

On subalterns and other agencies

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I

To start with, I have never heard of a US or Latin American president (Juan Domingo Perón, for example), refer to the American or the Argentinean ‘subaltern’. They always say, consistently, the American or the Argentinean ‘people’. ‘*Res publica res populi est*’ was Cicero’s motto when he distinguished between *imperium* and *res publica*. Since then, there has been a whole configuration of concepts that set up, on the one hand, *imperium* and cosmopolis, and on the other *res publica*; on the one hand *populo grasso* and on the other; *populo minuto*, on the one hand *vivere politico e libero* and on the other *vivere privato*. Thus, when Antonio Gramsci came up with the concept of ‘subaltern’, he was caught between two fires: the political vocabulary in the Latin/Italian tradition (from Cicero to Machiavelli), and the Marxist (and Saint-Simonian) concept of ‘class’.¹ ‘Class’, of course, does not only refer to the proletarian class but also to a social hierarchy organised on the principles of possession of the means of production, capital, and exploitation of labour. Instead, ‘subaltern class’ makes it clear that the bourgeoisie and the proletariat are not only situated in different regions of the system of labour-production-distribution etc., but that the proletariat is a ‘subaltern class’ in relation to the bourgeoisie. However, subalternity was not necessarily limited to the proletariat. Or, if you wish, the proletariat as a social class was a particular sector of the subaltern population. But it may very well be that Gramsci was attempting to locate a sector of the population larger than the proletariat but still in a subordinate relation and still identifiable because of their hegemonic dependency. That is why presidents of the US or Latin America prefer to call for the support of the American or Argentinean ‘people’ instead of the American ‘subaltern’!

When the category of ‘subaltern’ moved to South Asia, and Ranajit Guha extended it to encompass all sectors of the population in ‘subaltern position’, Gramsci’s ‘modern subaltern’ (defined on the ground of European history after the Industrial Revolution), became ‘the colonial subaltern’. Although Guha used ‘people’ and ‘subaltern’ as synonyms, it was clear that the meaning of both terms in the European political vocabulary did not translate literally to India’s pre-colonial history and its transformation by the intrusion of British imperial rule. At the same time, the ‘colonial differential’ introduced by the South-Asian historian helped highlight the fact that for Gramsci ‘subalternity’ could also have been a geopolitical category: Southern

Italy was in a subaltern position in relation to the North. ‘Subaltern’ is a concept that Gramsci starts developing fairly late in the notebooks, and I don’t think he managed to fully clarify its meaning.

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This short and well-known story is useful in defining my own take on these issues. My story begins some place else. I say ‘place’ because I start with the geopolitical subalternity of the Andes in South America and the Caribbean instead of starting from the geopolitical subalternity of Southern Italy (Gramsci’s geopolitical subalternity) or South Asia (e.g., Partha Chatterjee’s ‘rules of colonial difference’). My story originates with Frantz Fanon, an Afro-Caribbean intellectual and activist whose work extends from 1952 to 1961, and Fausto Reinaga, an Aymara intellectual and activist whose work extends from the late 1950s to the late 1970s. For the former, the key category is *damnés* and for the latter *Indian*. ‘I am an Indian, damn it, not a peasant’, Reinaga constantly repeated in his attacks and efforts to dis-identify himself from the concept of ‘class’. Class had been used by Creoles/Mestizos, some of whom were Marxists, to characterise the ‘lower class’ in the Andes. From the categories of *Indians* and *damnés* I will revisit the categories of the popular and the subaltern, and bring multitudes into the conversation. By so doing, I will suggest the need to de-universalise categories of thought, to diversify theoretical concepts and to relocate them in the horizon of modern/colonial local histories. Such local histories bring forth a constant tension between the ‘colonial’ and the ‘modern’, and it is this that sustains diverse and particular types of struggle for decolonisation and social transformation.

II

We have been invited to generate a scholarly conversation leading to a conceptualisation of ‘the popular’ and ‘the subaltern’ as subjects and modes of enquiry. One of the main reasons to explore these issues is that, in the view of the organisers, the *precise relations* between the two terms remain un-theorised. As a consequence of this under-theorisation, more often than not, the two terms are used interchangeably: ‘history of the people’ and of ‘subaltern classes’ appears to be one and the same. When that exchangeability occurs, both ‘the popular’ and the ‘subaltern’ appear as indistinguishable agencies characterised by their ‘resistance’ to ‘elite politics, culture and history’. Or, I would add, the ‘popular’ and the ‘subaltern’ appear as agents caught in the web of hegemonic power and their struggle emerges as a consequence of their consciousness of being in exploitative conditions. Thus, ‘the popular’ and the ‘subaltern’ could also be expressed as ‘popular consciousness’ and ‘subaltern consciousness’; in which case a distinction begins to emerge between ‘popular and subaltern consciousness’ on the one hand, and ‘class consciousness’ on the other.

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The argument is built upon certain assumptions and key concepts that have been introduced and are being developed by several intellectuals in South America, the Caribbean and by Latino/as in the US. The basic assumptions are the following: the modern/colonial world is structured by the colonial matrix of power, and that colonial matrix of power has *race* (in the sense of *racism*) and not class (in the sense of *classism*),² as the key concept that enables and justifies oppression and exploitation. The philosophical figure and the political agent are not subalterns, the people of the multitude, but the *damnés* (e.g., Fanon's wretched of the earth).³ The *damnés* are not just poor (in their Christian and Marxist description), but 'lesser humans', who *deserve*, from the point of view of political and economic conceptualisation of power, *to be poor!* To theorise the concept of the 'subaltern' and the 'popular' we need to go through the logic of coloniality and the colonial and imperial difference. And in order to do so, we have to start with the destruction of the civilisation of the Inca's and Aztec's, the exploitation of Indian labour, and the massive slave trade from Sub-Saharan Africa, long before arriving at Gramsci's South European and Guha's South Asian subalterns! To theorise the popular and the subaltern ignoring its racial foundation in the sixteenth century would retain us within the Eurocentric perspective with a narrow window toward British imperialism in India.

There are of course other distinctions to be made. Popular, as an adjective, refers to a kind of action that, in general, is associated with 'the people', while 'subaltern' is a noun that refers to a social ranking and that, as such, places people in 'subaltern relations' of power. Thus, the confusion between the 'subaltern' and the 'popular' seems to be, indeed, due to the fact that both are located in the lower rank of social and cultural stratification. Thus, the ontological dimension of the 'subaltern' and the popular is connected to the control of knowledge by the upper strata of society. The elite (bourgeoisie, Church, State, IMF, WB, canonical social sciences, etc.) corresponds, on the one hand, to one level of social stratification but, on the other, is the only strata that controls and determines the rules in which the stratification of society shall be established. Social reality has not been 'objectively' settled by 'natural' laws but by social consciousness: the social consciousness of the elite that controls money and meaning.

When the category of the subaltern moved from Gramsci's Italy to Guha's India, the criteria used to single out a certain kind of people changed from European class distinction to colonial Indian caste and racial classification. Class differential was not ignored, but the situation got complicated when class distinctions had to be adapted to account for caste differentials and the new racial classification engrained in the mind of British officers, merchants, missionaries and agents of the state. The racial classification I am talking about is the one that originated with the colonial matrix of power in the sixteenth century, when ranking of humanity was established by Christian theologians locating themselves at the top of the scale and from a superior place of observation. The classification was reproduced and fixed, in the eighteenth century by secular thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and G. W. F. Hegel. The European industrial revolution that brought about a new social

class (the bourgeoisie) that ignited Karl Marx's critical analysis of political economy did not spread to India. Instead, what took place in India was British imperialism; two parallel processes – the local history of India and the local history of Britain – entangled by power differentials, in a heterogeneous and historico-structural history. British imperial/colonial domination did not produce a bourgeois class, like in Europe, ready to take on the world. The European bourgeoisie who were colonising India had no interest in promoting a similar social class that would compete with them. Here the historical and social conditions were quite different from the internal history of Europe in which medieval merchants came to be the bourgeoisie that led the Glorious Revolution in England (1688) and the French Revolution (1789). British colonialism in India expanded the colonial matrix of power, already in place since the sixteenth century. The 'colonial difference' was re-articulated and the 'colonial wound' continued to be inflicted.⁴

'Popular' could be an adjective that modifies both, the people and the 'subaltern'. However, we all know that 'people' could also be used to refer to a social configuration distinguished not by its location at the lower end of the socio-economic stratification, but by the interests it shares across the socio-economic spectrum: being citizens of a given nation, for example. 'Popular' refers also to a large portion of the social spectrum, like in 'popular culture' (generally distinguished from 'elite culture'). The concept of 'people' was not *created* in the eighteenth century (as it is generally accepted) but – as many scholars working in the epistemic tradition of Latin, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese argue – it was translated from Latin and introduced in the political vocabulary of vernacular languages, in the sixteenth century. Or if you wish, the European Renaissance concept of *populo* (the agent of the *res publica*), was translated into 'people', the agent of the *Republic*, later conceptualized as nation-state. *Populo* became 'the people' of the nation-states. For this reason, presidents of modern nation-states will naturally refer to their national constituency as the American, Argentinean, French, etc. 'people'. The expression 'X (national characterization) people' carries, in itself, the silence of the colonial difference and the weapons of the colonial wound: 'people' are supposed to be citizens and citizens are supposed to be of a certain religion and ethnicity. If 'citizen' classifies a sector of the population by its legal status, then implicit in that legal status is the ethnicity, the religion and the language of the citizen.⁵

