

Decolonizing Migration Studies: A Chicanx Studies Perspective and Critique of Colonial Sociological Origins

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ABSTRACT

Sociological research on international migration shares a fundamental question: What underlining forces drive migration? Sociologists use a number of theories such as neoclassical economics, new economics of migration, network theory, segmented labor market theory, and world systems theory among others to untangle the complexities of individual and group migration patterns. These theoretical propositions, and the methodological applications that are informed by them, are colonial in their epistemic origins and assumptions. Explored in this paper are the assumptions, limitations, and the epistemic privileging within westernized migration studies and sociology. Chicanx Studies systematically addresses this question by confronting colonization's impact on how we temporarily study, measure, and analyze human behavior including migration. Moreover, the discipline works to humanize Chicanx populations and their historic migratory life ways. For borderland theorist Gloria Anzaldúa the underling force that drives Chicanx and Mexican migration is their ontological and epistemological connection to their indigenous tradition of "long walks" across recent politicized borders. Her work contributes to migration studies' lack of epistemic diversity and also gives insight to the historical relationship Chicanxs have with migratory practices to other parts of the U.S. beyond the Southwest.

KEY TERMS: *Chicanx Migration, Borderlands, Decoloniality, Colonialism*

Introduction

There is little debate concerning the societal impact colonization had and continues to have in the Americas. Beginning in the late 15th century, European colonization imposed new geopolitical identities, racial and cultural hierarchies, and attempted to suppress Indigenous cosmologies and ontologies. For Mexico, this process was well underway after the political conquest of Tenochtitlan in 1521. Perhaps one of the most violent acts of colonialism is what Sociologist Ramon Grosfoguel (2013) calls "epistemicide," or the extermination of knowledge and ways of knowing. As social scientists, we have to seriously consider the colonial history of scientific inquiry and its relationship with modernity. This paper recognizes and addresses western colonial epistemological projects in the Americas and their relationship to knowledge production. It gives particular attention to how the relationship between modernity and knowledge production affect our understanding of Mexican and Chicanx migratory life ways within the context of migration studies.

Mexican migration to the US Southwest does not begin in 1848, as commonly estimated in migration narratives. The origins of contemporary Mexican migration extend to pre-colonial routes carved out by multi-cultural Indigenous peoples. Resisting the conceptualization of Mexican migration as a recent nation-state phenomenon is in itself an intentional act to decolonize migration studies. From this perspective, unauthorized migration from Mexico into the U.S. can be understood as acts of resistance, as rebels, as Shadow-Beast.

Sociological and migration studies do not prioritize pre-colonial migratory practices by people of Mexican

descent. Instead, theories such as neoclassical economics, new economics of migrations, network theory, segmented labor market theory, and world-systems theory among others are given preference to engage the complexities of individual and group migration patterns. These theoretical frameworks, and the methodological applications that are informed by them, are colonial in their epistemic origins. I argue that this segmented group of theories and perspectives limits our understanding of the intentionality behind Chicana migratory lifeways. In addition, they fall into a nation-state temporal trap in which migration is seen as a recent phenomenon. How does our analysis shift when we unfold the historical and cultural conditions under which sociological theories of migration were produced? How do these conditions inform our theoretical understanding of migration for a group of people Indigenous to the Americas? Finally, where do Chicana epistemologies fit within this analytical shift?

Chicana Studies provides some guiding thoughts to consider as the discipline takes up these questions if taken from a decolonial approach. While the intellectual genealogy of Chicana Studies is broad, one of its common political objectives is to systematically address colonialism's impact on how we study, measure, analyze, and represent Chicana social life, particularly in matters of migration. Moreover, Chicana Studies works to (re)humanize colonial subjectivities caught in the "flows" of migration. It also shifts away from elitist epistemologies so that other "knowers" are acknowledged as experts in migration. This paper engages borderland theorist Gloria Anzaldúa's (1983) idea of "long walks" as migratory practices for Chicanas and Mexican descendants before the creation of nation-state borders. For Anzaldúa, the underling force that drives Chicana and Mexican migration is their ontological and epistemological connection to their indigenous traditions.

