

An Epistemology for the Next Revolution

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It is my intention, by this optimistic title, to mark the need for a newly revised and reformulated language of liberation. To explain this idea, let me begin with two distinct and important claims made by Sylvia Wynter and by Enrique Dussel. Wynter has suggested that the principal oversight of Marxist revolutionary discourses was to forsake the epistemological question of social theory, that is, the question of who knows. To be sure, Marx developed the beginnings of an epistemology of ideology in his account of how the fetish can appear as the real and in his idea of bourgeois ideology's *camera obscura* effect on perception. But neither he nor his followers paid sufficient attention, in Wynter's view, to the political circumstances in which knowledges of all sorts are produced. These political circumstances include how authority and authoritativeness are distributed, how certain sites and processes and methodologies are valorized while others are repudiated, and how the production of theory mirrors the production of social inequity. Thus, although Marx gave us a new and revolutionary analysis of how the general political economy is reproduced, he did not provide tools for maintaining and improving on that analysis or for creating revolutionary and democratic conditions for critical social theory. He did not provide a radical critique of the legitimation processes of knowledge. Wynter is suggesting, I take it, that the devolution of Marxism into positivism and patriarchal authoritarianism as well as bureaucratic capitalism that we witnessed throughout the twentieth century might be directly linked to this oversight. The extreme centralism of the Soviets as well as the general inability of Marxist movements and governments to acknowledge their own mistakes and limitations are usually attributed as a political problem, but perhaps their source is actually an epistemological problem (Foucault's own criticisms of Marxism echo this idea). The lesson from this is that the epistemological question must be explicitly addressed in the next era of revolutionary thought and practice.

I want to relate Wynter's insight with Enrique Dussel's argument that we need to develop an analectical method. While Marxist dialectics stays within the realm of intelligibility, in a dialogical opposition and sublation of the dominant worldview, analectics seeks to bring that which is beyond the dialectic into visibility. Dialectics remains in an internal critique by contradicting what exists, but it takes its terms of reference from the existing foundational concepts. New formulations are indeed possible through dialectics, but they will be achieved through the conflictual process of counterpoint. Dussel's analysis of Marx's treatment of "living labor" shows that Marx developed an account through which it was possible to think beyond the terms of the current system, to imagine that which has been made unintelligible by capitalism. Living labor is that essence of labor that preexisted private property and commodification and even use value as traditionally understood. Under capitalism living labor has been reduced and transformed into a commodity form, and it is

this form of labor on behalf of which the dialectic engages in class struggle. Yet to conceive the ultimate goal as the liberation of commodified labor is to fall short of the goal. The difficulty in reaching beyond commodified labor is again an epistemological one, since the very concept of living labor is unintelligible by current lights. Thus, Dussel argues that, in order to conceive of living labor, we need more than dialectics: we need what he calls analectics, a neologism for an attempt to think beyond what is currently thinkable, to reach beyond beyond dialectics toward the unintelligible and incommensurable or that which is beyond the existing totality. Living labor---uncommodified---exists today only as an idea outside the totality of the ways in which value and labor are measured and conceptualized. To reach such ideas, Dussel maintains, requires according epistemological authority to the poor, to the perspectivism of *los pobres*, to those whose lives and experiences are marginalized by the dialectic of intelligible possibilities.

I believe Wynter is right to argue that the epistemological problem must be central to the next phase of revolutionary struggle. Scientism, positivism, masculine authority, elitism, and Eurocentrism must be disentangled from the process by which liberatory knowledge is developed. And I believe Dussel suggests the right way to begin this work: by putting at the center not simply the objective conditions of global impoverishment and oppression, but the systematic disauthorization of the interpretive perspective of the oppressed in the global south. This disauthorization inhibits the critical dialogical encounters and epistemic coalitions through which new solutions can be developed.

To develop this project further, this paper will address two stumbling blocks within the current intellectual climate that obstruct the path of following this advice of Wynter and Dussel: (1) the stumbling block of epistemology, and (2) the stumbling block of identity. I will address each of these in turn.

