

Decolonial Options and Writing Studies

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Decolonial praxis in writing studies (WS) is not altogether new for Latinxs. For many of us, the commitment to decolonial thinking, writing, and teaching might be traced to the groundbreaking work of late indigenous Chicanx feminist Gloria Anzaldúa. Like Anzaldúa, we have spent a considerable amount of time resisting patterns of thought that arose in the context of European colonialism. For Latinxs and other scholars of color, the effects of colonialism are most damaging, yet least understood, in WS. The critical project of decoloniality inspires new conceptual formulations to account for colonial knowledge practices still limiting the study of written language and to enact anti-colonial resistance and transformation. The matter of how decolonial concepts might fit within existing frameworks and imaginaries of the field gives rise to a range of potentials and obstacles for practitioners, and we address a few here.

One of the main problems with WS is its own colonial unconscious. Studies of written language still theorize and teach writing as an alphabetic technology that emerged in Western Europe and spread throughout the world from ancient Greece to imperial Rome to enlightenment Germany, to eighteenth-century Anglo-North America by way of Western global expansion. Two centuries later, in the twentieth century, while Eurocentric ontologies remained dominant, we witnessed a “moment when . . . decolonial skepticism, and the creative thought of figures such as the Caribbean-Algerian Frantz Fanon and the Chicana Gloria Anzaldúa . . . animate[d] new forms of theorizing based on the scandal in the face of the continuity of dehumanizing practices and ideas” associated with limited Eurocentric theories and knowledge and meaning-making practices (Maldonado-Torres 4). Along with this decolonial skepticism, the “imperative of epistemic decolonization, and in fact, of a consistent decolonization of human reality was also born” (14).

Anzaldúa’s work in particular helps us critique and ultimately supersede the field’s hierarchy of knowledge adapted from colonial histories. Similarly, our attempt to formulate alternatives involves efforts to dismantle cultural hierarchies still enforced by colonialism. Furthermore, decolonizing WS involves rethinking and revising the field’s teleological macro-narratives of human progress, with whitened, Europeanized fourth-century Greeks cemented as the field’s intellectual cradle.

We apply the theories of Anzaldúa, Enrique Dussel, Linda Tuiwai Smith, Walter Dignolo and others outside the field to analyze how colonized populations are subjected not only to exploitation of their own resources but also to

a hegemony of Eurocentric histories, theories, and pedagogies. Such critique allows us to understand the dialectical relationship between historical domination and the pervasive alienation that scholars of color continue to experience in higher education. It also allows us to think through Anglo- and Eurocentric structures of representation that continue to dominate the field's governing gazes. Since the 2008 publication of *Mestiz@ Scripts, Digital Migrations, and the Territories of Writing* (Baca), scholars in the field have turned greater focus on non-Hellenocentric, non-Eurocentric, non-Anglocentric, decolonial modes of knowing and representation with attention to Indigenous, Latinx, and Latin American writing practices (Baca and Villanueva; Cushman; Olson and De los Santos; C. Ramírez; D. Ramírez; Ruiz, Ruiz and Sánchez; Thieme and Makmillan).

Taken together, these studies have the potential to inspire an eventual paradigm shift in the field. While Thomas Kuhn likely never thought that his notion of scientific paradigm shifts would be positively appropriated by Latinxs, he surely never imagined Latinxs when he developed his theory to explain how one might look at the same information in new ways. Following from Kuhn's concept of paradigm shift, epistemological and ideological shifts emerge from "knowing better and doing better" (Angelou). A familiar historical example is how worldviews adapted from a geocentric model of the solar system to a heliocentric model. With this shift in understanding came a new school of thought open to varied interpretations of the earth's place within the universe. Decolonial theory can facilitate such shifts in understanding to imagine writing otherwise in WS, writing no longer limited by Eurocentric foundations.

While not on the same scale as the scientific paradigm shift, an epistemological rupture can be connected to WS in the 1970s, when students of color gained more visibility, and studies diverged from structuralist approaches to texts and textual production and manifested in an ideological and epistemological paradigm shift inextricably tied to the rise of composition studies (Bizzell). Today many are experiencing another shift in that Latinxs in WS are revising the ways we conceive of texts, memory, history, identity, artistic production, nutrition, writing and rhetoric. Anzaldúa and critical third world feminist traditions prepared us for this shift in the 1980s, and have opened the door for people of color to conceive of writing ourselves and our knowledge differently on and beyond the page. As Latinx scholars with an indigenous/ decolonial consciousness, our psyches resemble a bordertown of subject positions, as articulated by Anzaldúa:

The struggle is inner: Chicano, indio, American Indian, mojado, mexicano, immigrant Latino, Anglo in power, working class Anglo, Black, Asian—our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are popu-

lated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in outer terrains. Awareness of our situation must come before inner changes, which in turn come before changes in society. Nothing happens in the “real” world unless it first happens in the images in our heads. (87)

Latinx scholars are struggling to reclaim erased histories. And while Latinx suffer from the cultural amnesia produced by formal schooling, we persist through the halls of the ivory tower with one eye closed, always searching for decolonial options, decolonial possibilities. It is no longer sufficient to think from the canon of Western philosophy; to do so is to reproduce the epistemic ethnocentrism that makes difficult, if not impossible, any philosophy of inclusion. The limit of Western philosophy is the border where colonial differences emerge, making visible the plurality of cultural histories that Western thought hides and suppresses (Mignolo 66).

We’ve gone from the sixteenth-century characterization of “people without writing” to the eighteenth and nineteenth century characterization of “people without history,” to the twentieth century characterization of “people without development” to the early twenty-first century of “people without democracy.” Today, colonial legacies continue to essentialize, demonize, criminalize, detain, deport, imprison . . . but we are speaking back. As Chicana/Indígena/Mexicana/Latinx scholars, our decolonial border consciousness is like a rough-edged mental schism; it jaggedly slides back and forth through identities, experiences, traumas, languages, and histories, hitting bricks and pikes between transitions. Our decolonial imperative, our contribution to WS, is to create and recreate the tools, perspectives, and practices most effective in helping to heal from the colonial wounds of Western history, and to create global realities no longer determined by imperial, Eurocentric horizons.

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