no extra-ordinary affair, but a constitutive feature of the reality of colonized and racialized subjects. The colonized is thus not ordinary Dasein, and the encounter with the possibility of death does not have the same impact or results than for someone whose mode of alienation is that of depersonalization by the One or They. Racialized subjects are constituted in different ways than those that form selves, others, and peoples. Death is not so much an individualizing factor as a constitutive feature of their reality. It is the encounter with daily forms of death, not the They, which afflicts them. The encounter with death always comes too late, as it were, since death is already beside them. For this reason, decolonization, deracialization, and des-generación (in sum, decoloniality) emerge not through an encounter with one's own mortality, but from a desire to evade death, one's own but even more fundamentally that of others. In short, while a vanquished people in war could achieve authenticity, for subjects who are not considered to be part of 'the people' the situation is different. For some subjects modernity changed the way of achieving authenticity: they already live with death and are not even 'people'. What Heidegger forgot is that in modernity Being has a colonial side, and that this has far-reaching consequences. The colonial aspect of Being, that is, its tendency to submit everything to the light of understanding and signification, reaches an extreme pathological point in war and its naturalization through the idea of race in modernity. The colonial side of Being sustains the color-line. Heidegger, however, loses from view the particular predicament of subjects in the darker side of this line and the significance of their lived experience for theorization of Being and the pathologies of modernity. Ironically, Heidegger recognizes the existence of what he calls 'primitive Dasein', but in no way he connected it with colonized Dasein.⁴⁷ Instead, he took European Man as his model of Dasein, and thus the colonized appeared as a 'primitive'. He forgot that if the concept of Man is a problem, is not only because it is metaphysical, but also because it does away with the idea that, in modernity, what one finds is not a single model of human being, but relations of power that create a world with masters and slaves. He needed to break with the idea of Europe and the European as models, in order to uncover the complex dynamics of Dasein in the modern period – both of European and colonized Dasein, to which we will refer here as the *damné*. But we are already in the territory of discourse on the coloniality of being.

What is the coloniality of being?

The concept of the coloniality of Being is best understood in light of the discussion of the *ego conquiro* and Manichean misanthropic skepticism in the

first section. I argued that the *ego conquiro* and misanthropic skepticism remained unquestioned by Descartes's formulation of the *ego cogito* and his methodic doubt. He could imagine an evil demon who deceives people about their apparent certainties, but could not observe an *ego conquiro* at work in the consciousness of the European (and, if we follow Dussel and Quijano, in his own presuppositions as well) and how it made everyone to take for granted the inhumanity of colonized peoples.

How does this relate to ontology and Being? Heidegger's critical response to the subjective and epistemological turn of modern philosophy achieved by Descartes consisted in pointing out an alleged forgetfulness in Descartes's thought. Heidegger correctly suggests that Descartes and basically all of modern philosophy after him focused rather exclusively on the question of the *ego cogito*. 'Cogito, ergo sum', 'I think, therefore I am', however, introduced, what was for Heidegger a more fundamental notion than the *cogito* itself: the very concept of Being. 'I THINK, therefore I am' turned for him into 'I think, therefore I AM'. The question of Being appears in the second part of the Cartesian formulation – the I AM.⁴⁸ Focusing on the second part of the expression, Heidegger wanted to oppose the modern tradition of philosophy as epistemology with his own fundamental ontology. Now, in light of what has been said about the *ego conquiro* and the misanthropic doubt that remains unquestioned in Descartes's formulation, it is possible to point out what both Descartes and Heidegger missed in their philosophical views. If the *ego cogito* was built upon the foundations of the *ego conquiro*, the 'I think, therefore I am' presupposes two unacknowledged dimensions. Beneath the 'I think' we can read 'others do not think', and behind the 'I am' it is possible to locate the philosophical justification for the idea that 'others are not' or do not have being. In this way we are led to uncover the complexity of the Cartesian formulation. From 'I think, therefore I am' we are led to the more complex and both philosophically and historically accurate expression:

'I think (others do not think, or do not think properly), therefore I am (others are-not, lack being, should not exist or are dispensable)'.

The Cartesian formulation privileges epistemology, which simultaneously hides both what could be regarded as the coloniality of knowledge (others do not think) and the coloniality of Being (others are not). Heidegger's ontological turn missed these two unacknowledged components of Descartes's formulation. Cartesian epistemology and Heideggerian ontology presuppose the coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of Being. In what was unmentioned and presupposed in Descartes's formulation we find thus the fundamental link between the 'colonialidad del saber' (coloniality of knowledge) and the 'colonialidad del ser' (coloniality of being). The absent of rationality is articulated in modernity with the idea of the absence of Being in

others. Misanthropic skepticism and racism work together with ontological exclusion. It is in this way that we better understand Frantz Fanon's idea that in a colonial anti-black world the Black does not have ontological resistance or ontological weight in the eyes of the white.⁴⁹ He also says that when the black person is going to speak with whites, reason flees away and irrationality imposes the terms of the conversation.⁵⁰ The lack of ontological resistance is linked with the absence of rationality and viceversa.

