

**Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Duke University Press, 2018. 304pp. ISBN 978-0-8223-7109-0.**

<https://www.dukeupress.edu/on-decoloniality>

Duke University Press's new series on decoloniality, of which Mignolo and Walsh's text is the first product, aims "to interconnect perspectives, expressions, thought, struggles, processes, and practices of decoloniality that are emerging in and from different corners of the globe" (1). Counter to the order of the subtitle, the opening volume is organized so as to emphasize the centrality of praxis in decolonial thought and work. After the co-written introduction, the first section, by Walsh, focuses on "Decoloniality in/as Praxis," discussing examples of decolonial praxes in different locations, while the second, by Mignolo, theorizes and historicizes decoloniality and "The Decolonial Option." The book is closed by a conversation between both co-authors, collecting final (as for now) thoughts. The chapters have many intratextual references, showing intricate relations between the ideas and the praxes discussed in different parts of the text. Written in a reflective style, it should invite the reader into the conversation and the praxis of decoloniality. However, the theoretical section builds heavily on Mignolo's field of semiotics, which could trouble the accessibility of the argument for uninitiated readers.

Central to Walsh and Mignolo's approach to decoloniality is the emphasis on relationality, conceptualized through "vincularidad." Walsh and Mignolo learned the term from "Andean Indigenous thinkers, including Nina Pacari, Fernando Huanacuni Mamani, and Félix Patzi Paco" (1); its use makes visible the genealogy of *On Decoloniality's* project. "Vincularidad" names the relations between all living beings and the land. In the North American context, this belief is often referred to via the Lakota concept of mitákuye oyás'īŋ, commonly translated as "all our relations." In this spirit, the aim of both this volume and the following texts in the series is to offer insights garnered from local, specific praxes and analytics, which could *relate to or correlate with* praxes and analytics in other locations, rather than claiming universal applicability of its terms. Mignolo and Walsh want a discussion of "*pluriversal decoloniality and decolonial pluriversality*" (2) – that is to say, multiple decolonial approaches from multiple locations through multiple conceptual frames, enacted through embodied ways of knowing rather than the "dislocated, disembodied, and disengaged abstraction" of Western so-called universals (3).

Buried in the middle of section II, chapter 6 ("The Conceptual Triad") is a statement by Mignolo that gets to the heart of *On Coloniality's* argument and purpose:

Liberation is through thinking and being otherwise. Liberation is not something to be attained; it is a process of letting something go, namely, the flows of energy that keep you attached to the colonial matrix of power, whether you are in the camp of those who sanction or the camp of those sanctioned. (148)

Similar to the current conversation in American Indian/First Nations studies, the emphasis of *On Decoloniality's* project is on something akin to resurgence, termed "re-existence" by Walsh and the organizing theme of her section. "Re-existence" centers a strengthening of Indigenous practice and praxis over a focus on decolonization. Rather than fixating on what the (settler) colonial needs in order to be convinced of Indigenous freedom, the aim is to achieve liberation through strengthening Indigenous existence and re-existence. The goal is not "decolonization," a

point that is both an end and a new beginning, often mandated by a state which still exists within colonial terms (both Walsh and Mignolo refer to African countries as still having been built on colonial terms rather than by Indigenous government structures and/or geographical organization and consequently doomed to fail in their decolonial promise). Rather, as in the quote above, “decoloniality” is a continual process of “delinking” (see Mignolo’s earlier work) from the “colonial matrix of power” and “relinking” to Indigenous ways of knowing and structuring the world. Decolonization is action; theory is made through action or “embodied practice” (35). This, so far as the “colonial matrix of power” exists in its global encompassing structures, is a daily assignment, a way of being, a way of knowing, a constant struggle against cooptation and *for* Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Walsh, in her section, offers examples of decolonial praxes less known to English language readers. She discusses “Amawtay Wasi (House of Wisdom), the Intercultural University of Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples of Ecuador” (69) which failed in its decolonial purpose to be recognized by the state as a university and was eventually closed by the state. This case study is contrasted with “Mexico’s Universidad de la Tierra (University of the Earth),” which never aimed for state recognition (72). Contrary to Amawaytay Wasi, “Unitierra” as it is known, is conceptualized “not *from* but *with* Indigenous struggles and postulates of knowledge, in conversation with other forms of critical thought and liberation-based theory and praxis” (73). This learning through “deschooling” (73), or learning entirely without the Western-style institutions of learning, is decoloniality in action.