When Karl Marx introduced the concept of the proletariat, he made a cut across the 'people': he indeed divided the 'people' into socio-economic classes. He identified the proletariat as a population group whose labour was exploited in the capitalist mode of production after the Industrial Revolution by members of the class who owned the means of production, the bourgeoisie. Since then, we are used to the basic distinction between the bourgeoisie, who own the means of production; the middle-class professional (e.g., mainly the agent of the three superior Faculties in Kant's 'The Contest of the Faculty', Theology, Medicine and the Law), and those who only own their own labour power. It is their living labour that is sold to the owners of the means of production. The 'proletariat' then became, among the people of a nation, the

exploited group. The consciousness of that exploitation transformed the ontology of a social class (e.g., class consciousness) into political agency. 'Class consciousness' means indeed a 'critical consciousness', which, like the critical consciousness generated by the colonial difference and the colonial wound (e.g., critical border thinking), generates, in the first case, projects of *emancipation* and, in the second, projects of *liberation*. However, in Marx and in the Marxist tradition, the idea of 'class consciousness' hides the fact that the paradigmatic model of the proletariat is white, male and European. Then, it is clear that if Antonio Gramsci needed the concept of the 'subaltern', it was not just to give a new name to something that had already been conceptualized as the 'proletariat' and the 'lumpenproletariat', but because he needed a name to identify a larger mass of the population in a subaltern relation of power. The lumpenproletariat is generally defined as 'the lowest level of the proletariat, comprising unskilled workers, the unemployed, and the dispossessed, alienated from the class they would normally identify and having little or no class solidarity'. Gramsci's 'subaltern' included not only the working class of the industrial revolution, but all those for whom the 'progress' made by the industrial revolution created the conditions that left them out of the game. However, Gramsci was not only looking at social stratification in relation to the means of production, he was also looking at the geo-political distribution of the population in Italy. 'The southern question' emerged from the perception that progress came together with the geo-political distribution of class stratification and that there was a correlation between subalterns in the political structure of socio-economic domination and 'the South'. Gramsci felt something that Northern European and U.S. Marxists, and those under their influence in South America as well, could not quite feel: that the South of Europe was a consequence of racialisation and the colonial matrix of power; and that the South of Europe was a contemporary and complementary form of Orientalism.⁶ Of course, Gramsci did not express his ideas in these terms, but it is not difficult to understand what he was perceiving once we understand how the colonial difference, brought about in the sixteenth century during the colonisation of America, was re-articulated in the eighteenth century, with the construction of the idea of the Orient and of southern Europe.

When Ranajit Guha, in the middle of the New Left debates in England, and the Althusser-Gramsci debate in continental Europe, took the category of the subaltern and translated it to South Asian society after the advent of British colonialism, he made three interesting moves. The first relates to the 'natural' complexity of what I would describe as 'the geopolitics of subalternity'. South Asia was not quite Southern Italy, even if India and Italy share the 'South' (of Europe and of Asia) in geopolitical location. They share the term South, as a metaphorical location in relation to North Atlantic imperial exploitation and domination. As Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos puts it, 'the South' is a metaphor that describes the coming together of a particular social sector of the population (e.g., the subalterns) with particular geo-political areas of the planet. There is then a harmony between the geo-political distribution of the exploitation of labour and the

geo-political distribution of the exploitation of nature. This means that in the imaginary (e.g., the hegemonic set of images that are taken, in general, for the world itself) of the modern/colonial world (capitalist, of course, that is why it is modern/colonial), there is a certain semantic and geo-political synchronisation. This is between the dependent subaltern sector of the population and the post-Hegelian Europe and US industrial and financial bourgeoisie on the one hand, and those sectors of the planet such as the colonies, and ex-colonies fighting for the constitution of a nation-state, Third World countries and developing or emerging countries, that are in a relation of dependency with other regions of the planet (e.g., empires, imperial nation-states, First World countries, developed and industrial countries), on the other hand.⁷ In other words, subaltern is not just a category that affects given sectors of the population of one single nation-state, but a category of the imperial and modern/colonial world that affects people and regions in a global distribution of wealth and meaning. The category 'subaltern', in the internal history of imperial Europe, is complemented by, yet distinguished from the 'colonial subaltern' in the double history of Europe/US. From the sixteenth century until today, from the 'war' against terrorism to the war in Iraq, our world is one in which we are forced to deal with European/US imperial expansion. So it is the colonial subaltern that carries on its shoulders the global colonial difference, the racialised colonial wound. They are what Frantz Fanon identified as 'les damnés de la terre' ('the wretched of the earth'). What is the colonial difference and the colonial wound? To put it simply, it is the authority and legitimacy of Euro-centered epistemology, from the left and from the right, assuming or explicitly declaring the inferiority of non-Christian, colored skin, of those who were not born speaking modern European languages or who were born speaking a surrogate version of a European imperial language, like in British India, Spanish America, the French Caribbean, etc.

The second of Guha's moves derives from the preceding scenario. It rendered the geo-politics of subalternity in more specific terms: modern/colonial subalternity. Guha, of course, never used this expression but if you remember the term 'dominance without hegemony', you will recall that he structured his argument around a detailed analysis of first, England before the colonisation of India and then India before the English imperial invasion.⁸ In that work, Guha laid out the 'structural dependency' in the domain of knowledge: the categories, in Hindi and English, structuring dependency in relation to power.⁹

The third move (and not in a chronological or sequential order, but as simultaneous articulations since the very first moment), was to insert the question of coloniality in the very heart of modernity. Subalterns in India (identified also as 'peasants' and 'lower castes') were – in contradistinction with Gramsci's 'modern subalterns' – the 'colonial subalterns'. Partha Chatterjee addressed the dependency of the colonial state under 'the rule of colonial difference'. Chatterjee, you may remember, opened Chapter 2 of *The Nation and its Fragments*, by asking the following question: 'Does it serve any useful analytical purpose to make a distinction between the colonial state and

the forms of the modern state? Or should we regard the colonial state as simply another specific form in which the modern state has generalized itself across the globe?¹⁰ Chatterjee identified three arguments used by British officers and intellectuals to justify the control of authority in the colonies. That is to say, to make the social regulations an aspect of the self-disciplining of normalised individuals, so that power is made more productive, effective and humane. The three arguments enacted as general principles of state regulation have been assumed to be universal and applicable around the globe. They were certainly thought to be thus by the British in India (just as they now are by the US in Iraq):

1. The principle must apply to all societies (to England as well as to India) irrespective of cultural or historical specificities;
2. The principle is inescapably tied to the specific history and culture of Western societies and cannot be exported elsewhere (which implies a rejection of the universality of principles and hence of argument one);
3. Historical and cultural differences, although an impediment at the beginning, can be eventually overcome by a suitable process of training and education.

Chatterjee recognised that each of these positions is associated with ‘distinct ideological formations’. However, they are all shaped in and by what Chatterjee calls the same ‘discursive field’. They are all linked by the same principle – the rule of colonial difference – and are directed toward the same end – the will to modern/colonial power.

Thus, when ‘the subaltern’ moved from Italy to India, it had to cross this colonial difference. Quite apart from the complication of a caste system in India, more generally, ‘race’ begins to infect the pure regime of a racially homogeneous class system of Europe. Marx and his followers, of what we call today Marxism, have never been at ease with the question of ‘race’. Raymond Williams, for example, doesn’t even include ‘race’ in his *Keywords*,¹¹ and, of course, neither does he include ‘colonialism’, since race and colonialism are the two sides of the same coin. Chatterjee in India (like Anibal Quijano in Latin America)¹² has understood that social class defined after the stratification brought about by the Industrial Revolution, is only part of the story. Modern/colonial social stratification has been founded on racial principles since the sixteenth century. Of course, this was to reach India in the nineteenth century when the British Empire projected onto India what England had learned in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from the Spanish Empire in America. There, they had all, including the French, shared the slave trade and the exploitation of indigenous labour. But in the case of India, Chatterjee observed:

Indeed, the more the logic of modern regimes of power pushed the processes of government in the direction of a rationalization of administration and the normalization of the objects of its rule, the more insistently the issue of race came up, emphasizing the specifically colonial character of British dominance in India.¹³

And he adds that the colonial difference ‘could be marked by many signs, and varying with the context, one could displace another as the most practical application of the rule. But of all these signs, race was perhaps the most obvious mark of colonial difference’.¹⁴