I first begin by outlining the origins of sociology and its relationship to western modernity and imperial expansion. Secondly, I provide a snapshot of the most widely accepted colonial frameworks used in migration studies literature. I then introduce the key characteristics of the coloniality/modernity framework as they relate to Chicana migration and challenge colonial frameworks. I conclude with a call for Chicana epistemologies as both appropriate and necessary towards conceptualizing Mexican and Chicana migration in the borderlands and a step towards decolonizing migration studies.

What's Empire got to do with it?

The relationship between imperial expansion and western modernity as historical processes needs to be explored as we think about the origins of sociology and its role in interpreting human group behavior and more specifically migration. Bhambra (2011) posits that the sociological understanding of modernity typically rests on ideas of the modern world emerging out of the processes of economic and political revolution located in Europe and underpinned in the cultural changes brought about by the Renaissance, Reformation, and Scientific Revolution. As Walter Dignolo (2005) asserts, the history of capitalism and "the history of Western epistemology, as it has been constructed since the European Renaissance, run parallel to and complement each other" (p. 227). It is this complementary relationship that contributes to the epistemic privileging of migration theories that dominate the way scholars have engaged the historical and contemporary movement of Chicanas in the U.S.

For example, classical sociology, as Stephen Seidman (2011) argues, emerged in the context of imperial states aspiring to world empires. From this historical position, modernity serves as the structuring mode of knowledge as it is the leading framework for migration studies. Overlapping with this argument is the view that knowledge produced in Europe and the United States is authoritative in nature and "universal" in application to all human phenomenon worldwide. This colonial logic was applied and further developed in the Americas as its geography and people, Indigenous and African, became the first identities of Modernity (Quijano, 2008). Emphasized here is the need not only for the expansion and exploitation of land but an epistemological subjugation of the peoples from that conquered space. The tools, logics, and philosophical views long held by migrant communities were no longer driven by priest, cross, and bible. Instead instrumental rationality became the replacing order of knowledge and knowledge production. European colonial expansion made these processes and intellectual projects possible.

Seidman (2011) found that thinkers such as Marx, Durkheim, and Weber did not incorporate the dynamic

of empire into their historical sociology. This exclusion is quite unfortunate and a missed opportunity as empire building was at the center of the making and organizing of modernity, a concept central to the discipline of sociology. The materialist philosophy of Marx makes an insufficient effort to include the displacement of Indigenous peoples across the Americas or the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in relation to the development of industrialized societies and capitalism. In ignoring the historical significance of empire, displacement, and enslavement, what is left is a considerably porous understanding of human relationships between colonized and colonizer. The implications of dismissing the historical role of western “universal” frameworks have negative consequences for both Mexican and Chicanx communities in the United States.

As a reminder, colonization was based on perceived ethnic and epistemic superiority. Not only were Indigenous bodies subject to colonial forces but also subjectivities. Internalizing the European cultural imaginary via violent colonial assimilation practices was a critical component of colonial projects across the Americas. Castro-Gómez (2008) points out that the European cultural imaginary perpetuated the idea that the only way of relating to nature, the social world, and our own subjectivities is through a narrow, Europeanized lens. Colonial logics presuppose the idea that racialized subjectivities could not think for themselves, let alone create knowledge. European philosophers who claim to have ownership over the creation of sociology made little to no effort to engage the minds and world views of those most adversely affected by colonial legacies in their development of the social science aimed to explain social human relationships. The epistemic exclusion of Indigenous knowledge in migration studies further neglects the idea that Chicanx and Mexican migrant communities are foreign in the land space of their historic migratory routes.

Indigenous migratory patterns established prior to and during the onset of Spanish empire building have yet to be fully engaged by classically trained sociologists. The employment of a deeper historical analysis of Mexican migration not only strengthens the field of migration studies but also works to humanize the diverse mestizo and Indigenous communities that make up the Chicanx population in the U.S. Additionally, recognizing migratory life ways from the perspective of Chicanx and Indigenous scholars is necessary towards breaking away from a nation state centered temporal trap as commonly seen in colonial sociological theories of migration.