For Fanon, the black is not a being or simply nothingness. The Black is something else. The enigma of blackness appears as the very radical starting point to think about the coloniality of Being. While Heidegger's focus on Being required reflection on Dasein's comportment and existentialia, reflection on the coloniality of Being requires elucidation of the fundamental existential traits of the black and the colonized. In this way, from Descartes's *Meditations* we move to the territory of 'Fanonian meditations'.⁵¹ The Black, people of color, and the colonized become the radical points of departure for any reflection on the coloniality of Being. Following Fanon, I will use a concept that refers to the colonial subject, equivalent in some way to Dasein but marking the aspects of the coloniality of Being: the *damné* or condemned of the earth. The *damné* is for the coloniality of Being what Dasein is for fundamental ontology, but, as it were, in reverse. The *Damn e* is for European Dasein the being who is 'not there'. I want to argue that they are not independent of each other but that, without awareness of coloniality, reflection on Dasein and Being involve the erasure of the *damn e* and the coloniality of Being. If there has been a problem in modern Western civilization it has not been so much forgetfulness of Being, as Heidegger believed, but suppression of the understanding of coloniality in all its aspects and lack of recognition of the efforts by the *damn es* to overcome the imposed limits by the cruel reality of damnation or the naturalization of war. This is part of what a project of Fanonian meditations would aim to elucidate. Fanonian meditations would articulate new categories for philosophical disquisition. For the purpose of clarity and consistency, I will only introduce and briefly discuss some of the elements that stand as parallels to Heidegger's efforts.

One of the most basic distinctions that Heidegger elaborates is that of the ontological difference, or the difference between Being and beings. Elucidation of the coloniality of Being entails reflection on this and other two kinds of fundamental differences: the trans-ontological difference and the sub-ontological difference. Fanonian meditations would be guided by these three categories:

Trans-ontological difference

(difference between Being and what is beyond Being; or Being and exteriority)

Ontological difference

(difference between Being and beings)

Sub-ontological or ontological colonial difference

(difference between Being and what lies below Being or that which is negatively marked as dispensable as well as a target of rape and murder)

We owe a more or less explicit discourse about the trans-ontological difference to Emmanuel Lévinas. The sub-ontological difference has been elaborated, although implicitly, by Fanon. The coloniality of being makes reference to the two of them – since ultimately what lies ‘beyond’ is what is put in a lower position – but I will focus here on the second.

The ontological difference allows one to think clearly about Being and not to confuse it with beings or entities or God. Likewise the sub-ontological or ontological colonial difference brings into view the reality that is defined by a differentiation between selves and subjects without ontological resistance. The sub-ontological difference relates to what Walter Dignolo has referred to as the colonial difference. But while his notion of colonial difference is primarily epistemic, sub-ontological difference refers primarily to being. Thus it would be best to distinguish between an epistemic colonial difference that allows one to perceive the contours of the coloniality of knowledge, and an ontological colonial difference which reveals the presence of the coloniality of being. Or else, one can say that there are different aspects to the colonial difference: epistemic and ontological, both of whom are related to power (exploitation, domination, and control). In short, sub-ontological or ontological colonial difference relates to the coloniality of Being in a way similar to how the epistemic colonial difference is related to the coloniality of knowledge. Colonial difference in general is indeed the first by-product of the coloniality of power, of knowledge, and being. Ontological colonial difference is more specifically the product of the coloniality of being.

Now, what kind of questions should orient our inquiry of the coloniality of Being. While Heidegger bases his reflections on an existential analysis of Dasein, the elucidation of the coloniality of Being requires an analysis of the existential modalities of the *damné*. For Heidegger Dasein ek-sist, that is, it is thrown toward the future, and it achieves authenticity when it anticipates his own mortality, that is, the very end of his future. This position contrasts sharply with Fanon’s description of the existential reality of the *damné*. In *A Dying Colonialism* he writes,

There is, first of all, the fact that the colonized person, who in this respect is like men in underdeveloped countries or the disinherited in all parts of the world, perceives life not as a flowering or a development of an essential productiveness, but as a permanent struggle against an omnipresent death. This ever-menacing death is experienced as endemic famine, unemployment, a high death rate, an inferiority complex and the absence of any hope for the future. All this gnawing at the existence of the

colonized tends to make of life something resembling an incomplete death.⁵²

While Dasein is lost in the They and achieves authenticity when it anticipates its own death, the *damné* confronts the reality of its own finitude as a day to day adventure. That is why Fanon writes in *Black Skin, White Masks* that the black lacks the opportunity to descend into hell.⁵³ As Lewis Gordon puts it, the reason is because the black already lives in hell.⁵⁴ The extraordinary event of confronting mortality turns into an ordinary affair.