The rule of colonial difference structured modern/colonial power in one specific way: racism operated not as a question of skin color, but as a way of ranking human beings and as a means of taking away their human dignity. ‘The ‘inferior’ were those who stood outside Christianity, modern imperial languages, secular scientific practices, and democracy and the State. Once the modern idea of the nation-state began to permeate India’s cultural sphere – Chatterjee argues – it engendered a nationalist movement that turned the colonial difference upside down. While imperial discourses described Indians as inferior, Indians themselves developed a nationalist discourse affirming pride in their own identity and therefore, in their own sense of cultural difference. The example that India offers Chatterjee is one that can be found all over the world. Wherever the colonial wound denied people’s dignity and provoked people’s shame about inferiority one finds an example of it. Fundamentalism is due, in part, to the imperial/colonial wound. When the situation is reversed, the miseries become and continue to be enacted, as oppositional celebration. In Latin America, similar issues were raised in the 1960s to the 1980s (Hernandez Arregui in Argentina and Zavaleta Mercado in Bolivia). Since both authors wrote in Spanish, their theories, contrary to those of the Subaltern Studies group in India, was for local use. Paradoxically in the 1990s, a group of scholars in the US attempted to apply the theories of the South Asian Subaltern Studies group to the historical and political situation of Latin America – a colonialist move from the left. The case is made more striking by the fact that even in the seventies Zavaleta Mercado was denouncing the epistemic differential between the center and the periphery – albeit from a critical stance within the frame of dependency theory (I will come back to Zavaleta Mercado’s contributions below).

III

In a groundbreaking article, Nelson Maldonado-Torres brought Fanon’s concept of *les damnés de la terre* (the wretched, the dispossessed, the condemned) of the earth, to a new light: *les damnés* allowed Maldonado-Torres to re-read and question Martin Heidegger’s ontology of *Being* and Immanuel Levinas’s counter-Heideggerian *Otherwise Than Being*. Fanon indeed uncovered, with the concept of the *damnés*, what remained invisible for Heidegger and Levinas: *the coloniality of being*. ‘Coloniality of being’ is a concept that belongs to a genealogy of thought alien to both Heidegger and Levinas. And it is alien precisely because both Heidegger’s ontology and Levinas’s dialogical counter-Heideggerian stance, are on the one hand, blind to coloniality and, on the other (willingly or not), contribute to maintain the invisibility of the consequences of the coloniality of being, namely, the generation of the *damnés*. The *damnés* is a category that described all those whose dignity has been and continues to be stripped away by the logic of

coloniality; that is, the de-humanisation and devaluation of human beings, and human lives that do not correspond to the criteria of humanity established by the rhetoric of modernity. And, as we know, the rhetoric of modernity, its very vocabulary, is Christian, Liberal and Marxist. The *damnés*, although it retains some Christian connotations goes against this. The conceptualisation of the *damnés* comes not from the experiences and thoughts of European history, but from the experiences of slavery and other historical forms of colonisation, and from the exteriority of the totalitarian rhetoric of modernity, in which Christianity has part of the responsibility. The *damnés* unveil the coloniality of being, as it displaces the poor and the victim of Christian Theology, and, by its sheer existence, it opens up two promising roads for the future. First, it introduces a spatial epistemic break that cannot be subsumed within the categories of thought that distinguish, but at the same unite in the same genealogy, the works of Heidegger and Levinas, the secular Athens and Greek language in which Heidegger's work is grounded; and the sacred Jerusalem and Hebrew language in which Levinas's counter-stance dwells. Indeed, historian Rémi Brague has noted (in a book that precludes the identitarian reconfiguration of Europe in the European Union): 'Europe is not Greek only, and not only Hebrew, and not even Greco-Hebrew, but it is above all Roman. Athens and Jerusalem, true, but also Roman [...] Three ingredients are necessary to come up with Europe: Rome, Greece and Christianity'.¹⁵

In spite of the slippage of the last part of the quote (Rome, Greece and Christianity) that erased Jerusalem from the previous sentence, and instead inscribed Rome and Christianity as two different entities, it is clear what Brague has in mind. Moreover, what he has in mind is also that which is generally accepted by people who considered themselves Europeans. Thus, while Heidegger's ontology and Levinas's dialogical (and otherwise) philosophy of Being can cover Athens and Jerusalem where do we find Rome? According to Maldonado-Torres, Rome re-appears in the European left, deceived by the failure of the Soviet socialist/communist experience. He elaborates on two striking examples: the trajectory of Antonio Negri who contributed to the conception of *Empire*, co-written with Michael Hardt,¹⁶ and Slavoj Žižek who turned to Christianity and to the Greek foundation of the political.¹⁷ Without going into details, a few observations might help. First of all, the location of the Empire's non-place – Empire is a non-place, Hardt and Negri insist. Secondly, the non-place of today's Empire is well anchored in the *historical place of Empire's history*. There is no equivocation whatsoever; the history of today's Empire is grounded in a history that stretches from Rome to the British empire then on to the reluctant imperialism of the US And third, the 'multitude' with their diverse energies, their resistance and opposition to Empire's sovereignty are a force that cannot be reduced to the 'people'. Hence one goes beyond the industrial proletariat of the nineteenth century. It is the 'rest' of neo-liberal civilisation who are now the globally oppressed and exploited. 'Empire' (in Hardt and Negri's formulation) occupies the place that Athen's has for Heidegger's metaphysics, and Jerusalem has In Levinas's dialogical imaginary. Maldonado-Torres

convincingly shows how the Heidegger, Levinas and Negri-Hardt genealogies differ in their content but remain within the same principles of modern (and Western based) epistemology (Athens, Jerusalem and Rome). Fanon with the *damnés* breaks away from this by creating a fracture in the epistemic identity of European 'diversity', and by locating and revealing the coloniality of being in the Caribbean history of African slavery and in the Maghreb's history of French colonialism.

In the same way that 'multitude' is a class category that allows us to understand the ranking of human beings in terms of wealth and material quality of life so too the *damnés*, as a racial category, allows us to understand the ranking of human beings in accordance with their degree of humanity. When I was a teenager in high school, as the son of a proletarian father, I was taught that it was better to be '*pobre pero honrado*' (poor but morally clean) than to be '*rico y corrupto*' (rich and corrupt). When I went to the university and began to study philosophy, I remembered those two dictums. Why in the first case the two nouns were linked by a preposition (*but*) while in the second they were linked with a conjunction (*and*)? Until I came to the United States from France, I did not realise that poverty is related to racism; I did not realise that to be poor and morally clean was not the same thing as being considered human. It was in this way that I learned that to understand how the logic of coloniality works at the level of subjectivity is to understand how it strips away at the dignity of colonial subjects. Race and class ranking are two different forms of oppression and justification of exploitation. However, in the modern/colonial world – which is also the world of Western and capitalist empires (from Spain to Holland and from England to the US) – it is one justification for oppression and exploitation and, also a fence – for the higher level social strata, from the middle class to the bourgeoisie – for keeping the racially inferior beings at bay: *you are good or smart enough and I let you into my value system – but only if you adopt the hegemonic point of view*. And, you see the response: *I am as good as you are and I believe in your values*. But this is from the point of view of the *damnés* who want to overcome being *damnés*. It is a line of argument from those who have assimilated the logic of damnification (e.g., the case of Condoleezza Rice and Alberto González, in President's Bush administration, are two good examples of these principles).

In sum, the *damnés* and the multitude are divided by the colonial difference. While the latter re-articulates the struggle from the perspective of European history (in the sense laid out by Brague), the former articulates the struggle from the perspective of the variegated non-European histories that became entangled with the history of Europe (its languages, economy, categories of thought, political theory, and subjectivity), since the sixteenth century. Not only Athens-Jerusalem and Rome, but Cuzco and Mexico-Tenochtitlan, Chiapas and Mumbai, Iran and Samarkant; Ayiti and La Paz; Beijing and Hong-Kong; Moscow and Istanbul, etc. It is the *damnés*, through the colonial and imperial differences (that is, the differences invented by the early Spanish Christian empires in relation to the Ottoman and Russian empires), that makes possible a genealogy of *de-colonial* thought of which

there are huge gaps in the material archives, but of which the persistence of bitter memories of being made inferior remains in the bodies of people of color, of homosexuals, of languages and histories that cannot find their niche in the histories of Athens, Jerusalem, Rome, Paris, London, New York and Washington DC.