1. The stumbling block of epistemology

Epistemology has been the protocol theory for discursive mastery in the West, sitting in authoritative judgment well beyond the circles of philosophy. Epistemology presumes its right to judge, for example, the knowledge claims of midwives, the ontologies of first-nations peoples, the medical practices of the colonized, and even first-person experiential reports of every sort. Is it realistic to believe that a single “master epistemology” can judge every kind of knowledge claim from every cultural and social location? Universal knowledge claims about knowledge itself need, at minimum, a deep reflexivity about their own cultural and social location.¹

Toward developing a resistance strategy that can block unreflexive and uninterrogated claims of mastery, and in order to avoid replicating Western epistemology’s imperialism, critical social theorists have largely relegated their own epistemological work to the sphere of the descriptive and the critical. In other words, critical social theorists will today *describe* what knowledge claims are made, where, and by whom, and they will *critique* knowledge claims of all sorts, but they have generally abandoned the doing of normative epistemology itself. We can all now critique existing knowledges with great sophistication; we can analyze the strategic aims behind existing knowledges

and their hidden exclusions; and we can, with Foucault, describe with great precision the interlocking matrices of power and knowledge and desire, their interconnections and interdependencies. But ask critical social theorists today about how to reach truth or how to comparatively evaluate theories of justification and most will look at you with incredulity. The language of truth, realism, and justification has been discarded rather than redefined. Epistemology proper, which has normative and not merely descriptive and critical components, has been surrendered to the analytic philosophers.

This is a serious mistake. I admit to sharing the worries of Bruno Latour about the excessiveness of our critical epistemologies and the paucity of our reconstructive ones. In a recent and much discussed article, Latour argues that the right has recuperated the critical project of social theory. He quotes from a *New York Times* editorial in which Republican strategist Frank Luntz says the following: “Should the public come to believe that the scientific issues are settled, their views about global warming will change accordingly. Therefore, we need to continue to make the lack of scientific certainty a primary issue.”² The Republicans, as this makes clear, have taken up the cause of critiquing positivism as a way to deflect the demands for the US to sign serious environmental agreements. In order to advance their political interests, they have taken a position in the meta-theoretical debates in the epistemology of the sciences, adopting the hyper-critical stance of the new social theorists which amounts to a convenient skepticism.

What should we learn from this?³ Of course, it is true that no theoretical position is immune from recuperation. But unless we can go beyond critique and deconstruction, and unless we are willing to risk the normative project of improving on the process of knowing, there is no hope in countering any sort of opposition. We have to be able to explain not just why opposition to the thesis of global warming is politically motivated, but why the thesis of global warming is itself epistemically defensible, at least in comparative terms with respect to other explanatory theories. Besides the debates over global warming, there are ongoing debates over the effects of free trade on the poor, over the capacity of women to do math and science, over the adequacy of DNA evidence to overturn death row convictions, and over the real solution to the AIDS crisis, none of which can be engaged merely at the level of meta-critique. The struggle over politics is ultimately fought on the plane of truth.

The refusal of epistemology was motivated by epistemology’s lack of political reflexivity. It was a rejection of the individualist orientation most epistemologies exhibit, which over-emphasize individual agency and over-estimate individual self-understanding. It was a rejection of epistemology’s attempt to colonize knowledge claims and maintain Western hegemony in the domain of rationality, of the intellectual virtues, and of truth. Thus, the postmodern refusal of normative epistemology was a corrective to individualist, de-contextualized, politically non-reflexive approaches, but, as a corrective, it was still reactive, caught in the dialectic of response. Today we can move beyond this.

Epistemology’s normative function concerns not just the question of how knowledges are produced, who is authorized, how presumptive credibility is distributed, and how the objects of inquiry are delimited. More than this, it concerns how knowledge *should* be produced, who *should* be

authorized, how presumptive credibility *should* be distributed, and how we might even gain some politically reflexive purchase on the delimitations of ontology.