Hellish existence in the colonial world carries with it both the racial and the gendered aspects of the naturalization of the non-ethics of war. *Indeed, coloniality of Being primarily refers to the normalization of the extraordinary events that take place in war.* While in war there is murder and rape, in the hell of the colonial world murder and rape become day to day occurrences and menaces. ‘Killability’ and ‘rapeability’ are inscribed into the images of the colonial bodies. Lacking real authority, colonized men are permanently feminized. At the same time, men of color represent a constant threat and any amount of authority, any visible trace of the phallus is multiplied in a symbolic hysteria that knows no limits.⁵⁵ Mythical depiction of the black man’s penis is a case in point. The Black man is depicted as an aggressive sexual beast who desires to rape women, particularly White. The Black woman, in turn, is seeing as always already sexually available to the raping gaze of the White and as fundamentally promiscuous. The Black woman is seeing as a highly erotic being whose primary function is fulfilling sexual desire and reproduction. To be sure, any amount of ‘penis’ in both represents a threat. But in its most familiar and typical forms the Black man represents the act of rape – ‘raping’ – while the Black woman is seeing as the most legitimate victim of rape – ‘being raped’. Women deserve to be raped and to suffer the consequences – in terms of lack of protection from the legal system, further sexual abuse, and lack of financial assistance to sustain herself and her family – just as black man deserve to be penalized for raping, even without committing such an act. Both ‘raping’ and ‘being raped’ are attached to Blackness as if they were part of the essence of Black folk, which is seeing as a dispensable population. Black bodies are seeing as excessively violent and erotic, as well as the legitimate recipients of excessive violence, erotic and otherwise. ‘Killability’ and ‘rapeability’ are part of their essence – understood in a phenomenological way. The ‘essence’ of Blackness in a colonial anti-black world is part of a larger context of meaning in which the non-ethics of war gradually becomes a constitutive part of an alleged normal world. In its racial and colonial connotations and uses, Blackness is an invention and a projection of a social body oriented by the non-ethics of war. The murderous and raping social body projects the features that define it to sub-Others, in order to be able to legitimate the same behavior that is allegedly descriptive of them. The same ideas that inspire perverted acts

in war, particularly slavery, murder and rape, are legitimized in modernity through the idea of race and gradually are seeing as normal to a great extent thanks to the alleged obviousness and non-problematic character of Black slavery and anti-Black racism. To be sure those who suffer the consequences of such a system are primarily Blacks and indigenous peoples, as well as all of those who appear as colored. In short, this system of symbolic representations, the material conditions that in part produce it and continue to legitimate it, and the existential dynamics that occur therein, which are also at the same time derivative and constitutive of such a context, are part of a process that naturalizes the non-ethics of war. The sub-ontological difference is the result of such naturalization. It is legitimized through the idea of race. In such a world, ontology collapses into a Manicheism, as Fanon suggested.⁵⁶

Fanon offered the first phenomenology of the Manichean colonial world, understood properly as a Manichean reality and not solely as ontological.⁵⁷ In his analysis, he investigated not only the relation between whites and blacks, but also those between black males and black females. Much can be added to his discussion, but that is not my purpose here. What I wish is first to provide a way to understand the Fanonian breakthrough in light of the articulation of sub-ontological difference and the idea of the naturalization of the non-ethics of war. This is important because, among other things, we can see now that when Fanon called for a war against colonialism, what he was doing was to politicize social relations which were already premised on war. Fanon was not only fighting against anti-black racism in Martinique, or French colonialism in Algeria. He was countering the force and legitimacy of a historical system (European modernity) which utilized racism and colonialism to naturalize the non-ethics of war. He was doing a war against war oriented by 'love', understood here as the desire to restore ethics and to give it a proper place to trans-ontological and ontological differences.⁵⁸

For Fanon, in the colonial context, ontological colonial difference or sub-ontological difference profoundly marks the day to day reality. If the most basic ontological question is 'why are things rather than nothing', the question that emerges in this context and that opens up reflection on the coloniality of Being is 'Why go on?' As Lewis Gordon has put it, 'why go on?' is a fundamental question in the existential philosophy of the African diaspora and it illuminates the plight of the *wretched of the earth*.⁵⁹ Why go on? is preceded only by one expression, which becomes the first instance that reveals the coloniality of Being, that is, the *cry*.⁶⁰ The cry, not a word but an interjection, is a call of attention to one's own existence. The cry is the pre-theoretical expression of the question – Why go on? – which for the most part drives theoretical reflection in the peoples of the African diaspora. It is the cry that animates the birth of theory and critical thought. And the cry points to a peculiar existential condition: that of the condemned. The *damné* or condemned is not a 'being there' but a non-being or rather, as Ralph Ellison

