

Enrique Dussel and Manuel Zapata Olivella: An Exploration of De-colonial, Diasporic, and Trans-modern Selves and the Politics of Recognition*

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Introduction

This essay represents a conversation between the concept of trans-modernity, developed in Enrique Dussel's, *The Underside of Modernity*, Afro-Latin American Diasporic thought, particularly the work of the Colombian thinker, Manuel Zapata Olivella, and what I have articulated as the discourse of memory in Afro-Diasporic thought. It is an attempt to further explore memory as an integral component of recognition, dis-alienation, and de-colonization. More specifically, it seeks to: 1) expand my current work which engages the question of memory and listening as a means by which Afro-Diasporic subjects assert their identities and their being in the world, particularly in Latin America, 2) initiate a conversation between contemporary Afro-Latin thinkers, such as Manuel Zapata Olivella and non-Afro Latin American thinkers like Enrique Dussel on the question of trans-modernity, knowledge, power and identity 3) speak to the notion of sources of the self as a critique of Charles Taylor through Dussel and as part of a dialogue regarding the politics of recognition.

Summary on the Discourse of Memory

A few years ago, I participated an NEH seminar on Afro-Latin American Literature. In addition to the literary and theoretical material, the other most engaging aspects of the seminar were the stories about the lives of the Afro-Latin American writers. Among the stories were repeated references to their relative obscurity in comparison to their white, criollo and even indigenous counterparts. The obscurity not only related to the politics of race, but also the politics of discursive legitimacy, that is, who and what counts as an intellectual. Most revealing was the narrative of race, which demonstrated a remarkable similarity to Afro-descendent subjects around the globe. This narrative showed that Afro-descendent subjects were oppressed and marginalized in their respective Latin American countries, suffering from poverty, illiteracy, lack of access to proper health care and political agency, among other things. Added to oppression was a substantive and enlightening narrative about invisibility in the culture where they lived. Invisibility, in this case, relates to a denial of the presence of vibrant communities of Afro-descendants (like in Argentina and Mexico), as well as a denial of their cultural influence. In large measure, this denial is hidden in the discourse of *mestizaje*, which in most cases privileges cultural and racial mixture between indigenous communities and cultures with descendants of the European colonizers. African influence is often minimalized or considered non-existent in many Latin American countries.

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As an Afro-descendant Latina colonized subject and critical theorist, I began to think about what might be the implications of these denials for asserting subjectivity. An important question was how do these Afro-descendants assert subjectivity, when their existence is denied? And, what does it mean to live without recognition? My work, “Discourse of Memory” (“Discurso de la Memoria”), is intimately engaged in answering these questions. The answer to the aforementioned questions is preemptively found in the title of the work. The title “Discourse of Memory” suggests that assertion of subjectivity occurs in engaging in conversations about memory. That is, afro-subjects assert their subjectivity through the acts of remembering not only their ethnic and cultural roots, but also by recalling each other in a local and global community. Memory, then, is not only an essential means of survival amidst invisibility and erasure, but also indispensable as a source of the self.

Memory is the vehicle to consciousness of the self and, a lifeline to existence. In this essay, memory is understood as: 1) the act of remembering, 2) the act of performing the past 3) la *concientización* 4) written and oral discourse with other theoretical traditions and, 5) the act of erasure imposed by colonial systems. Memory is part of a complex discourse, which becomes the pathway to an existence (individual or communal) that has functioned as resistance to alienation of self in colonized societies. Memory is a tool wielded by all who occupy a colonial space regardless of their race, class, gender, age, education, intellectual ability or religious affiliation. Seen from the perspective of Wilson Harris’ (Guyana) ‘limbo gateway,’ memory is that which capitalizes on the limitations of language and Western philosophy. The gateway is that space between past, present and future of the colonized. The location of this gateway is also very important in asserting subjectivity (Ashcroft 151).

