Decoloniality

The research collective on Decoloniality, organised by Walter Mignolo and Arturo Escobar, brings together scholars of Latin American / European origin working in universities in the United States and Latin America and interested in ideas of dependency theory, colonialism, gender, and critical theory. It builds on the earlier work of scholars such as Enrique Dussel and Anibal Quijano and seeks, in particular, to examine the relationship between the Frankfurt School version of critical theory and the emerging paradigm of coloniality / modernity.

Quijano’s understanding of the coloniality of power has had much resonance within academic debates. María Lugones, for example, provides a particular interpretation of the coloniality of power in the context of making an argument for a decolonial feminism. In turn, Nelson Maldonado-Torres transforms the idea of the coloniality of power to the ‘coloniality of Being’ (2007: 242). The key issue for him is that the supposedly unfinished (democratic) project of modernity, as theorised by scholars such as Habermas, ought actually to be understood as ‘the unfinished project of decolonisation’ (2007: 263). Sylvia Wynter similarly engages with European philosophy in order to unsettle its institution of ‘a new principle of nonhomogeneity’ consolidated around the ‘Color (cum Colonial) Line’ (2003: 322).
Beyond an engagement with Quijano’s idea of the coloniality of power, these contributions share an understanding that colonialism has not only displaced particular communities, but also their knowledges. It is to the recovery and re-articulation of those knowledges that these scholars and activists orient their academic work. Rolando Vazquez, for example, argues for wider recognition of the way in which social struggles challenge and define ‘the oppressive grammars of power’ (2010: 41). In this way, he suggests, the conceptual vocabularies of the academy can be displaced and re-signified with meanings that emerge from ‘political practices, alternative forms of justice, other ways of living’ (2010: 41).

Essential Reading:


Further Readings:


Questions:

What are the key insights and strategies of decolonial thought?

How do decolonial scholars challenge standard social theoretical accounts?

Compare and contrast the work of two or more decolonial scholars.

How does taking decolonial feminism into account help us extend our understandings both of feminism and of decoloniality?

Submitted by Gurminder K Bhambra