The *damnés* is not a modern category, and not even post-modern. It cannot be used to supersede the category of the *multitude*. It is a de-colonial category operating in an epistemic spatial break (not a chronological one within the same rules of the game). If as a philosophical category the *damnés* brings to the foreground the *forgetfulness of coloniality* (as Maldonado-Torres will have it), that foregrounding offers the platforms for its political dimension. The political project the *damnés* have been engaged in, since the sixteenth century, are de-colonial projects: to undo the coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of being that Greek, Latin and Hebrew memories have been keeping in the attic, celebrating their own imperial critique to instrumental reason, to the limits of the ontology of being and to the sovereignty of the Empire. The *damnés* is the other half of the story – the story of those who dwell in coloniality [not necessarily ‘in the colonies’]. To dwell in the coloniality of knowledge and of being means to be deprived and repressed of the potential to know, to understand and to be. For that reason, the political projects of the *damnés* are at once – as Frances Aparicio aptly put in relation to her own work – a series of acts of war and a series of acts of love.¹⁸ The two sides of the *damnés*’s de-colonial project can be further described through Afro-Colombian activist Libia Grueso. She conceptualises the struggle of Afro-Colombians in the pacific coast as *intra-cultural, inter-cultural and trans-cultural*. Intra-cultural refers to the dialogue and cooperation between diverse black communities in South America and also with indigenous communities. The intra-cultural is fueled by acts of love, both of togetherness for resistance and of cooperation to build a world in which many societies would co-exist. The inter-cultural struggle is fueled by the war against the hegemony of the State and of the racist civil society (including the media) that operates under the assumptions of the inferiority, the quasi-human quality, the ignorance, etc., of Blacks and Indians. And the trans-cultural refers to both acts of love at the local and global level: togetherness and cooperation with similar struggles around the world; and acts of war against the transnational coalitions of economic and political dominance. The singularity of the political project of the *damnés*, it should be remembered, is to overcome, to undo, the colonial and the imperial differences, two sides of the racist structure of the colonial matrix of power (that is, of the coloniality of power): dwelling in coloniality is not the same as dwelling in poverty, although poverty cannot be superseded without undoing racism. Another world is not possible because the democracy of the multitude would remain a romantic dream without undoing colonial and imperial differences. However, the political project of the *damnés* is irreducible to the political project of the multitude. They are complementary, since as Fanon noted, the coloniser shall be decolonised and, as Jean Paul Sartre showed in his well known preface to Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*, European

intellectuals have an important contribution to make to de-colonial projects. But of course, de-coloniality cannot be enacted from the perspective of Empire no matter how dissident these perspectives may be. As Maldonado-Torres forcefully argued, we (those of us who feel the effects of the coloniality of knowledge and of being and who feel more comfortable with the subjectivity of the *damnés*) have to dis-identify and dis-engage from the universal Christian and Marxist projects attributed to the multitude. The equation is the following: first, the singularity of the *damnés* political project is de-coloniality. Second, not all the projects of the multitude are de-colonial – only those whose agents are the *damnés*. Third, there are no ‘democratic possibilities without de-coloniality, without undoing the colonial and imperial difference that structures the modern/colonial world (that is, the Western and capitalist empires). And fourth, the colonial and imperial difference could be ‘transcended’ to maintain the logic of coloniality (which is the case of Japan, a ‘yellow’ empire in complicity with ‘white’ one), but could not remain in place if the project is a just, peaceful and caring society. Without de-coloniality, the struggle of the multitude will remain within the logic of coloniality; improving perhaps, but not moving toward a world in which many worlds would co-exist.

IV

Fanon observed:

In the *Weltanschauung* of a *colonized people*¹⁹ there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation. Someone may object that this is the case with every individual, but such an objection merely conceals a basic problem. Ontology – once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside – does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man.²⁰

Colonial and post-colonial national identities not only must assert their nationalism as nation, they also must be nationalists in relation to European nations. The debates in which Fanon made this statement are well known. He was in Lyon, France, coming from Martinique. He was attentive to the writing of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean Paul Sartre; fighting against Martin Heidegger’s ontology and displacing it by a double move: phenomenology and existentialism. However, while Sartre was looking for a way out of ontology and turned to Sadism and Masochism in order to reveal the double relation between Self and the Other (and the distortions with which Sadism and Masochism operate in that dialectics), Fanon literally had a different soup to cook.²¹ Sadism and Masochism were so entrenched in and limited to the European experience and notion of modern subjectivity – the modern relying on the Cartesian ego, on the dramatic crisis of European sciences as if these were universal and not local – that their meaning did not transfer and translate well across the colonial difference. The colonial wound generated a different kind of subject—the colonial subject with no time and energy for Sado-Masochistic speculations or practices. Fanon, distancing

himself from ontology, came through to his reflection on colonialism and racism. His breakthrough was indeed remarkable, and was made possible after decades of being silenced, in which he developed a growing awareness of the complicities between racism, knowledge and being – that is, the awareness of the epistemic consequences of the colonial wound. An epistemic potential that began to shift the ethics and politics of knowledge worked also for the originating of the de-colonial subject – the *damnés* – ethically and politically formed by the history of the colonial difference, worldwide: Fanon was Afro-Caribbean Black from Martinique and ended up fighting side by side with Arabs and Berbers in North Africa. The de-colonial subject introduced, in history, a geo- and body-political epistemic shift – those who were denied reason and history, took reason and history into their own hands. The *damnés* entered the social terrain not only as political actors but, more significantly, as epistemic ones.

But before going further in this direction, let me go back to my previous observations on Levinas and elaborate further on the spatial epistemic break introduced by Fanon. After several years of summarising and exploring Husserl's and Heidegger's works, Fanon came to his own critique of Heidegger's ontology in *Totality and Infinity* (1964). As he displaced ontology and moved towards dialogism and towards a recognition of myself in front of the *Other*, he did so at the margins of a Christian presupposition evident in Heidegger's thoughts. For Levinas, as I have stated before, Athens was much less meaningful than Jerusalem; and the Hebrew language more so than the Greek. After Derrida's critique, in which he showed that in *Totality and Infinity* Levinas was still very much attached to ontological principles that he himself criticised, Levinas's work took a radical turn and this then became *Otherwise than Being* (1972). If in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas proposed 'infinity' as the never attainable face of otherness (a face that 'totality' can never embrace), in *Otherwise Than Being* he negated ontology from its very beginning – a sort of infinity without totality. Levinas's radical contribution was to displace the universality of ontology and to identify the fracture of the *internal colonial difference* (the Jews as Europe's internal others). It was his thinking from Hebrew language and Hebraic history (rather than from Greek languages and Greek-German constructed historical relations) that allowed him to introduce an 'otherwise' that became the point of no return. Fanon, in his own way, did the same but thinking from within the linguistic vacuum that is the history of African slaves in the Caribbean. 'To speak', wrote Fanon:

means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization [...] The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter—that is, he will come closer to being a real human being in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language. I am not unaware that this is one of man's attitudes *face-to-face with Being*.²²

Fanon did not have a language linked to a religion (and therefore to an epistemology) like Levinas. He had to fight with the coloniality of imperial language, the coloniality of knowledge and of Being. In Fanon, the experience

that Levinas described as face-to-face, grounded on the emptiness of the 'other' language (Hebrew instead of Greek and Roman); the 'other' history (Jewish history) and the other place (Jerusalem), became the emptiness of a Black speaking French languages, the emptiness of the history of African slavery in the Atlantic and the movement of the African diaspora that cannot be anchored in a city like Athens, Jerusalem or Rome. The emptiness, the lack of the 'other' language, history and city were filled up, for Fanon, by the colonial difference and the colonial wound. That is precisely the foundational epistemology deployed in the un-dissociable colonial/imperial bind of 'black skin/white masks'. Fanon revealed the coloniality of being that, later on, would be translated into the political project of epistemic and political de-colonisation. The *damnés* acquired then a political agency founded in the colonial wound and the coloniality of being. The *damnés* are indeed part of the 'people' and of the 'colonial subaltern' but they are also a form of social subjectivity that opens onto a topology of being – once totalized in Heidegger's 'being and time'²³ – and a topology of social agency different from the people, the subaltern and the multitude.²⁴

After Fanon, an Argentinean philosopher Enrique Dussel, in the early and mid-seventies, realised the limits of Levinas's replacement of an ontology for a dialogical concept of being. Although he came from a different history and experience, he reached the same conclusion as Fanon had some twenty years earlier. He, like Levinas, and in part because of Levinas, was uncomfortable with the philosophical notion of 'Totality'. Dussel also went back to Greek philosophy, but he did it to identify the complicity between being and Totality, in order to trace its trajectory to the emergence of the *ego conquiro* of the colonial matrix of power and the *ego cogito*, of Cartesian foundation of the second modernity. And he had no particular investment with Greece, Jerusalem or Rome! Why, indeed, creoles and immigrants from European descent, in the Americas, would feel grounded to any of these three cities and their histories?! The modern ontology of Totality that emerged with the foundation of cartesian Ego reproduces the negation of Otherness that was already inscribed – according to Dussel – in the Greek tradition that Heidegger read as a celebration of being. The Ego, instituted as the foundation of Totality, is – for Dussel – no longer a physical Totality but an Egotic one. Hegel systematised it by making Being and Knowing one and the same, and by bringing together – in the same move – Totality and Wholeness (*absoluto*). Within this tradition, for people like Levinas, Fanon and Dussel, there was not much room left for maneuvering. It was necessary, then, to de-link from that tradition and to introduce a spatial epistemic break: the emergence of the epistemology of the *damnés* grounded in the denial of dignity and rationality fashioned by the colonial wound.