Another key concept to the praxis and theory Walsh and Mignolo discuss is that of “modernity/coloniality,” a “compound expression” which conveys the notion that “there is no modernity without coloniality” and which functions in this text as the shorthand for the “colonial matrix of power” (4). Mignolo, in his section, offers a history of the construction of the “colonial matrix of power” (a concept coined by Anibal Quijano; those familiar with Mignolo’s work will recognize Quijano, who has been at the center of Mignolo’s work since the 1990s) and of how languaging (“enunciation”) is the true regulator of power: Mignolo argues that the way the world is known directly correlates to the way the world is owned and controlled. Specifically, Western naming and mapping are what establish Western pronunciations of ownership and control. The historical evidence used to ground this assertion is that other peoples had traveled the world and made maps before the 1500s, but it was Europe’s claims to knowledge and the spreading of a European version of knowledge through maps and written accounts that made it possible for European settlers to “discover” the lands and waters and, thus, to claim them for themselves. The decolonial response to this epistemic colonialism (which, in this argument, is the precursor of all colonial power), is something Mignolo calls “epistemic reconstitution,” which he defines as “to delink from the CMP [colonial matrix of power] in order to re-link and to re-exist” (227, 229). This re-constitution and re-existence should be grounded in the local knowledge and worldview, resist the power of modernity/coloniality’s epistemology, and so necessarily be pluriversal, depending on location. Mignolo’s section moves through a lot of history and a lot of places to be able to make and support its claims about the historical development of the colonial matrix of power; consequently, it lacks nuance in some places and could irk a reader with in-depth knowledge of some of these particular moments, places, or histories.

Speaking about praxes and analytics based in the location of its authors as intellectuals from (Mignolo) or based in (Walsh) Central and South America, the book’s/series’ argument has a geographically global scope and, historically, goes back to the origination of the human. This

introductory volume addresses some other worldviews but is fairly limited in its discussion of North American thinkers, despite its focus on “the Americas” – referred to as “Abya Yala” by Walsh, “the name that the *Kuna-Tule* people (of the lands now known as Panama and Colombia) gave to the ‘Americas’ before the colonial invasion”) (21). Aside from a quick reference to Glen Coulthard’s work on the politics of recognition in Canada, Leanne Simpson is the only other North American Indigenous thinker with whom this volume engages. That said, the organization of the book, theorizing through praxis and focusing on resurgence/re-existence, recalls Winona LaDuke’s work, as well as many others currently practicing and writing about Indigenous resurgence practices in what is currently referred to as North America. With the theoretical and structural connections seemingly so present, and both authors’ obvious connections to North America (Mignolo is Argentinian but works at Duke University in North Carolina, U.S., and Walsh is American but works at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar in Ecuador), one might wonder why the authors chose not to spend a bit more time and space on the peoples of that geographical area. Throughout their writing, Mignolo and Walsh repeat the important claim (seated in the theory and practice they discuss) that they do not want to represent all Indigenous peoples and knowledges, but that they instead start from their localities, in Central and South America, to make larger claims that could be true more generally, without claiming universality. Referencing Leanne Simpson’s work on resurgence sets up the option to a clear parallel between this work and the North American Indigenous theories and praxes on resurgence: from theorists like Sium and Ritskes and many others to lived resurgence, like the annual Canoe Journey in the U.S. Pacific Northwest or the centering of Indigenous language learning in many First Nations. Walsh and Mignolo’s praxis and theoretical framework offer a localized approach to decoloniality that can only deepen the understanding of the need for Native resurgence and re-existence in all their particularities and makes another opening for international Indigenous nation-to-nation relations beyond the nations in what is currently considered North America. Perhaps the following books in the series will take up some of the leads presented here.

As the first book in the *Decoloniality* series, it sets the tone and terms; it opens the conversation on decoloniality that is relevant globally as the Right rises and the colonial matrix of power is only strengthened through global capitalism. *On Decoloniality* brings important insights to the fore from locations not as well-known by English-reading theorists who might not concentrate on colonial language areas other than English. This work’s focus on re-existence and decoloniality as a verb (rather than decolonization as an end goal) is timely also for those working in Native American and First Nations studies, as Walsh and Mignolo offer a plurality of options for relating, learning, and sharing in the work of decoloniality.

*Laura Maria de Vos, University of Washington*