The Temporal Trap of Migration Theories

Efforts towards decolonizing migration studies must take into account the histories that supersede the establishment of the nation state. For many sociologists (Portes & Rubaut, 2014; Massey, et. al 1994; Brettel & Hollofield 2013) the study of migration begins at the inception of the nation state. This historical ‘jumping off point’, or what I call the temporal trap of migration theories dominates the temporal location within migration studies. So long as this historical moment takes priority, the antecedents to more ancient migrations remain buried under the thick coat of modernity. Only after the world's territory became organized into states with internationally recognized boundaries did the distinction between internal and international migration emerge (Kritz, 2007). This temporal trap severs generations of cross-cultural exchange among the various Indigenous peoples moving across what we now call the US–Mexico borderlands.

The following scholars in this section subscribe to this nation state centered temporal trap and reproduce a what Grosfoguel (2014) identifies as a “northern-centric” social science view of the world. The intention here is to demonstrate how the temporal trap has been central to the most widely accepted social scientific theories of migration by colonialist thinkers. Migration theories fall under four general categories: Sociological, Economic, Geographical, and Unifying (See Figure 1, pg. 25). Each category is responsible for measuring the cause, content, and consequences of immigration. Regardless of their disciplinary home, however, the larger structuring frame for these theories are embedded in European modernity.

Sociologist Stephen Castles (2014), in his chapter titled “Theories of Migration,” concludes with a synthesis of arguments that support what he claims to be “the most important migration theories” (p.51). Migrant epistemologies within these theoretical propositions, however, are neither centered or considered as the “most important” components of theorizing their own experiences. His central arguments are as follows.

First, migration should be conceptualized as an intrinsic part of broader processes of development, social transformation, and globalization. Second, migration processes have internal dynamics based on social networks that are a testimony to the agency of migrants. Third, although migrants have access to limited forms of agency, we should not ignore the multiple political and social processes that constrain migrants. Last, insights from various theories operate at different levels of analysis and focus on different aspects of migration (Castles, 2014, p.51-52). All four points are conceptualized through a nation-state-centered lens with little to no context on colonial histories of social exclusion of Indigenous communities across the Americas. Furthermore, the effort to include the relationship between Chicana and Indigenous communities along the southwest as part of the broader process of development, social transformation, and globalization are absent.

The colonialist framework above also prescribes the identity of “foreign citizens” for migrants and juxtaposes this identity against “native born” citizens. The temporal trap here is exemplified in the form of generational citizenship and its designation of who belongs within the nation-state borders and who is still condemned to the periphery. Additionally, the “native born” category used in migration scholarship gives claim to nation state ownership by white European descendants. This issue of nativity and belonging is raised by Anzálúa in her idea of *fronteras* as a mechanism that is set up to distinguish “us” and “them.” The use of categories such as “native born” is an example of how temporality is used in the social sciences and sociology to distinguish European migration to the U.S. as the foundational point of reference for current distinctions of who is considered to be “foreign.”

Still, the most prominent scholars who have employed this colonialist framework on Mexican migration to the U.S. have taken these arguments as a central guide to understanding both macro and micro motivations for migration. For example, the seminal work of Douglas Massey (1994) on Mexican migration has sought to provide a basis for evaluating the various empirical models and to lay the groundwork for constructing an accurate and comprehensive theory of international migration for the twenty-first century. Similar to Castles, Massey (1994) provides a topography for migration theories. Examples include neoclassical economics, which focus on differentials wages and employment conditions between countries and on migration cost. Another is the new economics of migration:

“this theory considers conditions in a variety of markets not just labor markets including household decisions taken to minimize risks to family income. Lastly, dual labor market theory links immigration to the structural requirements of modern industrial economies, while world system theory sees immigration as a natural consequence of economic globalization and market penetration cross national boundaries” (Massey, 1994, p.432).

Together with Castles, these theories have been granted authority among migration scholars to the neglect of Chicana and Indigenous knowledge systems.

While migration is an inherent part of the process of development and other social-political processes, most of these theories do not adequately interrogate their relationship to colonialism. The constraints of migrants on migrant agency and the differential wages and employment conditions did not materialize in a neutral way but a rather violent one. As abolitionist Ruth Gilmore (2016) puts it, modern industrial economies are the result of “racial capitalism.” Only world-systems theory positions migration as a result of the first major cross Atlantic modern migrations by Europeans to the Americas. Unfortunately, colonialist migration theories rarely, if ever, account for the ontological tradition of Indigenous migration within the land space that we now recognize as the U.S. southwest and northern Mexican borderlands.