so eloquently elaborated, a sort of an invisible entity.⁶¹ What is invisible about the person of color is its very humanity, and this is in fact what the cry tries to call attention to. Invisibility and dehumanization are the primary expressions of the coloniality of Being. The coloniality of Being indicates those aspects that produce exception from the order of Being; it is as it were, the product of the excess of Being that in order to maintain its integrity and inhibit the interruption by what lies beyond Being produces its contrary, not nothing, but a non-human or rather an inhuman world. The coloniality of Being refers not merely to the reduction of the particular to the generality of the concept or any given horizon of meaning, but to the violation of the meaning of human alterity to the point where the alter-ego becomes a sub-alter. Such a reality, typically approximated very closely in situations of war, is transformed into an ordinary affair through the idea of race, which serves a crucial role in the naturalization of the non-ethics of war through the practices of colonialism and (racial) slavery. The coloniality of Being is not therefore an inevitable moment or natural outcome of the dynamics of creation of meaning. Although it is always present as a possibility, it shows itself forth when the preservation of Being (in any of its determinations: national ontologies, identitarian ontologies, etc.) takes primacy over listening to the cries of those whose humanity is being denied. The coloniality of Being appears in historical projects and ideas of civilization which advance colonial projects of various kinds inspired or legitimized by the idea of race. The coloniality of Being is therefore co-extensive with the production of the color-line in its different expressions and dimensions. It becomes concrete in the appearance of *liminal* subjects, which mark, as it were, the limit of Being, that is, the point at which Being distorts meaning and evidence to the point of dehumanization. The coloniality of Being produces the ontological colonial difference, deploying a series of fundamental existential characteristics and symbolic realities. I have sketched out some. An ample discussion will require another venue. What I would like to do here is to show the relevance of the categories that have been introduced so far for the project of decolonization, which is, ultimately, the positive dimension that inspires this analysis. Like I did in this section, let me begin once more with what we have discovered as our radical point of departure: the *damné*.

Decolonization and ‘des-gener-acción’ of being⁶²

What is the meaning of *damné*? The *damné* is the subject that emerges in a world marked by the coloniality of Being. The *damné*, as Fanon put it, has non-ontological resistance in the eyes of the dominant group. The *damné* is either invisible or excessively visible. The *damné* exists in the mode of not-being there, which hints at the nearness of death, at the company of death. The *damné* is a concrete being but it is also a transcendental concept. Emile

Benveniste has shown that the term *damné* is etymologically related to the concept of *donner*, which means, to give. The *damné* is literally the subject who cannot give because what he or she has has been taken from him or her.⁶³ This means that the *damné* is a subject from whom the capacity to have and to give have been taken away from her and him. The colonality of Being is thus fundamentally an ontological dynamic that aims to obliterate – in its literal sense of doing away completely so as to leave *no trace* – gift-giving and generous reception as a fundamental character of being-in-the-world.

Emmanuel Lévinas argues that gift-giving and reception are fundamental traits of the self. Giving is first and foremost for Lévinas a metaphysical act that makes possible the communication between a self and an Other – as trans-ontological – as well as the sharing of a common world. Without giving to an Other there would be no self just as without receiving from the Other there would be no reason. In short, without a trans-ontological moment there would be no self, no reason, and no Being. The trans-ontological is the foundation of the ontological. For Lévinas, the ontological, the realm of being, comes to exist out of the introduction of justice into the trans-ontological relation, which introduces measure and synchronicity in the order of the fundamentally diachronic.⁶⁴ The ontological comes to be at the expense of the trans-ontological. The ontological thus carries with it the marks of both positive achievement and betrayal of the trans-ontological relation, a relation of radical givenness and reception.

According to Lévinas, ontology is a philosophy of power. It is a discourse that, when taken as foundation or ultimate end, it gives priority to an anonymous Being over and beyond the self-Other relation – it gives priority to the ontological rather than to the trans-ontological, and to authenticity rather than to radical responsibility. When ontology is conceived as fundamental, the self-Other relation becomes a secondary dimension of the subject. It is also seen as a source of the potential *forgetfulness* of Being and thus as a departure from authenticity. Lévinas argues precisely the contrary: it is the forgetting of the self-Other relation that characterizes the return of ontology as fundamental, which can lead, not to lacking authenticity, but to a renunciation of responsibility and justice. That is so because being is always already a betrayal of sorts of the trans-ontological relation (of gift and reception between self and Other), and it tends to *forgetting*. That is, being presents itself as the foundation of reality when it is not. This happens because once being is born, it tends to preserve itself and to present itself as autonomous foundation. But, preservation and autonomy can be achieved at the expense of the trans-ontological. Being thus aims to eliminate the *traces* of the trans-ontological. This is done, both, by philosophical accounts that attempt to reduce the self-Other relation to knowledge or being, and by ways of thinking, concrete policies, and historical projects that reduce the significance of givenness, generosity, hospitality, and justice. Clearly enough, Lévinas saw Nazism and

the Jewish Holocaust as radical betrayals of the trans-ontological dimension of human reality, and thus, of the very meaning of the human as such. Thus, Nazism represented not only a threat to European nations and many minorities within Europe, but also a crucial moment in the history of being. The presence of anti-Semitism, Aryanism, and other forms of racial prejudices in Nazism, make clear that race and racism occupy an special place in that history.