Thus, while Heidegger explored the ontology of being, and Levinas displaced it toward its 'otherwise' in the dialogical encounter of the face-to-face, both Fanon and Dussel uncovered, in different but compatible ways, the *coloniality of being* and laid out the foundation for the *de-coloniality of being*. Fanon uncovered it at the level of the subject as he fractured the Hegelian Totality and showed the subject that Hegel had placed in that cage was,

indeed, modeled according to the features that self-defined a White European Man embedded in a particular genealogy of thoughts and languages (Greek for some, Latin for others, and above all German). The very concept of 'human being', defined by the theological principles of the European Renaissance, was both conceived according to a tradition found in Greek philosophy and translated into Latin theology, and in contra-distinction with the rest of the known world, chiefly, by the debates about the 'humanity' of the Indians provoked by the 'discovery' and colonisation of the New World. In that configuration, the Black African population that provided the massive contingent of slaves to work in the Caribbean plantations, reinforced what was already known in Christian cosmology: Africans were the sons of Ham, the most willful among the three sons of Noah. It is not surprising then that Afro-Caribbean radical intellectuals put in the center of their reflection the very question of humanness which was not conceptualised in terms of universal history but in terms of coloniality, the coloniality of being. And the coloniality of being cannot be understood outside of the colonial difference instituted in the sixteenth century on a world scale. The Dominican Bartolome de Las Casas provided the basic racial matrix in the middle of the sixteenth century.

Fanon could be considered an indirect and belated respondent to Las Casas when he contributed to uncovering the coloniality of being as *damnés*, from the very perspective of the *damnés* themselves. However, it would be a misreading of Fanon to think that the *damnés* are only those who were victims of the African diaspora. *The Wretched of the Earth* is not about Black Africans, but about Islamic Arabs and about all imperial/colonial history of the modern/colonial world. To read Fanon and to limit his thoughts to the Black experience would be like reading Hegel and Heidegger and limit them to the German experience. Racism is not a question of skin color that only affects black people, as I have suggested before, but of the devaluation of human being and of wounding their human dignity. And thinking from experience rooted in the colonial and imperial divides of the modern/colonial world should be universally valid, whether the experience is that of Heidegger, that of Fanon or that of Anzaldúa. Skin color was the prevalent marker after the eighteenth century, while in the sixteenth and seventeenth, racial markers were located in blood. White and Christian Spaniards wanted to preserve their purity of blood and prevent the mixture with Jews, Moors and Indians. 'Racism' is basically the decision by those in power to classify and evaluate the degree of humanness of vast sectors of the population in order to control and dominate. Thus, the *damnés* refers to the changing sector of the global population (e.g., like immigration today, as well as the white population disenfranchised by neo-liberal economy) in subaltern relations of power; those people whose lives are devalued in and by hegemonic Euro-centered discourses (from the right and from the left). For not every subaltern group falls, necessarily, under the category of *damnés* and of the coloniality of being – the *damnés* are located in the exteriority (i.e., an outside that is defined and constructed in the process of constructing the inside) that is the consequence of the (racial) colonial difference.

But let me be more specific about the *damnés's* coloniality of being and colonial difference. If Dussel questioned the philosophical concept of Totality, Anibal Quijano, a Peruvian sociologist, questioned it from the sociological perspective; two different roads leading to the same destination. Parallel to the philosophical concept of Totality, a sociological one came into the picture. Society as a Totality was conceived as a structure of functional relations among each and any of its part. *Such structure was regulated and held together by the one and only logic*. For that very reason, the colonial world that co-existed with such a concept of society was not considered part of the Totality; and consequently not part of modernity, either. Just remember, as an example, Anthony Giddens's general definition of modernity: 'modernity refers to modes of social life or organisation which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence'.²⁵

Be as it may, the second model of society as a Totality was imagined as a structure modeled on the human body and according to a particular (Western) hierarchy of the body and its parts. One part, the head, considered the superior one – regulates all the rest. Accordingly, the brain is the center that regulates the structure of all the parts. Translated, as a metaphor, to the organisation of society, the rulers were identified with the brain, while the people, the subalterns or the *damnés* – with the extremities. In both cases – philosophical and sociological – the concept of Totality was grounded in one and the same logic. The organic paradigm of society is compatible with the epistemic paradigm conceived in terms of the knowing subject and the known object – when people are objects, they are located in a subaltern position, sociologically as well as epistemically. Power and knowledge complement each other by the position they occupy in a structured and hierarchical Totality. And therefore, history is narrated according to the complicity between a given concept of society and a given concept of knowledge. People without history, in the colonial structuring of the world, are those situated under the head and who are outside the hegemonic concept of knowledge. In one case, in the history of Europe, people without history are the subaltern; in non-European histories, they are the colonial subalterns, that is, the *damnés*. It is not that the *damnés* shall be located outside of Europe; it is that it is the colonial difference constructed by imperial regimes that became the model of a new social and epistemic agency; a means to think and act in this world. Briefly stated, it is the *damnés*, rather than the proletarian or, in its updated version, the multitude, that embody the potential and the guidance to catalyse social and historical transformations.

Quijano's critique of Western and Hegelian-Marxist concept of totality and his conceptualisation of the colonial matrix of power, grounded in the emergence of the Atlantic commercial circuits and its consequences (Indian genocide, Black slavery, appropriation of land and exploitation of labor to produce commodity for a global market), instead of Athens or Jerusalem, is an attempt to imagine society and knowledge *otherwise*. That is, the colonial matrix of power contributes to shifting the geo-politics of knowledge and to looking at modernity from the perspective of coloniality. The colonial matrix

of power is based on a double operation: the saturation of modes of life and social organisation, as Giddens would have it, at the expense of others that were devalued, displaced and destroyed. The colonial matrix of power goes together with a concept of Totality that is not systematic or organic but heterogeneous and historico-structural. Why? Because different forms of life and social organisations co-exist in tension, conflict and are violence bound by the colonial difference. In other words, British colonialism in India is different from Spanish colonialism in the Americas or French colonialism in North Africa. However, they all have one element in common: the colonial matrix of power that 'glues' together the modern/colonial world from the conquest of America to the war in Iraq.

Although the colonial matrix of power was introduced after Zavaleta Mercado died (and of course, Zavaleta's contribution fueled that conceptualisation) its origins are helpful to know. Knowing them enables one to understand the tensions juggled in a conceptual apparatus inherited from Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci, but growing out of Bolivian society – a society quite different from the three industrial countries of Western Europe (England, Germany and France) that the German and Italian intellectuals were trying to understand. Zavaleta's heritage in those frames of mind created out of the Indian and African experience in South America and the Caribbean is clear. But so too is his Marxism and it is this that then prevented him from taking Fanon's conceptualisation of the *damnés* seriously, despite the fact that daily, in Bolivia, Zavaleta could see the *damnés* before his very eyes.

V

The *damnés* as a category of analysis and as grounds for political projects and actions, needs to be further elaborated, and I have no doubt that it will be in the forthcoming years. Since I cannot go into details here, let me offer you some highlight of what the category of the *damnés* can do for us when placed next to categories such as people/popular, the subaltern and the multitude.

During a period of about 20 years (between 1964–1984), the Bolivian sociologist and intellectual René Zavaleta Mercado engaged in a sustained analytical exploration of Bolivian society and history. He theoretically explored the limits of Marxist thought when facing a social structure and colonial history like Bolivia's. Marxism was forced to confront a society in which racial distinctions constituted the 'primordial society', as Zavaleta Mercado described it. Mercado is not referring here to some kind of metaphysical indigenous soul, but to what the Indians had been converted to since the Atlantic foundation of capitalism: the massive exploitation of land and labour by the Spanish, the British, Creole, and Mestizos land lords and mining barons, all of whom worked in conjunction with Europeans and later with US economic interests. At this point, the categories of 'proletarians' and 'subalterns' (Zavaleta never used these concepts in spite of being quite close to Gramsci), were not doing the job they did in Europe when looking at

Bolivian history and current situation. The key historical experience of his reflection was the Bolivian revolution of 1952 (as a consequence of a long colonial and national history), and the power of the *masses* to question the actions and the limits of representative democracy. In October 2003, an experience similar to the 1952 revolt took place when the *masses* forced the resignation of president elect Gonzálo Sánchez de Losada. Zavaleta's categories (the distinction between class, mass and multitude) proved to be critical in understanding a massive uprising in 1953, that moved the entire social spectrum, but whose leadership drew from the 'accumulation of knowledge' of the Indian masses (from the country, from the outskirts of the city, el Alto in La Paz, Indian proletarian and the vast sector of informal economy). 'Indigenous knowledge of history and society' prevailed over 'European knowledge of history and society'. For these masses, Marx and Gramsci, much like the indigenous people of Chiapas who became a fundamental component of the Zapatista movement, were not strictly necessary to an understanding of their five hundred years of exploitation. Moreover, their exploitation was of a type that was alien to both these great European radical thinkers. Zavaleta Mercado died in 1984, but his theoretical and conceptual legacy is critical to understanding the Bolivian situation, as well as the global scenario from the Bolivian perspective. That is to say, the necessary understanding of globalisation from the periphery to complement the partial and provincial understandings offered by the World Bank, the IMF as well as economists, sociologists and political theorists trained at Harvard, Columbia or Chicago.²⁶

Bolivian cultural theorist and analyst Luis H. Antezana wrote a small book about the work of Zavaleta Mercado, *La diversidad social en Zavaleta Mercado* (1991). One of the chapters is devoted to clarifying one of Zavaleta's key concepts, *sociedad abigarrada*, which cannot be easily translated into English. *Abigarrado* refers to something of various colours, not smartly combined. It also means things not arranged in good order. Perhaps a possible translation would be 'messy society, ethnically mixed, racially tense'. What was the mess about? What kind of mess? Let us say that the *abigarramiento* may be understood at the intersection of vertical accumulation of meaning in five hundred years of external and internal colonialism, and in the horizontal organisation of society. If 1952, and the colonial legacies of long *durée* in Bolivia was the paradigmatic example of the vertical accumulation of meaning, the 'mining proletarians' (workers in the famous and productive Potosi mines) were offered by Zavaleta as the paradigmatic example of the horizontal organization of society.