As a discourse in a colonial society that allows for the assertion of colonized subjectivities, memory is the most pervasive instrument of thought and vehicle of consciousness. Given this, memory becomes a symbol of equality, since it is among the most basic acts of consciousness available to human beings. Memory assures that an “I” exists even when this existence is denied. This ability to re-assert the self has contributed to the survival of Afro-Diasporic peoples under captivity, enslavement, and neo-colonialism. For this reason, memory is subversive.

Afro-Hispanic thinkers are alienated from both dominant discourses (like those in Europe and the United States) and marginal discourses (like those in the Latin America, the Caribbean and even among African thinkers). Their intellectual and social survival is fueled and sustained in large measure by what I call their discourse of memory. This means that they survive in large measure due to conversations about their condition with other kindred Afro-descendant subjects, theories, stories, remembrances, and traditions, around the world. In this context, to engage memory is to recall, not only aspects of the self, but also to search for other existing conversations that recognize and engage one’s existence and way of being in the world. This conversation asserts existence in ways that a racist society cannot or will not; it is a crucial element to survival in what Lewis Gordon calls an anti-Black world.¹ For these reasons, memory is an essential source of the self. Those who live in alienated communities and/or are excluded from dominant or marginal discourses survive, in part, through their conversation with other kindred spirits around the world and even beyond this world.

Memory is a form of listening; as such, it is also a proof of existence. Memory functions like the talking drums across communities. As a form of communication that crosses time, those who hold and carry these memories dialogue with communities that are audible, even in different continents and nations. In this way, Afro-Latin thinkers from Bogota, Colombia can speak to those in Harlem, NY; those in Harlem, NY can speak to others in Kingston, Jamaica; thinkers from

¹ See Lewis Gordon. *Bad and Anti-Black Racism*.

Martinique can speak to those in Senegal, and so forth. Concrete examples of these phenomena, of the talking drums, are found in Afro-Latin thought. In an interview with Margarita Krakusin titled *Conversación informal con Manuel Zapata Olivella*, Zapata Olivella addresses this issue when he talks about the influence of negritude around the world. The influence of negritude, which moved like the sounds of music through continents, also reached Zapata Olivella. The influence was a call to which he answered in the form of political, social, and creative consciousness. In the interview Zapata Olivella says:

Todos estos movimientos de los Estados Unidos, y del renacimiento de Harlem, en una forma o en otra se van a proyectar en la América. Los intelectuales de América comienzan a tomar conciencia...Y en esa ola, en ese eco, en esa repercusión que llega a la América, a mí me tocó estar oyendo esos cantos de sirena...(18)

In addition to dialoguing across continents, nations, islands and seas, memory incites the development of an Afro-Diasporic consciousness. Illustrated in the passage is Zapata Olivella's theory on the development of a consciousness. According to Zapata Olivella, consciousness develops from a dialogue between Afro-Diasporic intellectuals, movements and peoples around the globe. Awareness of one's situation is awakened and enhanced by hearing the "call" of other "like" beings whose voices reverberate knowledge about existence. This relationship is mediated by memory. Note that colonialism caused the fragmentation of culture and traditions, disrupted the epistemic directives for development of life, and undermined foundational metaphysical premises, which provided evidence, guaranteeing knowledge of human existence. In performance of memory, consciousness is gained and restored; new forms of understanding are acquired; the epistemic directives, which aid in understanding what is known and how it is known begin to emerge from the shadows; awareness of self solves the metaphysical dilemma, in that existence as a human being is experienced through the complexities of consciousness.

Memory in its most heightened state not only brings the individual subject to an awareness of self, but also slowly encourages a connection of that self to others. In this way, Senegalese writer Leopold Senghor's ideas can influence intellectuals in Harlem who, in turn, influence those in the Latin America. For Zapata Olivella, memory functions as a voice that awakens a consciousness containing both individual and collective dimensions. Within this context memory (re-) calls and (re-) confirms existence.