What I am calling the epistemological stumbling block is, then, the refusal to engage in reconstructive work in epistemology, to go beyond critical skepticism and to reconstruct how to make truth claims both responsible to political realities as well as reliable and adequate to the complexity of reality. The very project of “shifting the geography of reason” requires such reconstructive work, for it requires us to uncover and reassess disavowed knowledges and to clarify the grounds of our own claims of adequacy or epistemic progress.

Some argue, however, that the conclusion of critique will show that epistemology is unnecessary as well as delusional in its ambitions. Knowledge claims, it is argued, are forms of strategic intervention that can shift perspective, expand imagined possibilities, and rearticulate the good, but they should not be thought of as mirrors to reality or as capable of representational correspondence. This is excessively skeptical about the possibility of knowledge. We can responsibly claim to know that global warming is a defensible hypothesis, that Iraq did not have nuclear capabilities in 2002, and that poverty is getting worse in the United States. Knowledge claims are not *simply* strategies. Although they undoubtedly have strategic effects that should be charted and considered, to equate knowledge claims with strategic interventions is to ignore their representational content, dangerously rendering this beyond our assessment. Nor are knowledge claims *fully* governed by aesthetic or political criteria, though such criteria may well be operative and even decisive in regard to some underdetermined spheres of inquiry. Knowledge claims are always also claims to truth, and thus we need evaluative accounts that can compare theories of justification as well as the concepts of what it means to say that something is true. There has been some excellent work toward this end by post-Quinean epistemologists like Putnam, Brandom, McDowell, Lynch, and Cheryl Misak. There has also been excellent work by continental epistemologists like Hacking and post-colonial epistemologists like Mignolo, Glissant, Castro-Gómez, Patricia Williams, and Jennifer Vest, and, of course, a wealth of work by feminist epistemologists such as Nelson, Potter, Lloyd, Campbell, Harding, Haraway, and others. This post-colonial and feminist work does not make the mistake of individualizing epistemic agency or decontextualizing truth, but shows how political considerations can in some cases be legitimately salient to justification. This provides a good starting point for the project of decolonizing and reconstructing epistemology, disinvesting it of a mastery that would ignore the identity and situatedness of knowers while maintaining its normative capacity.

To accomplish the project of decolonizing epistemology will require an account of the relationship between political and normative considerations, and for this we need to develop what I would call a political epistemology. A political epistemology would construct a new formulation, both critical and reconstructive, of the project of epistemology, doing similar work for epistemology as Marx’s political economy did for classical economics. The project of political economy was not meant to eclipse entirely the work of economics, but rather to problematize and reveal the construction of the central problems of classical economics. In other words, political economy was a way of approaching economics at a meta-level, to explore how supply and demand are constituted,

what structures create the conditions for various economic roles and forms of economic agency, and what conditions are necessary for the reification of value. In this way, political economy pushed through to a broader problematic and a wider set of questions and options. The goal of political economy was, and is, to lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the reality of economic forces and to an expanded set of options for economic formations.

Similarly, a political epistemology could consider the conditions that structure epistemic roles, it could reveal how authority and presumptive credibility are sometimes arbitrarily distributed, and what conditions give rise to the illusion of a totally individualized epistemic agency. Political epistemology might also clarify how some contextual conditions are rendered relevant to the question of justification, while other contextual conditions are rendered completely irrelevant. And in this way it might push through to a more comprehensive and truer understanding of what knowledge and truth are, and to a broader set of epistemic options that can epistemically evaluate interpretive frames and justificatory procedures. Clearly, political epistemology requires a strongly normative and substantive notion of truth against which we can judge the inadequacy of existing claims of correspondence.