Race and caste, along with gender and sexuality, are perhaps the four forms of human differentiation that have served most frequently as means to transgress the primacy of the self-Other relation and to obliterate the traces of the trans-ontological in the concrete world. In modernity, racial differentiation alters the way in which the other forms of human differentiation work in modernity, as the entire globe is divided according to races, which alter the existing caste, gender, and sexual relations. To be sure, race is not totally independent of gender or sexuality, as feminization and eroticism are always part of it. I have argued that the emergence of race and its entanglement with gender and sexuality can be explained in part by their relation to war ethics and their naturalization in the colonial world. Lévinas did not go into these matters. He focused on the analysis of the trans-ontological dimension of human reality and in the rescue and philosophical reconstruction of the Jewish conceptual and ethical legacy, which for him provided an alternative to the Euro-Greek tendency to privilege knowledge and being. He nonetheless provided important considerations for understanding the meaning and significance of the *damné* and the coloniality of being. The appearance of the *damné* is not only of social significance but of ontological significance as well. It indicates the emergence of a world structured on the basis of the lack of recognition of the greater part of humanity as givers, which legitimizes dynamics of possession, rather than generous exchange. This is in great part achieved through the idea of race, which suggests not only inferiority but also dispensability. From here that not only poverty, but also the nearness of death – in misery, lack of recognition, lynching, and imprisonment among so many other ways – characterize the situation of the *damné*. It is this situation that we refer to here as coloniality. And the ways by virtue of which the world comes to be shaped by the excess of being and its obliteration of the trans-ontological we call the coloniality of being. Coloniality of being refers to a process whereby the forgetfulness of ethics as a transcendental moment that founds subjectivity turns into the production of a world in which exceptions to ethical relationships become the norm. That being has a colonial aspect means that in addition to posit itself as autonomous and be driven by preservation, it tries to obliterate the traces of the trans-ontological by actually giving birth to a world in which lordship and supremacy rather than generous interaction define social dynamics in society. The *damné* is the product of these tendencies. Colonization and racialization are the concrete and conceptual ways by virtue of which the *damné* emerges as an idea and mode of being. Colonization and

racialization are expressions of the dark side of being, that is, they represent radical betrayals of the trans-ontological. Colonization and racialization are not only political and social events or structures. They also have metaphysical and ontological significance.

War is the opposite of the an-archival relation of absolute responsibility for the Other that gives birth to human subjectivity. The obliteration of the trans-ontological takes the tendency of producing a world in which war becomes the norm, rather than the exception. That is the basic meaning of the coloniality of being: the radical betrayal of the trans-ontological by the formation of a world in which the non-ethics of war become naturalized through the idea of race. The *damné* is the outcome of this process. Her agency needs to be defined by a consistent opposition to the paradigm of war and the promotion of a world oriented by the ideals of human generosity and receptivity. This is the precise meaning of decolonization: restoration of the logic of the gift. Fanon suggests as much in the conclusion of *Black Skin, White Masks*:

Superiority? Inferiority?

Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself?

Was my freedom not given to me then in order to build the world of the *You*?⁶⁵

Fanon's message is clear: decolonization should aspire at the very minimum to restore or create a reality where racialized subjects could give and receive freely in societies founded on the principle of receptive generosity.⁶⁶ Receptive generosity involves a break away from racial dynamics as well as from conceptions of gender and sexuality that inhibit generous interaction among subjects. In this sense, a consistent response to coloniality involves both decolonization and 'des-gener-acción' as projects, both of which are necessary for the YOU to emerge. Only in this way the trans-ontological can shine through the ontological, and love, ethics, and justice can take the role that the non-ethics of war have occupied in modern life.