Dussel's Contributions to the Discourse of Memory and Taylor's Sources of the Self

In the "Editors Introduction" of *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Rorty, Taylor, and the Philosophy of Liberation*, Eduardo Mendieta describes Enrique Dussel's use of the term trans-modernity. He writes: "The term trans-modernity underscores that Liberation Philosophy is not about either negating modernity or blithely accepting it, but about transcending it anadialecically; that is, to think the couplet modernity and postmodernity not just from within, but also and especially, from the perspective of its *reverso*, its underside, its occluded other" (Mendieta xxii). Dussel's use of the term trans-modernity can be interpreted as both a call for moving beyond the modernity and its effects and, most importantly, as critically engaging and supporting non-Western knowledges. This definition is not only a theoretical concept, but also can be construed as an ethical demand for social change. This demand for social change, linked to a transgression of modernity, is also found in discourses of colonization and de-colonization. In contemporary post-colonial and critical theory, as well as post-continental philosophy, it is evident what Dussel sees as the stagnation of de-colonization, which had begun in the early twentieth century. Trans-modernity offers to the

discourse of memory a closer look at the cause of the stagnant de-colonial project, namely, a detection of and reflection on a modernity that had not been super-ceded and whose strength increased by its persistent engagement with the periphery. For these reasons, I read trans-modernity not only as coterminous with an ethical and political demand for an improved Liberation philosophy that merges what Dussel sees as two approaches to and discourses of liberation, namely continental philosophy and post-Marxism, but also as a movement toward completion of the unfinished de-colonization project (Dussel 40). The importance of addressing aspects of de-colonization not yet resolved, also known as the unfinished de-colonization project, can be seen in what Nelson Maldonado Torres describes as the de-colonial turn. He writes:

De-colonial turn refers to a shift in knowledge production of similar nature and magnitude to so-called Linguistic and Pragmatic turns. It introduces questions about the effects of colonization in modern subjectivities and modern forms of life as well as contributions of racialized and colonized subjectivities to the production of knowledge and critical thinking” (Maldonado Torres, “On the Coloniality”).²

Dussel’s trans-modernity, then, clears the way for a deeper, fuller, and completed de-colonization project, because it calls for an interrogation and transcendence of modernity, but also addresses both support and interrogation of its periphery. In other words, the concept of trans-modernity embodies a two-pronged trans-formative approach to dismantling modernity and its residual effects. This two pronged approach is necessary, since the residual effects of modernity are not simply found in political and social systems, like institutions, laws, global markets, ideologies and discourses, but most dangerous among its residues is its effects on what Dussel calls the periphery. This means that the oppressed living in the periphery can become agents for re-invigorating dominant discourses, political and economic systems with or without conscious efforts. With respect to the interrogation and transcendence of modernity, Dussel’s critique of Charles Taylor’s *The Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* demonstrates how Charles Taylor is an example of thinkers at the core who continue to reproduce dominance through his historical and epistemological perspective.

In the essay, “Modernity, Eurocentrism, and Trans-Modernity: In Dialogue with Charles Taylor,” Dussel argues that Charles Taylor tries but fails to describe modern identity from both a historical and philosophical perspective with complexity and sophistication (129). This failure comes from what Dussel describes as Taylor’s hellenocentric analysis. It is a hellenocentrism, which not only serves to re-affirm modernity, but also becomes counter-productive to Taylor’s goal of delineating a modern identity from both a historical and philosophical perspective. Of key importance in Taylor’s failure is a narrow reading of modernity itself. From Dussel’s perspective, Taylor’s reading of modernity was very much limited to the Eurocentric point of view in which his text was steeped. The Eurocentrism found could be described as a phenomenon that arises in and is complicit with a Hegelian view of Europe and time (131). According to Dussel, this Eurocentrism sees modernity as a European development. From this perspective, to view modernity as exclusively a European invention does not account for other agents who are in conversation with what is now a central hegemonic discourse. Absent was an analysis of Europe’s conversation with discourses, from the periphery. This conversation Dussel describes as worldly or planetary (131). Interestingly enough, Taylor falls victim to the residues of colonization in his conception of modern identity, as