We must be able once again to say with conviction that what is at stake in our struggle is no less than the truth about the world. We must once again be able to show how fascism and colonialism have no real respect or reverence for truth. And to get to this point, a liberatory language must be able to epistemically account for itself, by justifying its processes of justification. Epistemological nihilism cannot be accountable because it cannot be sufficiently reflexive about what justificatory claims, and procedures are animating its own theoretical judgments and critiques. We cannot collapse truth talk to strategy talk any longer, or avoid the work of thinking through the ontological implications of our truth claims. And the alibi of avoiding positivism can no longer work in the face of so much good and serious post-positivist epistemological work on the contextualism and historical situatedness of truth and justification.

Dussel's project of analectics is ultimately an epistemological project. The demand to reach beyond the dialectic is based in the conviction that dialectical approaches are inadequate to the reality of living labor and the conditions of the oppressed. The sense of inadequacy here is moral and political *because* it is epistemological; in other words, the political urgency of analectics is based in the idea that something about the perspective, experience, and knowledge of the oppressed is not making its way into existing discourses. The political call for a change in how we develop and assess theories of justice is thus grounded in a truth claim: that currently existing social theories do not meaningfully engage with some of the most critical difficulties faced by the global poor. The idea of analectics is driven, then, by an epistemic project: to get to a larger, more comprehensive, and more adequate understanding of all that is true concerning the experience of those whose experiences are most often ignored.

2. The stumbling block of identity

Dussel's formulation of analectics also makes identity a legitimate element to consider in developing a new philosophy of liberation. Traditional Marxist formulations of the abstract categories of class cannot address the specificity of group identities such as the indigenous, the poor, racialized peoples, women, religious minorities, and sexual minorities. As a result classical Marxism lacks explanatory adequacy: the organization of the labor market in every society, not to mention social ideologies, makes use of these identities. Feminists and post-colonial theorists have made this point for decades. Yet some of the most vociferous criticism that Dussel has received concerns his invocation of such identity groups, charging that he presents them too monolithically and homogeneously, thus reifying their differences.

The project of decolonizing epistemology (and of shifting the geography of reason) requires attentiveness to social identity not simply in order to show how colonialism has, in some cases, created identities, but also to show how it has silenced and epistemically disauthorized some forms of identity while shoring up the authority of others. Thus the project of decolonizing epistemology assumes the epistemic salience of identity because it assumes that experiences in different locations are distinct and that location matters to knowledge. This will open us up to charges once again that we are falling into identity politics, that we are metaphysically unsophisticated and politically retrograde, a critique that has too often been wielded from the metropole to the peripheries in the global academy. The critiques of identity politics have held too many in thrall to the charge of crass political essentialism and lack of theoretical sophistication. I believe that the anti-identity trend so prevalent in social theory today is another stumbling block to the very project of decolonizing knowledge, since it undermines our ability to articulate what is wrong with the theoretical hegemony of the global north.

Moreover, many people involved in social justice movements have come to accept the idea that identity politics is a diversion from class struggle. Identity-based political movements are by definition class-inclusive, but more than that they are seen as divisive of a class-based agenda, as fetishizing identities, and as presenting identities in an essentialist and de-historicized way that obscures the fact that identities are the product of history and capable of dynamic change. Such critics of identity come from the right, from liberals, and from the left, and unite in their claim that identity politics fractures the body politic; that it emphasizes difference at the expense of commonalities; and that its focus on identity offers only a reductionist politics, one that would reduce or replace an assessment of a person's political view with an assessment of their identity. Important leftist European theorists like Žižek and Badiou have recently joined the ranks of those who believe that, if we want to make genuine social revolution, identity-based political organizing must be minimized.

The problem leftists have with identity politics, however, is not just about the process of getting to the revolution, but also about what we think we are struggling for. That is, some imagine that the new imaginary communities to come will have much less emphasis on racial and ethnic differences, differences which they see as the product entirely or almost entirely of structures of

oppression such as slavery and colonialism. Colonialism creates and reifies identities as ways of managing peoples and setting up hierarchies between groups. Therefore many believe we must aim for a future in which the identities created by colonialism can wither away. For this reason, Nancy Fraser articulates our long-term goals as “socialism in the economy plus deconstruction in the culture. But, she warns, “for this scenario to be psychologically and politically feasible requires that all people be *weaned* from their attachment to current cultural constructions of their interests and identities.”⁴

I want to call both of these claims into question: that identity politics is *in all cases* divisive and that social identities are generally undesirable for the future. Such a monolithic rejection of identity politics follows from a particular understanding of what identities are. I will briefly address both issues here.