Antezana, in his pioneering and insightful study, explores the meaning of three interrelated concepts in the chronological extended works of Zavaleta, from the late sixties to the mid eighties: the proletarian class (where the paradigmatic example was the mine worker), masses, and, late in his writing, the concept of the multitude. Briefly stated, and open to further explorations, Antezana proposes the following meanings of, and relationships between the three concepts: 1) The proletariat have the standard meaning that the working class has in Marx; 2) in Bolivia, however, this is hardly satisfactory: mine

workers were, and are, generally Indians and, as Indians, they have more in common with Indians working in the country than with the *mestizo* working class; the latter being closer to the mentality of the Creole middle class from Spanish. Although Zavaleta was not explicit about the 'racial' component of the Bolivian working class, he was not unaware of the Bolivian colonial history. His Marxist assumptions prevented him from understanding that racial conflicts were as important as class conflicts. However, he was aware of the knowledge generated by the working class; that is, a knowledge that guided their actions and that made superfluous any kind of 'guidance from above' (from the State or from Marxist theorists), of their role in society and their destiny. He devoted various studies to 'knowledge and class consciousness' and his concept of 'accumulation of knowledge' is complementary to class consciousness. The fact remains that Zavaleta bypassed the ethnic and racial consciousness in the accumulation of knowledge. That mixture manifested itself clearly in 1952 and again, more clearly, in 2003. However, if Zavaleta did not explicitly explore the racial component, it was precisely the intuition of the racial component that allowed him to see the limits of Marx and Gramsci to account for Bolivian history and society. Today we can say that the *difference* Zavaleta perceived between the industrial countries (he called it center) and underdeveloped countries like Bolivia (he called it periphery), was the *colonial difference*. It was mainly because Zavaleta Mercado was looking at and participating in Bolivian history and society with a critical consciousness. He realized that the Bolivian working class, mostly composed of Indians, was in a country far away from the industrial revolution, and yet bore the brunt of imperial/colonial expansion that was fueling the Industrial Revolution. They, therefore, had a different understanding of 'class oppression'. In their accumulated memory lay an indigenous consciousness. This was a consciousness that from the colonial times could not avoid the colonial wound of racial oppression. That wound does not touch the bodies of Marx's German and English working class. That was a working class for which colonialism may not have been part of their everyday life. From the early sixteenth century to the beginning of the twenty-first century, that was a part of everyday life that no Indian could avoid. One could argue that, at the end of the road, oppression is oppression, whether it is in the English working class or in the Bolivian proletarianisation of the Indians. Fair enough. But, if that is the case, there is no reason to use the proletarian experience of the Industrial Revolution and of industrial countries, as a model for all kinds of oppression. Zavaleta's work twisted the ethics and politics of knowledge and placed the Bolivian racialised class and masses as paradigmatic example of colonial/capitalist exploitation. Building a new future will depend very much on whether we continue to think in terms of the proletarian/multitude global revolution or to think from the pluri-versity of the colonial wound, colonial experiences and colonial histories.

As I mentioned, Zavaleta introduced the distinction between 'class' and 'masses'. Class is a socio-economic location in society while 'masses' refers to class plus history, that is, the inter-subjective knowledge accumulated by a

given class. 'Class accumulation' was the expression Zavaleta Mercado used to name that knowledge. The concept of 'mass' was necessary for him to account for the 'difference', and I would say the 'colonial difference', that he perceived *between* the canonical definition of class as defined on the European experience of an industrial revolution, and the complexity of racial and class distinction, in Bolivia, where the working class in the mines and in the country were Indians. Furthermore, Indians as workers were (and still are not) living the experience of an industrial setting like in England, for instance. Their work was related to the extraction of natural resources that, directly or indirectly, was fueling the industrial revolution. The complexity of the imperial exploitation of natural resources and people, in the colonies, coupled with the history of settlers and Creoles disputing power, requires a distinct creative conceptualisation, and not derived from categories created to explain socio-historical and economic phenomenon in Europe. The colonies, in other words, need their own thinkers as much as the core of the empires need their own. How they can work together is another matter. The point is that imperial domination is imperial domination, even when it is cast in the rhetoric of leftist liberation of the colonies. Thinkers of and in the empires cannot solve the problems of the colonies, be those thinkers of the IMF or academic Marxists. Critical thinkers in the colonies are *de-colonial* intellectuals whose thinking is grounded in the pain and anger of the *colonial wound*. Aware of the heterogeneous historico-structural configurations between empires and ex- or neo-colonies, Zavaleta Mercado focuses, on the one hand, on 'knowledge and social classes' and, on the other and in complementary form, on what he called 'local theory'. In the context of his original conceptualisation founded in the history and current situation in Bolivia (after 1952 and the democratic revolution), Zavaleta did not mean that his was a local theory while Marx's or Gramsci's was a general (or universal) one. He meant that there cannot be anything but local theories. Marx and Gramsci theorised what they saw in their current situation and in their local histories. How can Marx's and Gramsci's theories be local like Zavaleta's when everybody knows and studied Marx and Gramsci, while Zavaleta is a perfectly unknown Bolivian, beyond his own country? Well, that is precisely the point. Concepts such as 'subaltern knowledges' and 'epistemic damnés' are supposed to correct the imbalance that imperialist ideology naturalised, even among critical theorists like Marx, Gramsci and Zavaleta.

The concept of '*masa*' ('mass') in Zavaleta shall be understood in tandem with the larger concept of *sociedad abigarrada*. Since Western European societies, industrial and developed, are not *sociedades abigarradas*, it was not necessary for Marx or Gramsci to invent that or a similar concept. In this regard, intellectuals and scholars whose living experience is based on Euro/American developed societies are in deficit – they lack concepts such as *sociedad abigarrada* to account for the experience of the larger sector of world population that has been and continues to be affected by the colonial wound. My observation here may sound strange. Why? Because European societies have been taken as the point of reference to understand underdeveloped and peripheral societies, and not the other way round. Why? If Bolivian society is

as much part of the modern/colonial world as Germany or England, why should England and Germany offer the models of understanding? There are all kind of societies and is there any reason why Bolivia cannot offer the model of *sociedad abigarrada*? Indeed, when you look around, it is obvious that quantitatively *sociedades abigarradas* are everywhere, except perhaps in European industrial countries and in the US. Things are changing, however. Massive immigration from Africa, Asia and Latin America has seen to that. Thus, Zavaleta's distinction between *forma clase* (class form) and *forma masa* (mass form) is not just an objective reality 'outside' of the analytical mind of an intellectual or a scholar, but a given reality and a given consciousness going hand-in-hand. That is, 'disciplinary formations' (in this case social sciences and humanities or human sciences), contribute to a structural type of consciousness that goes hand-in-hand with the 'social formation' from which disciplinary understanding emerges. In other words, disciplinary understanding in the social sciences and the humanities is as much formed by the conceptual structure of the disciplines, as it is by the social structure in which the disciplines are embedded, and which the social scientists embody. Thus, disciplinary understanding in and of the (ex, neo) colonies has its own profile irreducible to the disciplinary understanding of the colonies from the empire, or the 'center', in Zavaleta's own vocabulary. The distinction between *forma clase* and *forma masa* deals with 'intersubjective relations' and 'accumulation' in the heart (*seno*) of the class or mass, Zavaleta maintains. By 'accumulation' Zavaleta refers – as I already mentioned – to meaning and knowledge (perhaps something that Antonio Negri was trying to describe with the term 'potency' – a force emerging from the pain and awareness of being exploited and undignified, as a human being). *Forma clase* allows us to describe class consciousness, while *forma masa* goes beyond each particular consciousness (class, ethno-racial, gender-sexual). The consciousness of *forma masa* is the consciousness of a *sociedad abigarrada*, a society mounted on five hundred years of colonial exploitation of Indigenous people and the tensions between the emerging Creole and Mestizo societies as they bid for local power in Bolivia but dependent, racially and economically, on the global power controls in other local histories (those of England, Germany, France, U.S.).