² See also Nelson Maldonado Torres, “Post-continental Philosophy.”

he leaves out not only himself, but also many others like him who represent other vibrant worlds and knowledges.³

Trans-modernity reminds critical theorists and post-continental philosophers to closely examine not only the hegemonic discourse, but also discourses from the periphery, which may be infected with the virus of modern strains of colonization within contemporary critical discourse. This virus seeps into liberation discourses and serves no other purpose than to cause their derailment and/or demise. In the end, Taylor fails to provide a viable alternative to conceptualizing, exploring and understanding the sources of modern identity.

Manuel Zapata Olivella, Sources of the Self, the Search for Recognition, and Trans-modernity

In the book, *La Rebellion de los Genes*, Manuel Zapata Olivella also attempts to conceptualize, explore and understand the sources of the self, given modernity. One of the main projects is of highlighting the ways in which Afro-subjects, in Latin America maintain a sense of self, given the devastating effects of a modernity that persists in contemporary life. In addition, he emphasizes the need to look at the ways in which identity discourse is framed. Finally, Zapata Olivella insists that part of what it means to liberate, embody and assert the afro-self is found in avoiding alienation and the traps of contemporary identity discourse which can distort, misrepresent, alienate, and render invisible one's subjectivity (Zapata Olivella 13). This is seen clearly when Zapata Olivella makes the distinction between idiosyncrasy and identity. According to Zapata Olivella,

La idiosincrasia es inalienable (etimológicamente significa “temperamento propio” – por tanto inalienable--), hereda y determina la naturaleza del ser. La identidad es un concepto abstracto del ser, que puede cuestionarse, hipotecarse, venderse y negociarse. Hay quienes se preguntan si existe o no una cultura latinoamericana para negarla. En cambio, la ideosincrasia jamás podrá enajenarse: “Genio y figura hasta la sepultura.” (13).

According to Zapata Olivella, “identity is an abstract definition of the self that can be questioned, mortgaged, sold and negotiated” (13). He also asserts, “idiosyncrasy, on the other hand, is a part of the self which can never be negated, dismissed, nor separated” (13). Within this context, alienation is an “other” subjectivity, which is forced on to the idiosyncratic aspect of the self. The other subjectivity is an identity, which obscures and denies the idiosyncratic (13). Zapata Olivella offers ancestral memory as that which can help to decipher and process the many layers of an alienating subjectivity engendered by the politics of identity and identity discourse (13).

The title of the essay that opens Zapata Olivella's, *La Rebellion de los Genes*, and from which the thesis of a difference between identity and idiosyncraticism is first proposed in the text, has the title “Brújula,” which means compass. I read Zapata Olivella as suggesting that not only is idiosyncrasy an important element of the self, but also that ancestral memory forms the compass by which the oppressed who are Afro-descendants can find their way through the many layers of acculturation causing alienation. Zapata Olivella's perspective is “planetary” in its approach, because it accounts for a variety of cultural, social and political discourses in his analysis of the sources of the self. In *La Rebellion de Los Genes*, an important element is the attempt to advance a tri-cultural thesis of sources of the self. It is that Colombians are tri-ethnic and multi-racial, i.e., part of the Native, African and European cultures. Tri-ethnicity is the idiosyncratic in Colombia.

³ Perhaps it can also be said that absent is a post-continental dimension, as described by Maldonado Torres.

Zapata Olivella allows for the possibility of multiple sources of the self as well as the knowledge that there can be multiple selves within a person. The notion of multiple sources comes from his emphasis on showing how a subject may be constituted by a variety of cultures in addition to being directed by multiple ideologies. However, many of these sources are at the level of identity and, thus, merely scratch the surface of the self. Most important among the sources is ancestral memory, which can track and trace the varying elements of alienation.