To address the concerns about class, we need first to understand correctly the relationship between social identities such as race, ethnicity and gender on the one hand and class on the other hand. The idea of a “pure” class uncorrupted by race and gender may seem an old-fashioned remnant of class reductionism prior to the theoretical reforms made by Marxist feminists and race theorists, but class reductionism is enjoying a renewed resurgence. For example, in the work of Fraser, one of the most widely influential social theorists today, the political fights around class are analytically separable from the political fights around social and cultural identities. In her analyses of identity-based struggles, Fraser divides what she calls demands for redistribution from demands for recognition. Demands for redistribution are material struggles around resource allocation such as made by labor and the poor, whereas demands for recognition are cultural struggles around identity. On the face of it, her case looks persuasive. She argues that the movements for redistribution often deserve our support, while movements for the recognition and even affirmation of identities can be distracting of scarce political energy and can lead to a number of political problems (e.g., separatism). But if we go beyond the surface plausibility, we find that her account presumes the possibility of an analytical separation between class and social identities, that is, it presumes that we can define and explain class prior to or apart from racism and sexism. As an example of a “pure distribution demand,” Fraser gives the case of a white male skilled worker who becomes unemployed due to a factory closing resulting from a speculative corporate merger. In this case, she tells us,

[T]he injustice of maldistribution [that is, the worker becoming unemployed] has little to do with misrecognition. It is rather a consequence of imperatives intrinsic to an order of specialized economic relations whose *raison d'être* is the accumulation of profits. To handle such cases, a theory of justice must reach beyond cultural value patterns to examine the structure of capitalism. It must ask whether economic mechanisms that are relatively decoupled from structures of prestige and that operate in a relatively autonomous way impede parity of participation in social life.⁵

But the reality here is that it is profitable to transfer production (or outsource it) from one labor segment to another — i.e., from white male workers to a lower paid segment either within a country

or outside of it— because of the segmentation of the labor market by race, ethnicity, gender, cultural identity, nationality, and geographical location. Thus, the prime directive of capitalism operates through the segmenting of the labor market by identity. National minorities often form, willingly or unwillingly, an “ascriptive class segment” which economist Mario Barrera defined over 20 years ago as a “portion of a class which is set off from the rest of the class by some readily identifiable and relatively stable characteristics of the persons assigned to that segment, such as race, ethnicity, or sex, and whose status in relation to the means and process of production is affected by that demarcation.”⁶

In actuality, there are no “pure” class demands: there are demands of skilled or unskilled workers, of the trades or the service professions, of migrant workers, of women workers, of immigrant workers, and so on. Sometimes these groups can make common cause, but the very project of doing so will require a clear understanding of how identities mediate class relations to produce specific workplace hierarchies and conflicts of interest. Class reductionists argue here that conflicts will dissolve if we can only wean ourselves from our identity attachments. It is in just this way that the left colludes with the right in portraying ethnic group politics today as special interest agendas with opportunistic leaders who never take into account the common good.

However, we need to take another look at the assumption that politically mobilized identities are inherently exclusive and thus tend toward separatism. When one goes beyond the anecdotal to the empirical, there is simply not sufficient evidence for the absoluteness with which the critics of identity have assumed that strongly felt identities always tend toward separatism. There are certainly problems with essentialist constructions of identity and overly narrow formulations of political alliances, but these problems result from certain kinds of construals of identity rather than the automatic effect of a strong sense of group solidarity and group cohesiveness. There are many examples, so I will just be able to mention a few here.