Other migration scholars have provided a more nuanced approach to recognize the gendered (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Karjanen, 2008), racial and ethnic (Bonilla-Silva, 2008; Chambram, 1997; Feagin, 2016; Jimenez, 2008) experiences of Latino migration within the social structure of the U.S. The fact remains, however, that these social scientists continue to conceptualize within the dominant theoretical models specified above, which result in further reproduction of the colonized epistemology in question. Out of epistemological necessity, Non-western subjects in academic spaces create their own disciplinary homes to challenge the myths of “universality” and modernity. Chicana Studies is one of those intellectual spaces.

Resisting the temporal trap is necessary and a possible step towards decolonizing migration studies.

Diversifying Ways of Knowing

Traditional disciplines such as sociology can benefit from reaching beyond Europe for their theoretical borders. This is important for at least two reasons. One is so that social scientists do not collapse migration within one universal structure of knowledge. This is not to say that they should not come to agree on one encompassing theory of migration, but rather that they should stay clear of monopolizing knowledge from a European standpoint. Secondly, doing so is dangerous because of the potential (re) creation of categories that subordinate migrating communities into simple variable. As Saldaña-Portillo (2016) explains, too often the birth of humanism is narrated as a northern European development of the Enlightenment and dismisses the histories and knowledge of migrant communities.

Within Mexican and Chicax communities, we have seen how anthropologist, sociologist, political scientist and others have dehumanized and reduced our experiences to plot lines on graphs. These are two reasons that scholars outside of ‘traditional’ and colonizing disciplines have sought to decolonize western knowledge systems. Chicax Studies and other ethnic studies disciplines recognize the need to diversify ways of knowing. In doing so, it disrupts Eurocentric versions of reality that distort the ontology of cultural groups. We must first ask, how did we reach this epistemological moment? The following sub-section will provide a deeper contextualization of how modernity shapes/dominates worldviews and epistemologies. Additionally, it will clarify the coloniality/modernity conceptual framework for the study of migration.

The Coloniality of Knowing and Knowledge Production

This sub-section broadly highlights the relationship between coloniality/modernity, empire, and their centrality for the development of sociology. Linking these concepts to the discipline of sociology reveals some of the hidden assumptions, limitations, and epistemic privileging in the study of migration. For Chicaxs, our narratives of migratory movement in our ancestral continent has been swept into the logic of western epistemologies. First, there are some key characteristics of coloniality and modernity that we must consider.

Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) refers to coloniality as “the long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations” (p.243). For Maldonado, coloniality is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. Coloniality successfully outlives formal colonialism because of the nature in which colonialism rooted systematic structures, such as universities and schools, in an effort to subjugate any other form of knowledge outside of European rationality. Coloniality is essentially interested in the relationship between knowledge and power.

Modernity, on the other hand, is assumed to be the apex of civilization and humanity. To be modern is to be enlightened, rational, and human. This concept is rooted in western philosophy and has come to define our cultural norms. One important aspect of modernity is how it has been used to define those who possess knowledge. More importantly it also defines who possesses humanity. In linking both knowledge and humanness modernity has violently separated Chicaxs from their sense of self, cultural identities, and their ancestral migratory routes in the Americas. Decolonial scholars examine coloniality and modernity in relation to one another.

Similarly, Arturo Escobar (2007) engages the relationship between coloniality and modernity and provides a conceptual guide that presupposes a series of postulations that distinguish coloniality from established theories of modernity:

“(1) There is an emphasis on locating the origin of modernity with the conquest of the Americas and control of the Atlantic after 1492; (2) a persistent attention to colonialism and the making of the

capitalist world system as constitutive of modernity; (3) the adoption of a world perspective in the explanation of modernity, in lieu of a view of modernity as an intra-European phenomena (Vacuum effect); (4) the identification of the domination of others outside the European core as a necessary dimension of modernity; (5) Eurocentricism as the knowledge form of modernity/coloniality” (p.184).

Colonialist migration theories migration fail to center these propositions as they relate to the way we study Mexican migration to the U.S. or Chicana peoples’ legacies of migration.