Zapata Olivella's concept of the self is in tune with Dussel's theory of trans-modernity in that it offers a way to understand the self within the context of modernity while at the same time attempts to transcend it. *The Rebellion of the Genes* is also a liberation project. First, it seeks to point to ways in which oppressed subjects can dis-alienate. Second, it seeks to transcend modernity by offering alternate ways in which to contextualize the self, outside of modern paradigms by engaging in what Walter Mignolo calls "pensamiento otro," "an other thinking" (Mignolo 66-79). Third, it attempts to be self-reflexive; it acknowledges the presence of obstacles placed by systems of oppression.

Although Zapata Olivella attempts to be self-reflexive, one must ask: is he self-reflexive enough? Does he critically engage his theory? Are there any problems with the notion of the idiosyncratic? A closer inspection of Zapata Olivella's theory forces the critical theorist to ask whether Zapata Olivella's theory of the self is essentialist, anti-black, and ultimately counter-productive. Despite the ease at which these questions are raised, I would argue that the answers are not as simple as they might have appeared to Zapata Olivella's critics.

Upon the release of *La Rebellion de Los Genes* in 1997, Zapata Olivella received significant criticism by his peers who found his theory of the idiosyncratic to be anti-black and, thus, counter-productive to the struggle against racial oppression and invisibility in Colombia. Critics claimed that in advancing a multi-ethnic source of the self Zapata Olivella was also being racist, because at the core of his project was the denial and dilution of Blackness in Colombia. The resulting dilution of Blackness was (and continues to be) precisely what most Afro-descendants in Colombia fought against. For these reasons, critics argued that Zapata Olivella's theory was counter-productive to the anti-racist struggle in Colombia.

In widening the scope of race discourse to account for a variety of sources, Zapata Olivella's critics claim that he has re-inscribed racist notions of identity conceived in modernity. Perhaps, this is part of the pitfalls of race discourse. Could it be that part of the key to solving this debate begins with an analysis of terms, specifically how one understands and interprets what is normative in the social space to which he refers, and how race, particularly whiteness and blackness function in that society? Also, it may be helpful to explore what *mestizaje* has meant within that context, particularly why Zapata Olivella may have still seen himself as a counter-revolutionary against racism in advancing an idiosyncratic view of race and culture in Colombia.

The roots of Zapata Olivella's pre-occupation with a tri-ethnic view of race are in the history of colonialism, particularly race discourse, where *criollo* elites in Latin America sought to keep their superiority by distancing themselves from claims of race mixture. The distancing comes from the discourse of *mestizaje*, which was used to explain economic, political and social problems in Latin America during the nineteenth centuries. The issue was the notion of illness. The cause was thought to be *mestizaje*, race mixture.

This trope of illness is very common among not only writers of the African Diaspora in the 20th century, but also for *criollo* thinkers in Latin America from as early as the mid 19th century. Most noted among the *criollos* are Alcides Arguedas of Bolivia, Salvador Mendieta of Central America, Manuel Ugarte of Argentina, and César Zumete of Venezuela. These thinkers, who were deeply influenced by positivism, blamed the political and social lack of progress in Latin America on a form of "social illness" (Davis 101). Positivism is a philosophical thought derived from the philosopher

Auguste Comte. Positivists believed that social progress could be created and regulated by systematic rules. So, they attempted to construct a science of progress. Darwin's theory of evolution was driven by this ideology. Authoritarian forms of government, which sought to control the influence of native and religious sects (like Catholics), also take root in Latin America with the help of positivist ideology (Davis 97-98).