In the National Black Politics Survey conducted in 1993-1994, the first survey of mass political opinion among African Americans conducted in the United States, one of the most striking findings was a very high degree of belief in what political theorists call “linked fate”: the belief that what generally happens to people in your identity group, in this case your racial group, will significantly affect your life.⁷ Researchers found that the very high level of group identification that exists among African Americans showed no evidence of having a correlation to a racially-separatist political approach or a tendency to reject coalition efforts. Positive responses on the question of “linked fate” registered over 80 percent; positive responses to political separatism came in under 30 percent.

In another study, political scientist José E. Cruz recently analyzed Hartford’s Puerto Rican Political Action Committee as a case study of identity politics in action. The PRPAC took up ethnic mobilization as “a way of achieving representation and a means to negotiate individual and group benefits,”⁸ uniting in typical fashion the demands for recognition with the demands for redistribution. And in fact, their identity-based organizing led not toward separation, but instead was precisely the key to the enhanced political mobilization and involvement of Puerto Ricans in Hartford politics (12). Identity politics did not “reify victimization,” but rather “encouraged

individuals to overcome passivity” precisely through a rearticulated “self-image” and the demand of “equal access to positions of responsibility within the civil and political society” (12). Thus on balance, Cruz argues that the identity based political organizing of the PRPAC resulted in significantly increased voter turnout and in the political representation for Puerto Ricans not only in the city but in the state. The very possibility of coalitions with the black and white communities of Hartford required this political mobilization and involvement.

Other studies by Renato Rosaldo and the Latino Cultural Studies Working Group, which did ethnographic work in five states, as well as by political scientists like Omar Encarnación working in Latin America and Manuel Castells working all over the globe reveal similar findings. These empirical findings of diverse political outcomes from identity based political organizing clearly suggest that we need a better account of the nature of identity itself than the sorts of accounts one finds among the critics. Strongly-felt identities *in reality* do not uniformly lead to the political disasters the critics portend because identities *in reality* are not what the critics understand them to be. Social identities can and sometimes do operate as interest groups, but that is not what identities essentially are. Given this, what we need is not a *global or general* repudiation of identity and identity politics, but an analysis of *when* identity based movements become dysfunctionally narrow and conformist, under what conditions and in what contexts, rather than assuming an inevitable logic of identity.

We might define identities more insightfully as positioned or located lived experiences in which both individuals and groups work to construct meaning in relation to historical experience and historical narratives. For example, Satya Mohanty has argued that identity constructions provide narratives that explain the links between group historical memory and individual contemporary experience, that they create unifying frames for rendering experience intelligible, and thus help to map the social world.⁹ Identity designations are like small theories whose adequacy to experience can be judged, tested, and evaluated.

Thus, identities are not lived as a discrete and stable set of interests with determinate political implications, but as a site in which one has ties to historical communities and events and from which one engages in the process of meaning-making and thus from which one is open to the world. To the extent that identities involve *meaning-making*, there will always be alternative interpretations of the meanings associated with identity. And yet, the self operates in a situated plane that can be culturally located with great specificity even as it is open onto an indeterminate future and a reinterpretable past, not of its own creation. The self carries with it always this horizon of experience and history as a specific location, with substantive content—as, for example, a specifiable relation to the holocaust, to slavery, to the 1492 *encuentro*, and so on—but whose content only exists in interpretation and in constant motion.

There is also an important epistemic implication of identity. In stratified societies, differently-identified individuals do not always have the same access to points of view or perceptual planes of observation from which certain aspects or layers of reality are readily visible. Two individuals may participate in the same event, but have access to different aspects of that event. Social identity is relevant to epistemic judgment, then, not because identity determines judgment but

because identity can in some instances yield access to perceptual facts that themselves may be relevant to the formulation of various knowledge claims. Social identity operates then as a rough and fallible but useful indicator of differences in perceptual access.