Take for example Escobar’s first proposition about the emphasis to locate the origin of modernity, conquest, and control. The conquest of the Mexica empire began in the Gulf Coast region, home to the Huasteco and Totonac people. The Spanish interfered with their previously established migratory routes to the interior regions of Anahuac (Mesoamerica) as these routes became controlled for the purposes of transporting coffee, tobacco, sugar, and minerals to the shores of Andalusia, Spain. Conquest also involved the violently imposition of Catholicism that disrupted Huasteco and Totonac cultural autonomy to practice their religion freely and their relationship to land. Modernity’s ordering of Indigenous society brought new conditions for forced migration that included the enslavement of Indigenous peoples. This enslavement process redistributed Totonac people to the Caribbean and Arawak Indigenous people to the Mexican Gulf Coast. The redistribution, reorganization, and dehumanization process were all instrumental in the conquest of Indigenous territories. Additionally, the logic of modernity also provided the condition and rationale for the importation of enslaved Africans to Mexico.

Other scholars, like Walter D. Mignolo (2005), emphasize Escobar’s second and third propositions by claiming coloniality as the darker side of modernity. For him, both coloniality and modernity are opposite sides of the same coin reinforcing one another. Mignolo (2005) asserts that one cannot be modern without being colonial; and if you are on the colonial side of the spectrum you have to transact with modernity—you cannot ignore it. Coloniality is thus interconnected with European expansion beginning in the late 15th century. It refers to the logical structure of colonial domination underlying the Spanish, Dutch, British, and U.S control of the Atlantic economy and politics, and from there the control and management of almost the entire planet. In each of the particular imperial periods of colonialism the same logic was maintained; only power changed hands (Mignolo, 2005). As Escobar (2007) points out, modernity did not come to existence via an intra-European phenomenon or vacuum effect. The ‘modernization’ of Europe would not have become a reality without colonial expansion in the Americas, the extraction of land and mineral resources, and the creation of a new world economy based on a racial division of labor.

Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano (2007) agrees with Mignolo, Escobar, and Maldonado-Torres in so far as their understanding that coloniality is still the most general form of domination in the world today once colonialism, as an explicit political order, was destroyed. For Quijano (2007), coloniality of power was conceived together with America and Western Europe, and with the social category of ‘race’ as the key element of the social classification of colonized and colonizers. New social identities were prescribed all over the world: whites, Indians, Negroes, yellows, olives, using physiognomic traits of the peoples as external manifestations of their ‘racial’ nature. Thus, race becomes a critical social marker of belonging in the modern colonial world’s economic and cultural system. Without considering these historical realities as we study the movement and migration of human beings we will continue to have an incomplete picture of what it means to migrate for different cultural groups.

Very few sociologists have ventured to critique the racism that is inherent to the colonial epistemologies produced in migration studies. However, Puerto Rican sociologist Ramon Grosfoguel (2014) emphasizes that “epistemic racism refers to a hierarchy of colonial domination whereby knowledge produced by Western subjects within the ‘zone of being’ are considered to be superior to the knowledge produced by non-western colonial subjects in the ‘zone of non-being.’” The power relationship between Western migration intellectuals, such as Massey, and Mexican migrant communities are asymmetrical in their agency to produce a narrative of and about Mexican migration to the U.S. Without the recognition of the inherent nature of this relationship, as noted by Grosfoguel, colonial epistemologies simply go unchallenged and normalized under the guise of objectivity and science. Decolonizing migration studies takes up the challenge to historicize the development of the colonial world-views imposed on migrating Mexican and Chicana communities and provide a critique of colonial epistemologies.

Decolonizing as Process

“We have a tradition of migration, a tradition of long walks. Today we are witnessing la migracion de los pueblos mexicanos, the return odyssey to the historical/mythological Aztlán. This time, the traffic is from south to north.” – Gloria Anzaldúa

Decolonization as a process is an intentional resistance to the forces of colonialism that perpetuate the subjugation and exploitation of our minds, bodies, and lands. It is engagement for the ultimate purpose of overturning colonial structure and realizing Indigenous liberation. The quote above is a reclamation of both social and territorial social space. Anzaldúa notes the antecedent migratory caminos commonly undervalued in migration narratives concerning the multi-cultural Indigenous peoples of the Southwest and Mexican interior. The temporal trap is avoided in her consideration of migration as a social act that extends beyond the nation-state era. This act is in itself an intentional act to decolonize migration studies. From this perspective, migrants labeled as unauthorized citizens are the Shadow-Beasts of a nation-state centered on settler colonialism.