Positivism in Latin America not only shaped political structures, which sought to establish social order, but also guided thinkers in their quest to explain the problems facing the society as it strove to elevate itself socially, politically, and economically. In the race for progress, Latin American countries were not advancing as rapidly as Western Europe and the United States. The United States was exceeding the pace of Latin American societies. Latin American intellectuals, particularly those belonging to the bourgeoisie, explained the difference through the logic of race. For example, positivist philosophers Domingo Sarmiento (Argentina 1811-1888) and Juan Alberdi (Argentina 1810-1884) attributed the lack of national progress to racial factors (Davis 123). This conversation about race parallels others in Europe and the United States where scientists, anthropologists and other intellectuals devoted a great deal of research and writing to proving racial difference and positing a hierarchy of values. Polygeny and craniometry, scientific movements, which fabricated evidence about the differences between the races, helped to justify slavery and institutionalized discrimination in the Americas.⁴

Since the institutional separation of people based on race was a prominent feature of social order in the Americas and, since the nature of racial differences was also accepted in the 19th century, it is reasonable to conclude that Latin American thinkers, many of whom were bourgeois, represented people who distanced themselves from the lower classes in order to gain greater respectability from members of the world intellectual community. Furthermore, since from the perspective of Western colonial powers Africans and Native people were constructed as a "cursed" and "uncivilized" people by the colonizing elite, and also since the U.S. moved ahead by alienating the colonized, it stood to reason that Latin Americans in the 19th century would follow the hierarchical system which discriminated against descendants of Africans. Nevertheless, miscegenation made this task nearly impossible.

To overcome the problems of miscegenation, positivists attempted to erase evidence of the existence of Africans in their midst. This erasure is most evident in countries like Argentina, whose citizens still believe that to be Black and Argentine is oxymoronic. With respect to memory, national and racial identities often clash, particularly when referring to understanding and developing a Black identity. Native peoples in Latin America have been acknowledged, in many cases, as important contributors to the cultures in which they live. Nevertheless, Africa's influence on Latin America has long been vehemently denied. During the last twenty years, many cultural and post-colonial theorists have worked hard to redress the false claim.

The interconnection between the notion of "social illness" and miscegenation, in Latin American thought, had severe consequences not only for the development of a strong and independent branch of Latin American thought, but also on the national, ethnic and individual identities, as well. In equating social illness with miscegenation, 19th-century Latin American philosophers gave an incentive to further divide communities that were already mixing in order to create "racial purity" in the name of progress. In addition, the equation of social illness with miscegenation caused the further rejection of existing ethnic populations such as the "afro" communities in varying parts of Latin America. Within this context Zapata Olivella's idiosyncratic view has a different tone, because it can be seen as attempting to acknowledge the African element

⁴ For more information, see Stephen J. Gould, "American Polygeny and Craniometry Before Darwin: Blacks and Indians as Separate, Inferior Species."

of *mestizaje* that was left out by the dialogue. That is, those who saw themselves as multi-ethnic identified as anything but “Black.” To say that Colombians are also “Black,” could then be construed as going against the grain. Therefore, Zapata Olivella, who has repeatedly shown his commitment to his “Black” identity and African cultural roots, can also be read as attempting to advance a more inclusive and complex view of racial and cultural existence in Colombia. Part of his goal was to insist on an acknowledgement of a long, sustained history of the contribution of Blacks in Colombian society, as an integral force, i.e., integral as the native roots.

In challenging already established definitions and understanding of what are relevant peripheral identities, the tri-ethnic view could also be read as an effort to further destabilize the normative, within marginal identities. This reading of Zapata Olivella shows how the idiosyncratic theory of race mixture may have been offered as a way of combating latent, but powerful positivist racist ideology that insisted on rejecting Afro-descendants.

Rejection of the concept that “Black”⁵ people were an integral part of Latin America evoked a deeper form of alienation not only for Afro-descendants in Latin America, but also for Latin American nations themselves. In other words, Latin America’s “illness” was exacerbated. The exacerbation was rooted in the perception that the denial of African cultures in Latin America was a denial of Latin American history itself. Thus, the positivist climate of the 19th century in Latin America, which was scientifically driven and historicist in nature failed to accurately reflect the cultural and social reality; these positivists practiced a false historicism. This false historicism is one against which Zapata Olivella fought.