The concept of 'heterogeneous structural histories' is not exactly from Zavaleta, as I mentioned before, but from the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano. Nevertheless, Zavaleta's theorization of '*sociedad abigarrada*' and the concept of 'dependency' implied something that Quijano described later on. Remember that although Zavaleta was not a '*dependentista*' himself, he was writing between 1960 and 1980, the high moment of dependency theory. 'Historico-structural heterogeneity' is a necessary concept to push Hegel's linear history to the side and to focus on how world history was re-structured since the sixteenth century when, simultaneously, a fourth continent, a new group of people, a massive exploitation of land and of labour engendered the foundation of capitalism as we know it today. What do I mean? Capitalism was formed through the conjunction of capital, massive appropriation of land (mines and plantations in the Americas) and massive exploitation of labor

(Indians and Africans) to produce commodities for a global market. 'Dependency' is an unavoidable relation in the formation of capitalism, the dependency between the metropolis and the colonies. Even after the colonies gained 'independence' (in the Americas since the end of the eighteenth century and in Asia and in Africa after WWII), independence was and continues to be, in reality, an illusion. In South America, for example, the 'independence' from Spain and Portugal translated into a political and intellectual dependency upon France and an economic dependency on England. The illusion was based on the fact that in the first case, the 'colonies' were in the hands of the metropolitan powers and actors while in the second one, the 'nation-state' was controlled by Creoles or native actors – always dependent, until today, on imperial powers. In both cases, the imperial center, colonies and peripheral nation states form a 'heterogeneous historico-structural' history composed of simultaneous local histories unfolding in time. Thus, historical unfolding could be understood either from the perspectives of the metropolitan centers or from the peripheries. Naturally, metropolitan centers had money and intelligentsia; even the oppositional intelligence flourished there. But oppositional intelligence does not mean that the perspective is not imperial, as the case of Marx clearly showed. To be an intellectual in the periphery does not mean that the perspective of the periphery is a given or naturally assumed. On the contrary, the very idea of 'dependency' could apply to the political, the economic, as well as intellectual domain.

Thus, when Zavaleta talks about 'local theory' he does not only mean theories in and from the periphery, he also implies that theories in and from the center are also 'local'. The restitution of the theoretical power and potency, in the periphery, highlights epistemic dependencies and the subalternity of knowledges, and not just of people, economies and the state. At this point the 'popular' shall be cast in a different domain, since 'subalternity' in the sphere of heterogeneous structural-histories and dependency relations between empires, colonies, ex-colonies, seemingly independent countries, the G8 and the unnamed 182 (U172), or more, is in economic, political, and personal domains. Gender and sexuality, for instance, emerge as a question around the veil in both Muslim countries and in France, just as do questions of abortion and of the sexual mutilation of women.

We reach the point where Zavaleta introduces a new distinction – this time between 'mass form' and 'multitude form'. In many of Zavaleta's essays, both mass and multitude seem indistinguishable. But of course, if they were the same there would have been no need for a careful thinker like Zavaleta to explicitly introduce the distinction between 'class form' and 'mass form', on the one hand, and between 'mass form' and 'multitude form', on the other. If 'class form' introduces the distinction between the 'proletariat,' in the strict Marxian sense of the word, and 'the masses' – formed by Indians working in the mines and Indians working in the field, that is, between '*proletarios y campesinos*' – then 'mass consciousness' is not just a proletarian consciousness, but simultaneously a racial consciousness of being Indian exploited in the industries and in the country (campesinos). But then, what could be the

‘multitude’? At this point, things get complicated, but Antezana suggests the following:

‘*Multitude*’ is the mass in the most general sense of *active civil society* and the ‘mass’ is its singular nucleus; that is, the nucleus that is capable of activating the ‘*multitude*’. ‘*Multitude*’ includes the ‘mass’, although the guiding and political, social and historical motivation comes from the ‘mass’ not from the ‘*multitude*’.²⁷

Whoever has followed the events of October 2003 in Bolivia, which radically changed the psychology and the social structure of the country, would be able to clearly understand what Zavaleta perceived 20 years ago: the leadership was in the hands of the ‘masses’, that is, the Indigenous people, both from the interior of Bolivia and from the city, El Alto, and their political consciousness was shaped by knowledge ‘accumulation’ *as* Indians, rather than by a proletarian class dependent on Europe.

We are coming full circle and reaching the spheres of the *damnés*, the colonial wound of the *damnés*, and the heart of the anger and pain of the ‘masses’ in the Andes, and in Bolivia, as described by Zavaleta. It is time that, once and for all, we depart from the Euro-centered, post-Enlightenment and short sighted ‘class consciousness’, modeled on the experience of the proletarian of the Industrial Revolution. I am not trying to get rid of class experience, but rather, of a sort of Marxist dogma, blind to racial oppression and the reproduction of the colonial wound. Financial globalisation is guided and manipulated by institutions located in Europe and the US, but decolonisation and liberation cannot be guided and manipulated by an abstract-universal concept of emancipation and revolution, based on the experience of the European proletariat or, its modern version, the Euro-American concept of multitude.²⁸ The colonial wound and the *damnés* structured social consciousness, exploitation of labour, appropriation of land, dispensability of human lives (from the Indians exploited in the mines to the Black slaves exploited in the plantations, to the thirty thousand anonymous people who died in Iraq while only the fifteen hundred valuable ‘American’ lives – many of them Blacks and Latinos – have been used in this country to move the hearts of ‘Americans’).²⁹ Zavaleta died young, in the early 1980s, and he was also formed as a Marxist. Both, dying in the early 1980s and being Marxist of the 1960s, prevented him from pushing further into the colonial wound and the profound historical experience of the *damnés* that shaped the ‘mass accumulation’ of meaning. This aspect was developed with force and insight by perhaps the most brilliant follower of his work, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui. In the work of Silvia Rivera, the colonial wound, the consciousness and the accumulation of the *damnés* (although she doesn’t use this word), is loud and clear.

VI

The ‘subaltern’ cannot be an *abstract universal* unless we maintain our belief (in the Hegelian-Marxist tradition coming from Christianity) in one concept

that subsumes the difference; pretty much like ‘multiculturalism’ in the US conceived by the State. The ‘subaltern’ shall be a *connector of the diversity*, that is, a connector that opens up to the *local pluri-versal instead of the local disguised as uni-versal* (be it Christian, neo-liberal or neo-Marxist).

As for the ‘popular’, we can take it in two complementary directions: ‘the popular’ at the level of culture and media and ‘the popular’ at the level of the State and the civil society, that is, the question of ‘populism’ and the populist States. In the first case, what is relevant for my argument is that ‘the popular’ has been a strategy used by the market and the State to manage (since the nineteenth century) national consciousness (e.g., Foucault’s bio-politics) at the time when the State and the Industrial Revolution were creating a new type of society. Today, ‘the popular’ is a strategy for the formation of subjectivities at a global level, as it is clearly shown by the global reach of US music and television, not to speak of the overarching influence of Hollywood’s dream factory. In the second case, ‘populism’ that has been subjected to criticism from the wide range of the political spectrum as a manipulation of power by dubious and corrupt regimes, is now being reassessed to look at the revolutionary potential of the ‘popular’. ‘The popular’ understood as State manipulation of the ‘people’ misses the point that ‘the people’ are not just a conglomeration of passive living organisms waiting for the State to move them, but that the ‘people’ has its own politics, motivation and action. On the other hand, recasting ‘the popular’ then means to look at social action and movements from the perspective of the people rather than from the perspective of the State (e.g., Daniel James, Ernesto Laclau).

I do not have time to do justice, neither is this the opportunity, to rethink the concept of ‘multitude’. Introduced by Spinoza, in counter-distinction to the concept of ‘people’ and then reworked by Paul Virno (who links the ‘multitude’ to a post-fordist society and the transformation of the life-work relation) and then by Hardt and Negri (the other head of the imperial eagle that, in a global political economy, transcended the ‘people’ as the other head of the national state). What I want to stress, however, is the equation I stated above (at the end of section II): there cannot be a proper understanding and conceptualisation of ‘people’, ‘multitude’ and ‘subaltern’ without taking into account the concept of the ‘*damnes*’. That is to say, without taking into account the colonial and imperial differences which, at its turn, implies racism and the logic of coloniality that structure the modern/colonial world (or the network society, or Empire or the clash of civilisations, whatever pleases you more as a metaphor to describe the global totality of our days and of the past five hundred years of history).