Decolonization and 'des-gener-acción', different from authenticity, are not based on the anticipation of death, but on the aperture of one's self to the racialized other *to the point of substitution*.⁶⁷ Substitution occurs when one's identity is teleologically suspended and when one offers one's life to the task of achieving decolonial justice: that is, a justice oriented by the trans-ontological dimension of the human. Decolonial justice opposes the preferential option for imperial Man by the preferential option for the *damné* or condemned of the earth. Such justice is inspired by a form of love which is also decolonial. 'Decolonial love' – a concept coined and developed by the Chicana theorist Chela Sandoval – gives priority to the trans-ontological over the claims of

ontology.⁶⁸ Decolonization and ‘des-gener-acción’ are the active products of decolonial love and justice. They aim to restore the logics of the gift through a decolonial politics of receptive generosity.⁶⁹

In order to be consistent, the discourse of decolonization and ‘des-gener-acción’ would have to be understood according to the very logics that they open. They cannot take the form of a new imperial universal. Decolonization itself, the whole discourse around it, is a gift itself, an invitation to engage in dialogue. For decolonization, concepts need to be conceived as invitations to dialogue and not as impositions. They are expressions of the availability of the subject to engage in dialogue and the desire for exchange. Decolonization in this respect aspires to break with monologic modernity. It aims to foment transmodernity, a concept which also becomes an invitation that has to be understood in relation to the decolonial paradox of giving and receiving.⁷⁰ Transmodernity is an invitation to think modernity/coloniality critically from different epistemic positions and according to the manifold experiences of subjects who suffer different dimensions of the coloniality of Being. Transmodernity involves radical dialogical ethics – to initiate a dialogue between humans and those considered subhumans – and the formulation of a decolonial and critical cosmopolitanism.⁷¹

Decolonization is an idea that is probably as old as colonization itself. But it only becomes a project in the twentieth century. That is what Du Bois suggested when he stated that the problem of the twentieth-century is the problem of the color-line. The idea was not that the color-line was unique to the twentieth century, but that critical and violent confrontations with it were unavoidable then. With decolonization I do not have in mind simply the end of formal colonial relations, as it happened throughout the Americas in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. I am instead referring to a confrontation with the racial, gender, and sexual hierarchies that were put in place or strengthened by European modernity as it colonized and enslaved populations through the planet. In short, with decolonization I am thinking of oppositions to the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being – it may be more consistent to refer to it as ‘decoloniality’, as Chela Sandoval and Catherine Walsh suggest.⁷² Such opposition existed before the twentieth century, but only reached interconnected global articulations then. If Du Bois announced the project of systematic opposition to the color-line, it was perhaps intellectuals after the Second World War who most consistently expressed the ambitions of decolonization as project. We owe some of the most important early formulations to authors such as Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon. They are key thinkers of what could very well be considered a decolonial turn in theory and critique.

The de-colonial turn refers to a shift in knowledge production of similar nature and magnitude to the linguistic and pragmatic turns.⁷³ It introduces questions about the effects of colonization in modern subjectivities and modern

forms of life as well as contributions of racialized and colonized subjectivities to the production of knowledge and critical thinking. As mentioned above, the decolonial turn was announced by figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois in the early twentieth century. Du Bois was trying to see what was produced as invisible. He was trying to look at the pathology of the world from the position of those regarded as most pathological and in some way non-human. The very enunciation of the 'problem of the color-line' was predicated on at least a partial solution, which involved a shift in the theoretical attitude of the knower. The theoretical attitude requires detachment and wonder; the *decolonial attitude*, which Du Bois advances, demands responsibility and the willingness to take many perspectives, particularly the perspectives and points of view of those whose very existence is questioned and produced as insignificant.⁷⁴ The Decolonial Turn is about making visible the invisible and about analyzing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility in light of a large stock of ideas that must necessarily include the critical reflections of the 'invisible' people themselves. Indeed, one must recognize their intellectual production as thinking – not only as culture or ideology.⁷⁵ DuBois was implicitly suggesting as much when he explore the meaning of the question 'How does it feel to be a problem?'⁷⁶ But, while much is talked about the idea that the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, much less discussed are his own responses to the problems, which not only involved the creation of black institutions in the United States as well as furthering Pan-African visions and struggles, but also a fundamental shift in perspective that leads one to see the world anew in a way that allows one to target its evils in a new way and that gives us a better sense of what to do next. If the problem of the twentieth and the twenty-first century, and indeed, the problem of the entire modernity is the problem of the color-line, the solution for the twentieth century is, at least in part, the decolonial turn, which promotes a shift away from the *imperial attitude* (both natural and theoretical; Eurocentric, Americancentric, or otherwise) and the *decolonial attitude* in politics, theory, and critique. The decolonial turn marks the definitive entry of enslaved and colonized subjectivities into the realm of thought at before unknown institutional levels.

