Border Thinking, Minoritized Studies, and Realist Interpellations: The Coloniality of Power from Gloria Anzaldúa to Arundhati Roy

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Literature follows great social changes—. . . it always ‘comes after’. To come after, however, does not mean to repeat (‘reflect’) what already exists, but the exact opposite: to resolve the problems set by history.

Franco Moretti, Modern Epic

Introduction

This essay has a somewhat sweeping character. It is a preliminary attempt to link pensamiento fronterizo (border thinking) in Chicano/a Studies and realist interpellations of the subject and the politics of reclaiming identity of this volume. Border thinking emerges from the critical reflections of (undocumented) immigrants, migrants, bracero/a workers, refugees, campesinos, women, and children on the major structures of dominance and subordination of our times. Thus envisaged, border thinking is the name for a new geopolitically located thinking or epistemology from both the internal and external borders of the modern (colonial) world-system.1 Border thinking is a necessary tool for thinking what the Peruvian historical social scientist Aníbal Quijano calls the “coloniality of power” and identity at the intersections (los intersticios) of our local histories and global designs.2

Quijano’s coloniality of power, I argue, can help us begin to account for the entangled relations of power between the global division of labor, racial and ethnic hierarchy, identity formation, and Eurocentric epistemologies. Moreover, the coloniality of power can help us trace the continuous forms of hegemonic dominance produced by colonial cultures and structures. As I use it, the coloniality of power is fundamentally a structuring process of racial identity, experience, and racial knowledge production articulating geopolitical locations and subaltern (minor) inscriptions.

L. M. Alcoff et al. (eds.), Identity Politics Reconsidered
My emphasis will be on late-twentieth-century postcolonial narratives (Chicano/a and South Asian) and early twenty-first century realist theories about identity, critical multiculturalism, and minoritized studies. So I'll begin by discussing three of the most important paradigms of minoritized study as forms of culture which have shared experiences by virtue of their antagonistic relationship to the hegemonic culture, which seeks to marginalize and interpellate them as minor. Then I will examine the issue of minoritized border thinking and languaging practices in Gloria Anzaldúa’s celebrated *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza.* Last, I will speculate on the issue of epistemic privilege and kinship trouble in Arundhati Roy’s Booker Prize-winning novel, *The God of Small Things.*

Why propose a cross-genealogical (U.S. Latino/a and South Asian) treatment of differently structured histories of border and diaspora identity and minoritized writing? I hope this will emerge as I go along, and indeed throughout this book (designed as it is by Satya Mohanty, Paula Moya, Michael Hames-García, and Linda Martín Alcoff to encourage in-depth, cross-cultural comparisons within the general field of minority studies in the United States). But I'll begin by asserting some of the potential meanings and nuances of the minor as they have appeared on the scene of U.S. postcolonial studies in the past fifteen years.

**The Politics of “Becoming Minor”**

In a landmark 1987 conference at the University of California, Berkeley, the literary theorists Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd called for a radical examination of the “nature and context of minority discourse.” JanMohamed and Lloyd were specifically interested in rethinking the relationship between a “minor literature” and the canonical literatures of the majority. Schematically put, Lloyd and JanMohamed’s theory and practice of minority discourse involves “drawing out solidarities in the forms of similarities between modes of repression and struggles that all minorities experience separately but precisely as minorities” (1990, 9). Their project of minority discourse fundamentally supplemented Deleuze and Guattari’s Eurocentered theorizing of a minor literature—a literature so termed by its “opposition to those which define canonical writing.” A minor literature entails for them “the questioning or destruction of the concept of identity and identification . . . and a profound suspicion of narratives of reconciliation and unification” (1990, 381). In other words, Lloyd and JanMohamed maintained that a “minority discourse should neither fall back on ethnicity or gender as an a priori essence nor rush into calculating some ‘nonhumanist’ celebration of diversity for its own sake” (1990, 9). While some realists might take issue with Lloyd and JanMohamed’s partial dismissal of the cognitive work of our identities and their overreliance on the Eurocentric work of Deleuze and Guattari (their erasure of the cognitive aspects of U.S. and other globalized racialized minority experiences and identities), the political project of minority discourse remains on target: “Becoming ‘minor,’ ” they write, “is not a question