The limits of explanations of current stage of capitalism, globalisation and transformations of labour is that they look at the surface phenomenon as they unfold in Western Europe and in the US Think of Bolivia, Tanzania, even Taiwan or Indonesia, Russia and Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, the Caribbean – insular and continental, and you will see that racialisation of societies (geo-politically, geo-culturally, geo-historically), that classifies and structures it in an increasing order of moral and physical dispossession, of dispensability of human lives. Virno and Hardt-Negri would

agree that the multitude left the ‘theory of proletarianization’ out of the mix. And so would Zavaleta if he was alive. However, Zavaleta might now wonder what the ideas of these people thinking in Italy and the US have to do with Bolivia, Tanzania, Taiwan or the Caribbean (just to name a small number of geo-historical locations). Briefly, it is time to put on hold not only the theory of proletarianisation but also, the concepts of people, popular, multitude and subaltern until there is a proper grasp of what racialisation means in the modern/colonial world, which is capitalist and imperial/colonial; and how ‘local theories’ (as Zavaleta has it) – which means again, local theories in the Germany and England of Marx, the Italy of Gramsci, the British India of Guha and the Latin-Aymara-Quechua Bolivia of Zavaleta, each local, imperial or colonial – have become entangled with each other in relation of dependency rank by the racialisation of the planet: people, languages, knowledges, religions, geo-historical locations, economies, social organization, etc. A topology of social actors hand in hand with a topology of being, is an imperative to understand the current imperial articulation both at the level of the imperial differences (e.g., US and the EU – both with Russia and China) and the colonial differences (e.g., the re-alignment of the ex-Third World under the emergence of global ‘terrorism’).

Notes

- ¹ My thanks to my colleague and friend Roberto Dainotto (Romance Studies, Duke University) for his insights on Gramsci’s concept of the ‘subaltern’ and its geopolitical dimension (that is, beyond class proper) prompted by ‘the southern’.
- ² This is a crucial point when we think from the history of South America (particularly from Indian and Afro-Andean and Caribbean histories – and not of course, from the history that the Creole/Mestizos and late immigrants with Marxist convictions tell to themselves) and the Caribbean. Just one example: Afro-Colombian intellectual Manuel Zapata Olivella has a crucial chapter of his book *Las Claves Mágicas de América* (Bogotá: Plaza y Janés, 1989, pp 140–180), convincingly argued the point in a chapter called ‘La lucha de razas y clases en las guerras de Independencia y la República’ (Racial and Class Conflicts in the Wars of Independence and the Republic). Race is constitutive of the modern/colonial world and the colonial matrix of power put in place in the sixteenth century, with the new Atlantic economy and the foundation of modern/colonial capitalism. For Karl Marx, we know, this was a period of ‘primitive accumulation’ leading to the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of the proletarian class which, in the Northern Europe of the time, were already cut off from the Muslim, Sub-Saharan Africa and Indian population. It was a white proletarian Europe and a Europe already well fed with the gold, silver, sugar, coffee, tobacco, the slave trade itself – in which Marx was thinking about class and primitive accumulation. The foundation of capitalism as we know it today goes together with race and a new form of land appropriation and labor exploitation without which the Industrial Revolution would be unthinkable.
- ³ The philosophical and political import of the category of the *damnés*, transforms the map of political agencies when we only have in mind the categories that take into account the local history of Europe and not political theories emerging from the *damnés* themselves; a common blindness to the colonality of knowledge and of being. See Nelson Maldonado-Torres for a powerful philosophical and political argument (‘The topology of being and the geopolitics of knowledge. Modernity, empire, colonality’, *City*, vol. 8, 1, 2004, pp 29–56).
- ⁴ The concept of ‘colonial difference’ to characterise the historical colonial conditions in India was introduced by Partha Chatterjee (*The Nation and Its Fragments. Colonial and Post-colonial Histories*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, pp 14–35). My own use of the ‘colonial difference’ follows the logic of the colonial matrix of power (e.g., colonality of power), introduced by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano ‘Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality’, in *Los Conquistados*, Heraclio Bonilla, ed.,

- Bogotá: Tercer Mundo, 1992, pp 345–356. In the colonial history of the Americas, the ‘colonial difference’ was introduced to account for the logic of coloniality hidden under the rhetoric of modernity. The ‘colonial difference’ engendered the ‘colonial wound’ (Gloria Anzaldúa: *‘la frontera es una herida abierta’*; Fanon: ‘Look, mom, a Neger’) and the colonial wound engendered an epistemic displacement at global scale (Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000; *The Idea of Latin America*, 2005).
- ⁵ Because of this historical legacy (the colonial difference and the colonial wound) implicit in the national category of citizen, to speak or imagine a ‘global citizenship’ is either to be blind to the colonial difference and the colonial wound or to play the game of neo-liberal rhetoric of salvation and of global democracy, as has been – and will continue to be – the imperial rhetoric projected over Iraq and the ‘Iraqi people’.
- ⁶ I develop this argument elsewhere (Mignolo, *Local Histories*). In Italy the ‘southern’ question was brought back into discussion by Franco Cassano and, more recently, by the brilliant argument developed by Roberto Dainotto (*Europe: In Theory*), Durham: Duke University Press, forthcoming).
- ⁷ Dependency theory had unfortunately a bad press through the translation into English offered by Gunther Frank, in the US; and, in Latin America, by the up coming of the ‘transition to democracy’ generation. Certainly, there are aspects of the theory that should and have been criticized. It happens all over, with Kant, Hobbes, Hegel, Voltaire, Aristotle, etc. However, in spite of the criticism, we continue to draw on Kant, Hobbes, etc., but not on ‘dependency theory’. Knowledge is subjected to the same geo-political logic of the international distribution of labor and of nature: whatever emerges in the Third World is not there to last. If modernisation and development, as a global design from the US for the world, did not work in Latin America, why should work the corresponding theorisation of that particular moment? And who will think that Third World Theories are more than accounting for a particular moment? Who will give them credit for having a universal or global import?
- ⁸ I have no question that there was a moment in England before India, and in India, before England. But what I am sure we cannot do is to ‘understand’ those moments now, without going through the mutual transformation (of England by being in India and India by having England in their souls and territory). See Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250-1350*, London: Oxford University Press, 1989; and K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia Before Europe. Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- ⁹ See Mignolo, ‘Coloniality of Power and Subalternity’, in Ileana Rodriguez, ed., *Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.
- ¹⁰ Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, p 14.
- ¹¹ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- ¹² Anibal Quijano, ‘Colonialidad y Modernidad/Racionalidad’, in *Peru Indígena*, vol 13, no 29 (1991), pp 11–20.
- ¹³ Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, p 21.
- ¹⁴ Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, p 21.
- ¹⁵ Rémi Brague, *Europe, la voie romaine*. Paris: Gallimard, 1992, p 40.
- ¹⁶ Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- ¹⁷ Maldonado-Torres, ‘The Topology of Being’, pp 44–52; on Zizek’s plea for Eurocentrism (which of course, as Brague clearly shows, is part of the package of Christianity), see my ‘Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference’, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101/1, 2002, pp 29–40, for a critique of Zizek’s endorsement of Eurocentrism and Christianity.
- ¹⁸ Frances Aparicio, *Listening to Salsa: Gender, Latin popular music and Puerto Rican cultures*. Hanover: University of New England Press, 1998.
- ¹⁹ After the previous discussion we could replace here *people* by *being*; but it won’t make sense here to replace *people* by *multitude*. The ‘colonized multitude’ doesn’t make too much sense to me. The only way it would make sense is if *coloniality of being* is considered co-extensive with *multitude*. And, in this case, then, and only in this case, all political project of the *multitude* will be a *de-colonial project*.
- ²⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York: Grove Press, 1967 [1952], pp 109–110.
- ²¹ On this topic, see Lewis Gordon, *Existential Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought*, London: Routledge, 2000.
- ²² Fanon, *Black Skin*, pp 17–18, italics mine.
- ²³ Nelson Maldonado-Torres, ‘A topology of being’.
- ²⁴ This argument has been made first by Enrique Dussel (*Philosophy of Liberation*, Aquilina Martinez and Christine Morkovsky (trans), Naryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985 [1977]); it was taken up by Walter

Mignolo ('The Network Society and the Coloniality of Being', Lecture delivered at the Department of Art History, University of British Columbia, March 1998) and Sylvia Wynters, 'Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument'. *The New Centennial Review*, 3/3, 2003, pp 257–338 and developed by Nelson Maldonado-Torres, 'The Topology of Being', pp 29–56).

²⁵ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992, p 2.

²⁶ Gonzálo Sánchez de Losada received the advices of Jeffrey Sachs on how to conduct Bolivian government. Sánchez de Losada preferred the understanding of an economist from the US instead of the understanding of what Zavaleta Mercado called the *masses*. In other words, Sanchez de Losada preferred the understanding of the *experts* from the US instead of the *experience* of the Bolivian *masses* (I will unravel this concept of *mass*) in what follows.

²⁷ Luis H. Antezana, Jr. *La diversidad social en Zavaleta Mercado*, La Paz: Centro Boliviano de Estudios Disciplinarios, 1993, p 124.

²⁸ Paolo Virno, *The Grammar of the Multitude*. New York: Semiotext(e), 2004; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude. War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, New York: The Penguin Press, 2004.

²⁹ Of course I am not saying that the fifteenth hundred lives of soldiers with US uniform are not valuable! I am talking about the frame of mind, used by the government and the media, and ingrained in 'American's people's mind' of what counts as human life and what is dispensable.