The de-colonial turn involves interventions at the level of power, knowledge, and being through varied actions of decolonization and 'des-gener-acción'. It opposes the paradigm of war which has driven modernity for more than five hundred years, with a radical shift in the social and political agent, the attitude of the knower, and the position in regards to whatever threatens the preservation of being, particularly the actions of the *damnés*. The transition from modernity to transmodernity lies first and foremost in the political and epistemic interventions and creations of the *damnés*, not the 'people' (of the nation) or the 'multitude' (of Empire). Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe the 'project of the multitude' as the expression of a

desire for a world of equality and freedom as well as for global democracy.⁷⁷ The 'project of the *damnés*' incorporates such ideals but is more precisely defined by the opposition to the scandal of death and the naturalization of war and by the search for love and human filiality which can only be achieved through decolonization and 'des-gener-acción'.⁷⁸ The 'unfinished democratic project of modernity' which the multitude assumes gives way in this picture to the 'unfinished project of decolonization' that aims at transmodernity as a goal. The *damnés* or condemned of the earth become primary agents of such transformations. The *damnés* have the potential of transforming the modern/colonial into a transmodern world: that is a world where war does not become the norm or the rule, but the exception.⁷⁹

Notes

- 1 Sections of this essay were presented in talks at the John Hope Franklin Center at Duke University on 5 November 2003 and in the Critical Theory and Decolonization Conference at Duke University and the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill on 30 May 2004.
- 2 They include Fernando Coronil, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Oscar Guardiola, Edgardo Lander, Walter Mignolo, Anibal Quijano, Freya Schiwy, Catherine Walsh, and others.
- 3 See Walter Mignolo (1995). For a more recent source see Walter Mignolo (2003). The concept also appears in a recent essay by Sylvia Wynter (2003).
- 4 It seems that Mignolo was presenting the idea in different places in the year 2000. He offered a presentation entitled 'Thinking Possible Future: The Network Society and the Coloniality of Being' in a Joan Carlisle-Irving Lecture at the University of British Columbia on 30 March 2000. Unfortunately the text of this presentation is missing.
- 5 See Martin Heidegger (1996).
- 6 For discussion about Heidegger's involvement with Nazism, including primary sources, see Wolin (1991).
- 7 Lévinas judges Heidegger very negatively for not offering an apology to the Jewish people. See Lévinas (1989).
- 8 See Emmanuel Lévinas (1969).
- 9 On the 'coloniality of power' see Quijano (2000, 1991, 1992).
- 10 The idea of the coloniality of knowledge ('colonialidad del saber') becomes the organizing theme of Edgardo Lander (2000).
- 11 Mignolo (2003, p. 669).
- 12 Mignolo takes Fanon as a major source for his own articulation of the coloniality of Being. See Mignolo (2003, p. 669).
- 13 For a clarification on the relation between genetic, existential, and genealogical/historical levels of analysis see Nelson Maldonado-Torres (forthcoming). In this book I articulate genetic, existential, and genealogical/historical reflections on modernity on the basis of Lévinas, Fanon, and

- Dussel's work. This essay represents a transition between *Against War* and a new book project preliminarily entitled *Fanonian Meditations*.
- 14 See Anibal Quijano (2001).
 - 15 See Anibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein (1992).
 - 16 Quijano (2000, p. 533).
 - 17 See Walter Mignolo (2003).
 - 18 See Quijano (1992, n.p.).
 - 19 See Gordon (1995, 2000), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2006) and Wynter (1995).
 - 20 On 'global coloniality' see Georas (1997), Grosfoguel (2003), and Mignolo (2002, 2000).
 - 21 Translation of 'desde entonces, en las relaciones intersubjetivas y en las prácticas sociales del poder, quedó formada, de una parte la idea de que los no-europeos tienen una estructura biológica no solamente diferente a la de los europeos; sino, sobre todo, perteneciente a un tipo o a un nivel 'inferior'.' See Quijano (1992, n.p.).
 - 22 Dussel (1996, p. 133).
 - 23 Dussel (1996, p. 133).
 - 24 The model or paradigm of existence referred to with the concept Imperial Man has more concrete manifestation: European and American Man. I have referred to the overcoming of these modes of selfhood in terms of the 'death' of Imperial Man. See Maldonado-Torres (2005, 2002).
 - 25 See Quijano's comments on modern dualism in Quijano (2000, pp. 554–6).
 - 26 Recall Du Bois's sentence about the twentieth century: 'The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line, the relation of the lighter and darker races in Asia, Africa, America and the islands of the sea' (Du Bois 1999, p. 17).
 - 27 The preferential option for the ego conquiero would be contested later on by liberation theology's emphasis on the preferential option for the poor and dispossessed. On the preferential option for the poor and other central ideas in liberation theology see Ellacuría and Sobrino (1993).
 - 28 The rest of this section reproduces a discussion that I develop more in the six chapter of Maldonado-Torres (forthcoming).
 - 29 On the debates in Valladolid see Lewis Hanke (1974).
 - 30 Wynter (1995, pp. 5–57).
 - 31 See Todorov (1992, pp. 144–5).
 - 32 On the early Christian conception of slavery and their relationship with the Roman Empire see Horsley (1997).
 - 33 I take the notion of damnation from Fanon (1991).
 - 34 On this point see the chapter on 'The Negro and Psychopathology' in Fanon (1968, pp. 141–209). See also 'Sex, Race, and Matrices of Desire in an Antiblack World', in Gordon (1997, pp. 73–88).
 - 35 In this respect, Dussel writes: 'El *sujeto* europeo que comienza por ser un 'yo conquisto' y culmina en la 'voluntad de poder' es un sujeto *masculino*. El *ego cogito* es el *ego* de un varón'. [The European *subject* who begins in the