Decolonization as a process shifts the conversation of immigration reform to one of Chicax autonomy and their broader relationship with Indigenous land sovereignty for the multiple tribal communities in the U.S. According to American Indian scholar Dylan Miner (2014), Chicax exist within the U.S. land space as the largest detribalized diasporic communities. If we view Chicax as aboriginal people to what is now parts of the U.S. political territory, we cease to “foreignize” people of Mexican descent in lands where their ancestors have migrated for millennia. George Hartly (2012), mentions that Chicax Indigeneity provides us with a hinge concept for sorting out the various lines of colonial hegemony in North America and thus for conceptualizing Indigeneity outside of colonialist boundaries and colonial logics.

We see this decolonial strategy reflected within Anzaldúa’s quote above. What she provides in this short, yet impactful statement is the intentionality of Indigenous Chicax’s migratory systems. It is an assertion to the ontological question of migration to and from the mythical site of Aztlán. Colonial logics renamed Aztlán to Nueva España and then again as the states of Arizona, Colorado, California, and New Mexico. In doing so it also separated the multiple Indigenous communities that shared space in what is now the states of Baja California del Norte, Sonora, and Chihuahua. As Hartly (2012) recalls, the U.S.-Mexican border “ends up not simply dividing Mexicans into two different national groups on either side of the border but at the same time dividing Mexicans from native peoples in the newly expanded United States” (p. 58). Renaming space, time, and identities is one of the many violent acts of colonialism and modernity. Anzaldúa (re)claims of our existence along the borderlands and into the interiors of both nation-states with her acknowledgment of long-walks as a Chicax ontological practice.

In her second chapter of *Borderlands/La Frontera* she writes, “What we are suffering from is an absolute despot duality that says we are able to be only one or the other. It claims that human nature is limited and cannot evolve into something better” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 19). Similar to the physical/political border, Chicax people have internalized the message of western modernity that indicates that they can only be assigned to one identity at a time. Mexican or American Immigrant or Indigenous. Through her writing we find epistemic moments that disrupts the assertions of western modernity. For example, Anzaldúa (1987) states, “This land was Mexican once, was Indian always and is. And will be again” (p. 3). Somos atravesados in the sense of the spaces where we live, the borders that we cross, and the modes in which we think. In this case as decolonial thinkers and theorists we become epistemic atravesados.

Unlike the sociological theorist mentioned above, Anzaldúa does not fall into the temporal trap of the nation-state in relation to the migratory life ways of Mexican and Chicax peoples. She mentions that the migration of these peoples from Aztlán to central Mexico begins before the colonial era around the year A.D. 820 (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 37). By extending our memory of migration back to the 9th century, Anzaldúa creates temporal space linking Chicax to their Indigenous conocimiento of what it means to migrate. Our history and civilization does not begin with the arrival of Europeans. In the same spirit, our humanity didn’t end at their arrival either.

Additionally, she critiques western epistemologies’ claims to “objectivity.” In her chapter titled “Entering

the Serpent” she states, “In trying to become ‘objective’, Western culture made ‘objects’ of things and people when it distanced itself from them, thereby losing ‘touch’ with them” (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 37). Anzaldúa thus raises our awareness of both objectivity and time as two significant elements of modernity. How then do we continue to push back on these deeply embedded “scientific” ideas? One significant way is through art.

Through this form of cultural expression, Chicanxs have created transformational spaces of education and self-determination. Art is often one of the most accessible forms of cultural resistance and recreation through our own imaginaries. These imaginaries are informed by our particular communities’ epistemologies. For Chicanx, lowriding has been framed by western ideologies as a delinquent act tied to Cholos, Pachucos, and Vatos. These very terms have also been reconfigured in their meaning(s) as markers of criminality. However, Dylan Miner (2014) subverts these racialized and incorrect views. He connects lowriding to a much older traditional practice set by our ancestors that involves moving slowly from one place to another establishing deep roots along the way. With a firm understanding of settler-colonialism as a political project that unsettles multiple Indigenous populations in the Americas, Miner uses low riding as an expression of Chicanx ontological practice to bridge aboriginal communities along the U.S.-Canadian border with Chicanx diasporic communities.