In contextualizing Zapata Olivella’s tri-ethnic conceptualization of Colombian identity, I am not attempting to argue for it. Instead, I am suggesting that in contextualizing Zapata Olivella’s theory, a different view of his project emerges. Certainly, there is the question of whether his project succeeds. I would agree with his critics that the way in which the idiosyncratic is framed does not fulfill the project of destabilizing positivist racist ideology, because the dialogue around cultural mixture has often been a dialogue about *blanqueamiento*--re-claiming “whiteness”--and not racial and multi-cultural solidarity. The project of a struggle against racial oppression should not be based on mixing races, because mixing races may continue to make “Blackness” invisible and subordinate to “white” and “native” ethnic identities. In addition, the project against racial oppression often has meant to necessarily assert not only the existence of the subject as a subject and a race category. For Afro-descendants in Colombia, it is important to assert their subjectivity (as human entities) while at the same time assuming a racialized identity that goes with this subjectivity. Important to this desire is not just that one is somebody, but also that this somebody is “Black.” Inherent in this is a problem of the normative.

The United States, like Colombia, can be construed as a world that is hostile to Blacks.⁶ In this world, the normative is “white.” For this reason, according to Lewis Gordon, when one uses terms like man, woman, and person a “pre-reflective parenthetical” is operative (Gordon, “Sociality and Community” 113). This “pre-reflective parenthetical” is the derivative “white.” Given this pre-reflection, the words man, woman, person and somebody would be normatively pre-ceded and understood as the term “white,” i.e., “(white) man, (white) woman, (white) person.” But the

⁵ In placing the term Black in quotes, it is not my intention to completely negate its validity and common usage. Instead, the quotes are to call attention to the shifting and flowing nature of the term Black. The term race and the categories that can be derived from it, such as Black and White have been heavily debated as to their meaning and usage in theoretical, critical, social and political discourse. The quotes are to acknowledge this dialogue and the controversial and problematic nature of the term. In addition, the quotes also point to the potential shifts in meaning of the term Black from north to south and vice versa.

⁶ For more on what it means for a Black person to live in a hostile world, see Franz Fanon. “Introduction.” *Black Skin, White Masks*. Trans. Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1967.

question is: in an anti-black world, can one assume or enforce the parenthetical “Black?” According to Lewis Gordon, the answer would be and emphatic, “NO!” For Gordon, in an anti-black world there is the denial of the self/other relationship, between what functions as the category “White” and the category “Black.” In the dominant “White/Black” relationship, Gordon argues Fanon’s viewpoint that the relation is one of self/below other (Gordon, “Sociality and Community” 116). Zapata Olivella’s idiosyncratic view does not go far enough, because it does not address the varying dimensions of normativity that are operative. Zapata Olivella’s theory of the idiosyncratic perhaps attempts to by-pass the normative, without addressing its power. In other words, the tri-ethnic view simply further marginalizes Afro-descendants. Perhaps this is why this theory is problematic.

Tri-ethnicity ignores the fact that the *mestizo* subject is the white’s other and the Black subject is “below other,” in Gordon’s terms (Gordon, “Sociality and Community” 116). When Black subjectivity is added, to the *mestizo* identity, it is erased or suffers greater alienation in that it may not be distinguishable from the dominant cultures in the triad. Given these relationships Zapata Olivella’s tri-ethnic view is not effective in transcending the self/below other relationship in which the alienated afro-self exists. What does this mean in practical terms? It would mean that even with a tri-ethnic view, afro-descends would continue to engage in what Lewis Gordon describes as taking “...extra-ordinary measures to live ordinary lives” (Gordon, “Sociality and Community” 118).