- mode of 'I conquer' and reaches its climax in the 'will to power' is a *masculine* subject. The *ego cogito* is the *ego* of a male.] (Dussel 1977, p. 50). Dussel also comments in this text on the ways in which the colonized male subject repeats the same behavior toward colonized women.
- 36 Dussel (1977, p. 99).
- 37 Goldstein (2001, p. 332).
- 38 This idea is the basis of Maldonado-Torres (forthcoming).
- 39 See the work of Lewis Gordon, the most prominent black existentialist today. See, among others, Gordon (1995, 2000, 1997). Even though Gordon's existentialism is mainly Fanonian and Sartrean, his phenomenological explorations of the meaning of blackness in the modern world greatly inform my critical assessment of Heidegger's categories and the overall discourse on the coloniality of being articulated here.
- 40 My description here is based on Heidegger (1962).
- 41 See Heidegger (1962, pp. 28–35).
- 42 For a Heideggerian critique of theology see Heidegger (1962, pp. 74–5).
- 43 On Dasein's existential character see Heidegger (1962, pp. 32–35).
- 44 See Nietzsche's reflections on herd morality in Nietzsche (1989).
- 45 For reflections on being-toward-death and authenticity see Heidegger (1962, pp. 279–304).
- 46 On the relation between war and authenticity see, among others, Gray (1959) and Losurdo (2001).
- 47 Heidegger (1962, p. 76).
- 48 See Heidegger (1962, pp. 46, 71–2).
- 49 Fanon (1968, p. 110).
- 50 Fanon (1968, pp. 119–20).
- 51 Fanonian meditations refers to a decolonial horizon of re-thinking the idea of first philosophy, just as Descartes did in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*. It is also the title of a book project in progress.
- 52 Fanon (1965, p. 128). See also Fanon (1988, pp. 13–4).
- 53 See Fanon (1968, p. 8).
- 54 Gordon (2005, p. 4).
- 55 This analysis is informed by Lewis Gordon description of sexual and racial dynamics. See Gordon (2005, pp. 73–88). Gordon writes: 'For, in an antiblack world, a black penis, whatever its size, represents a threat. Given our discussion of the black signifying the feminine, the underlying nature of the threat should be obvious: the black penis is feared for the same reason that a woman with a penis is feared. She represents a form of revenge' (p. 83).
- 56 See Fanon (1991).
- 57 I am referring to Fanon (1968).
- 58 The idea of 'love' appears in several parts of *Black Skin*, particularly in the conclusion. Gordon (2000, pp. 13–15).
- 59 Gordon (2000, pp. 13–15).

- 60 For an analysis of the meaning of the 'cry' from the perspective of the coloniality of being and decolonization see Maldonado-Torres (2001, pp. 46–60).
- 61 Ellison (1999).
- 62 I owe the concept of 'desgeneración' to Laura Pérez.
- 63 Benveniste (1997, pp. 34, 40).
- 64 See Lévinas (1974).
- 65 Fanon (1968, pp. 231–2), bold mine.
- 66 On the concept of receptive generosity see Coles (1997).
- 67 Decolonization and 'des-gener-acción' characterize forms of thought and action that are central to what Mignolo refers as the geo-politics and the body-politics of knowledge in his contribution to this volume. They are the privileged forms of action that emerge and are characteristic of the Decolonial Turn (see below).
- 68 Sandoval (2000).
- 69 See Coles (1997).
- 70 For an elucidation of the concept of transmodernity see Dussel (1995, 1996, 1999, 2002). Also see Dussel's contribution in this volume.
- 71 On critical cosmopolitanism see Mignolo, (2000) and Saldívar (1991).
- 72 See Sandoval (2000) and Walsh (2005).
- 73 See Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2005). This conference was organized by Ramón Grosfoguel, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and José David Saldívar.
- 74 For reflections on the decolonial attitude see Maldonado-Torres (forthcoming, n.p., 2005, 2006, n.p.).
- 75 This is a point incessantly made other figures of the Decolonial Turn: Lewis Gordon, Walter Mignolo Chela Sandoval, and Sylvia Wynter, among others.
- 76 Du Bois, 1999, p. 9. See an acute analysis of this question in Gordon (2000, pp. 62–95).
- 77 See Hardt & Negri (2004, p. xi).
- 78 I develop this point more in Maldonado-Torres (forthcoming).
- 79 For references to the unfinished project of decolonization see Grosfoguel (2005); Ramón Grosfoguel *et al.* (2005), Maldonado-Torres (forthcoming) and Mignolo (2000).

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