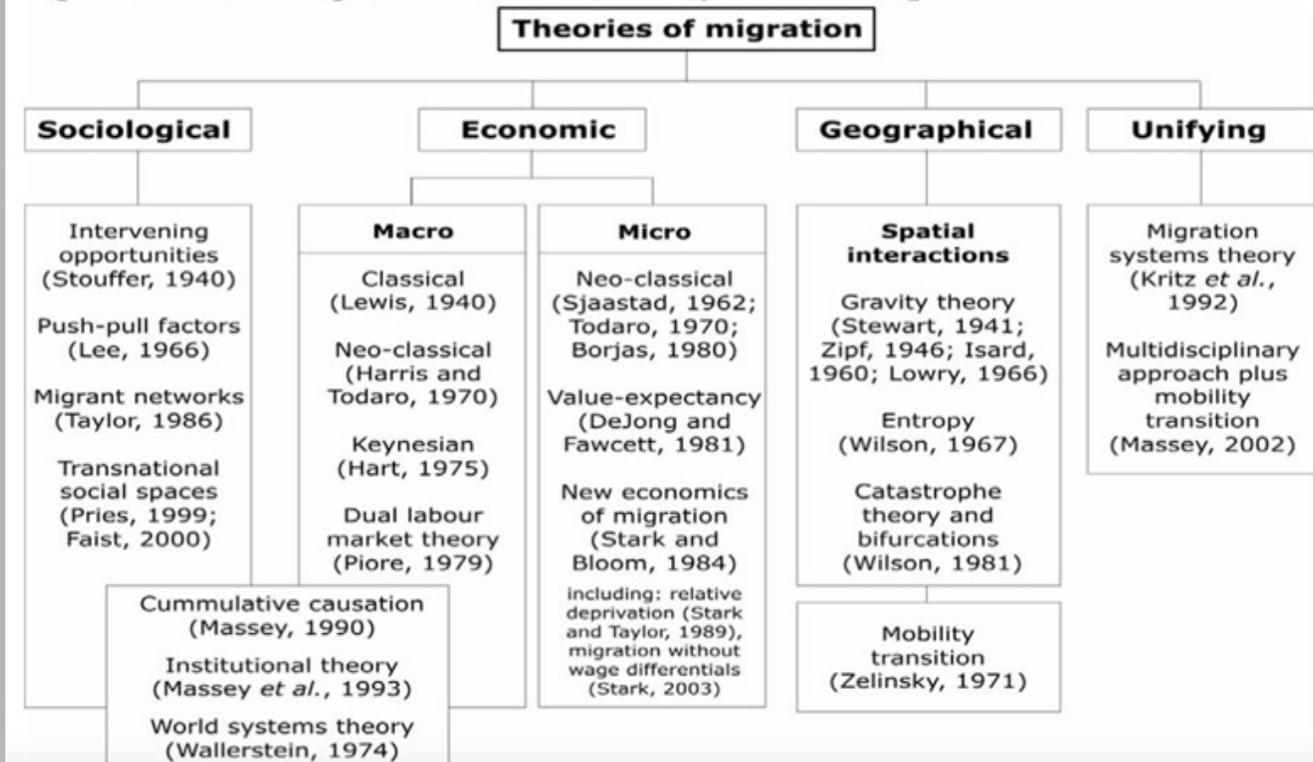
He reaffirms the “tradition of long walks” as proposed by Anzaldúa in the opening quote. Miner (2014) mentions that Chicanx art [and lowriding] is a unique philosophical modality that proposes new ways of being in the world that is linked to older forms of Indigeneity. He engages the art of slow movement as a metaphor that repositions various temporalities and delinks from traditional western accounts of linear histories. By doing so, Miner synchronizes pre-colonial, colonial, and contemporary ontologies that inform Chicanx peoples’ decision to migrate. Both Miner and Anzaldúa occupy in epistemic territories within the academy in order to (re)conceptualize what Fanon refers to as a new humanism. Decolonial thinkers and practitioners emphasize Fanons’ concept in order to create new ways of being, knowing and doing.