This kind of hermeneutic descriptive account of social identities is more true to lived experience and more helpful in illuminating their real epistemic and political implications than the theory that identities are scripts that circumscribe our freedom, or the notion that identities are simply top-down enforcements of power. And with this approach we can now see that, as a located opening out onto the world, different identities have no *a priori* conflict. Aspects of horizons are naturally shared across different positions, and no aspect comes with a stable ready-made set of political views. What is shared within a horizon is having to address in some way, even if it is by flight, the historical situatedness and accompanying historical experiences of a given identity group to which one has some concrete attachment. Because of this, and because identities mark social position, the epistemic differences between identities are not best understood as correlated to differences of knowledge, since knowledge is always the product in part of background assumptions and values that are not generally grouped by identity categories. Rather, the epistemic difference is in, so to speak, what one can see, from one's vantage point. What one can see underdetermines knowledge or the articulation of interests, but the correlation between possibilities of perception and identity mandates the necessity of taking identity into account in formulating decision making bodies or knowledge producing institutions.

3. Conclusion

Enrique Dussel and Sylvia Wynter rightly invoke the need for a new epistemology of liberation. I have argued that this new epistemology must be able to address truth and the normative project of improving the production of knowledges. Moreover, the normative project itself requires a rearticulation of the relationship between identity and knowledge, such as I have suggested. If we are to establish that social position makes an epistemically relevant difference, we must be able to articulate why and how this can be so. I want to conclude by returning again to the need for a new liberatory lexicon.

The most important legacy of the so-called new social movements for the academy was the wave of demands for diversity. No longer could liberation be formulated in the name of a single, homogeneous class. Within the academy, these movements took the form of demands for a liberatory scholarship that would be produced through the creation and institutionalization of programs of inquiry in women's and gender studies, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender studies, racial and ethnic studies, post-colonial studies, and, more recently, disability studies. The omission and distortion of scholarship on these large areas of human experience required a reform that would take disciplinary and institutional forms, including the creation of new methodologies of inquiry.

What we have witnessed in the past two decades, however, has been a slow erosion of the discourse that grounded the demands for these new areas of study. That is, the intellectual basis for

the demand to decolonize the academy has been eroded by skeptical, postmodern philosophies that have called into question the founding terms such as humanism, identity, progress, truth, and liberation. Postmodernism is a movement that I would credit with opening up new ways to diagnose the causes of oppression and to critique domination, but it has also resulted, particularly in the humanities, in a demoralization and confusion about what unites our diverse constituencies, what language we can use to make demands, and what vision we are working toward, just as it has called into question the ability to invoke any “we” here at all.

I believe we need today to re-invoke that “we” that would include all groups targeted by identity based forms of oppression. And we need to consider on what intellectual and political grounds we can responsibly base our alliance and plausibly formulate a united agenda for academic work once again. This cannot be based on a return to the theoretical naïveté of the 60s. Rather, we need new articulations of identities and knowledges, articulations with greater historicist and contextual reflexivity, but articulations which can explain why decolonization has not yet been achieved in the academy, why it is even of legitimate *scholarly and epistemic* concern, and how, concretely, we can revise and reform our epistemologies in time for the next uprising.

Notes

¹ Some such discussions have occurred in the philosophy of the social sciences, on the debates over rationality across cultures, for example. These discussions have noted the difficulty in coming up with universal standards, but have generally not attempted a genealogy or diagnostics of western epistemic assumptions.

² Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004): 226.

³ Latour’s own reconstructive proposals are, in my view, vague and underdeveloped, but he is right to point out that we need to be able to make serious, and not merely strategic, truth claims.

⁴ Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the “Postsocialist” Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997): 31.

⁵ Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003): 35.

⁶ Mario Barrera, *Race and Class in the Southwest: A Theory of Racial Inequality* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979): 212.

⁷ Michael C. Dawson, *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), and Daniel Holliman, and Robert A. Brown, “‘A Nation within a Nation’: Racial Identity, Self-Help, and African American Economic Attitudes at the End of the Twentieth Century”, Paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., 1997.

⁸ José E. Cruz, *Identity and Power: Puerto Rican Politics and the Challenge of Ethnicity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998): 6.

⁹ Satya Mohanty, *Literary Theory and the Claims of History* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997).

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