Zapata Olivella’s idiosyncratic vision of Latin American culture may be an existential call for inclusion in a nationalist cultural hegemony. This inclusion may be a call for both an acknowledgement of existence, and an affirmation of the importance of Afro-descendants to Colombia. Given these acknowledgements Afro-descendants may ultimately be viewed as valuable and integral citizenry. However, one can argue that Zapata Olivella’s tri-ethnic theory is an illusion. The question is: can one distort the normative by engaging in a multi-cultural dialogue?

The “Discourse of Memory’s” Potential Contribution to Trans-modernity

The discourse of memory offers a viable alternative to Charles Taylor’s view of sources of the self and Zapata Olivella’s tri-ethnic idiosyncraticism. The alternative is to look at memory as foundational to sources of the self and from which the idiosyncratic operates. The idiosyncratic from the point of view of race becomes problematic for varying reasons. First, racial categories are often used as fixed categories, even when they may not operate as fixed categories. Second, race is a manifestation of relations of power. These relations of power determine the extent to which privileges are granted. Third, although as Fanon suggests, these identity categories are experienced as real, they are determinations of the individual from without. Fourth and most important, identity categories based on race are not simply determined from without, but are rooted in modernity. When exercising these identity categories that call attention to relations of power arising out of modernity, we continue to reproduce their relevance, power and efficacy. Trans-modernity could not fully be realized within race categories because although in contemporary life we continue to understand ourselves (in part) along racial terms, these are still determinations from without. In addition, these external determinations are rooted in modernity.

Memory is not fixed. A person may remember the same event differently at varying times. Or not remember the same event at all. Memory is dynamic; it shifts and changes with time and may be influenced by new events and ideas. Most importantly, memory comes from within; each individual, who recalls his or her existence, engenders it. There are memories that are long and wide, extending through generations, and even through centuries. There are even some memories that extend significantly before modernity. Although many memories live, others perish or are distorted. Memories may also converse with other memories within a body or across bodies. Selves are as dynamic as the memories that help produce them.

Memories are powerful, meaningful and resourceful. They can hide and resurface to avoid obliteration. Given their power to help sustain the self, memories are the battleground for maintaining or destroying the self. Memory is that which modernity seeks, engages, enhances, corrupts or destroys. It is not just important as a source of the self, but also as a crucial battleground from which colonization has been fought. By destabilizing old memories and creating new ones that are destructive colonizers are able to disrupt the oppressed's ability to regenerate and restore after subsequent attacks and incursions, by hegemonic powers.

Discourse of memory is not just about reclaiming the self, but also restoring lines of communication that transcend modernity. When least expected, memories that have been under attack, by hegemony, may resurface as if renewed to converse with other memories. This is a process of awakening, a means by which dis-alienation and transcendence can occur. For these reasons, at the frontlines of the de-colonial turn are memories that do more than simply become resources of regenerating the self and the objects of hegemonic destruction; they also are combatants at the frontlines of the battle for dis-alienation and self-determination.

Conclusion

Memory is an important site from which liberation of Afro-subjects is launched, because it allows for a space in which "an other thinking" can occur.⁷ Diaspora thinkers who engage in the discourse of memory give greater strength and meaning to trans-modernity as a liberatory effort, since this discourse is a transgressive, liberatory, and dis-alienating. The site of memory is not only a place of affirmation of existence, but also a prime source of the self-for Afro-descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean. For these reasons, trans-modernity would be incomplete and lack planetary dimension if it failed to acknowledge the role the discourse of memory plays in emancipatory, transcendental, and trans-modern practices.

⁷ See Walter D. Mignolo. *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. (Princeton University Press, 2000) 66-78. Also see Catherine Walsh. "Interculturality and the Coloniality of Power. An 'Other' thinking and Positioning from the Colonial Difference." *Coloniality of Power, Transmodernity, and Border Thinking*. ed. R. Gosfoguel, J.D. Saldivar and N. Maldonado-Torres (forthcoming).

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