Traditional sociologists have failed to account for what Anzaldúa (1984) claims as an indigenous “return” to the place of origin, Aztlán, thus making Chicanx originally and secondarily Indigenous to the Southwest. If we consider the contemporary practices of low riding and accounts by Chicanx feminist scholars, we get a much broader and deeper conceptualization of what it means to move from place to place for people of Mexican descent. Migration studies can begin to open ground for epistemic shifts should they begin to consider these historical trajectories that pre-date the U.S.-Mexico border.

Are we as Chicanxs a migrating people? Yes. Are we “new immigrants” in the U.S.? No. If we can say that “Chicanx are indigenous to Mexico but not the United States, we immediately run into the problem of determining which historical boundaries of either state we are using to determine such national (and epistemological) claims” (George Hartly, 2012, p. 56). As Bettina Ng’Weno (2012) asserts, “Indigeneity provides a space for autonomy and for control over community and territory” (p. 202). Furthermore, Miner (2014) deepens our conceptualization of Indigeneity as an active cultural category that represents the inextinguishable right of Indigenous peoples to self-determine who they are, how they govern themselves, and how they define their own knowledge and aesthetic systems. Migration studies as a field has an opportunity to reevaluate the conversation of and about (im)migration, international spatial and temporal borders, and migrant labeling especially as they relate to Mexican and Chicanx people.

One aspect that migration studies rarely considers is that “migrants do not arrive in an empty neutral space, but in metropolitan spaces that are already ‘polluted’ by racial power relations with long colonial history, colonial imaginary, colonial knowledge and ethnic/racial hierarchies linked to a history of empire” (Grosfoguel, 2014, p. 7). When this history is considered it is often a marginal comment and decentralized from the analysis. If migration studies continue along the same modernistic path of dismissing Chicanx epistemologies there will be very little room for transformational possibilities.

Envisioning liberation of detribalized Indigenous Chicanxs begins by just that, envisioning it. Shifting away from referencing Mexican and Mexican descendants as foreign populations in the U.S. can have profound effects on how future generations understand their history of migration. Chicanx scholarship has to be taken seriously as an intellectual project if we are to heal the damage caused by modernity and coloniality at every personal and institutional level.

Figure 1. Selected migration theories offered by various disciplines of science

Conclusion

Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2011) reminds us that decolonial thought does not refer to a single theoretical school, but rather points to a family of diverse positions that share a view that coloniality is a fundamental problem in the modern age. Decolonizing migration studies will not come at the cost of abandoning the useful sociological tools that are widely used today but rather to balance the asymmetrical power relationships between knowledge production and the institutions that structure it. To decolonize is to delink from an understanding that conflates Europe with modernity and renders the process of becoming modern (Bhambra, 2011). Scholars invested in understanding Mexican migration cannot simply ignore the colonizer/colonized relationship steeped in academic tradition. This is in fact violent epistemic privileging. Shahjahan (2012) points out that “transformational resistance is a proactive effort to transform colonizer/colonized subjectivity, colonial discourses and material structures” (p.220). Transformational resistance affords multiple non-hierarchical epistemologies to coexist and recognition of others as full human beings. It is a mutual respect of cosmologies, languages, and epistemologies. These are some fundamental characteristics of decolonizing migration studies.

The decolonial process cannot occur without first recognizing the colonial legacies embedded in the social sciences and beyond. The fact remains that Chicana scholars understood their colonial situation and continue to understand their positionality in relation to U.S. cultural, political, and social hegemony. Los pueblos Mexicanos will continue to migrate in their ancestral territories. Will the social sciences continue to name this population “immigrants” and reinforce the idea that they are a foreign population? One can work intentionally to correct these epistemic fallacies and continue to challenge the coloniality of power that legitimizes these false narratives of Chicanas.

Lastly, Fernando Coronil (1998) with a persistent eye on (post) modern forms of empire writes; “Imperial-subaltern encounters occur in social landscapes structured by differing modes of exploiting nature and labor.

The social identities formed in these landscapes cannot be analyzed without reference to these forms of exploitation.” This solidifies once more the estranged encounters and relationship between scholarship and community. However, what is important here is our ability to reenvision these social landscapes via art, by retelling of our migratory narratives, by low riding, and claiming our indigenous ancestry to this colonial space.

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