# Decolonizing Radical Democracy

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# Contents

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# Abstract

This article explores some of the central challenges presented by decolonial thought to other critical, progressive, or emancipatory theories, especially theories of radical democracy. The article has two main aims. First it seeks to synthesize and highlight a number of key strands and interventions of contemporary decolonial thought. It does so through a reading of several decolonial literatures including the Latin American modernity/coloniality school, as well as research in Indigenous Studies and Settler Colonial Studies focused largely on the Anglo settler colonies of Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. Three key thematics of decolonial thought are drawn out and explicated in this survey: (1) modernity/coloniality, (2) land, and (3) ethico-political resurgences. The second aim is to show what kind of work is done by these decolonial interventions by using them to interrogate Chantal Mouffe's theory of radical democracy.

What kind of challenge and task is that of decolonization today? Despite the concept's wide circulation, its usages are highly varied, its distinctive commitments at times unclear, and its meanings contested. The relationship between decolonial and other critical or emancipatory struggles is particularly fraught, with progressives often trading on the radical connotation of decolonization while simultaneously eliding the radical content of its critique (Tuck and Yang, [2012]; Dhamoon, [2015]; Lawrence and Dua, [2005]; Byrd, [2011]). Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue that ''decolonization'' is regularly but wrongly treated as a synonym or metaphor for any and all liberal-left social justice projects: ''Decolonize (a verb) and decolonization (a noun) cannot easily be grafted onto pre-existing discourses/ frameworks, even if they are critical, even if they are anti-racist, even if they are justice frameworks'' ([2012], p. 3). Decolonization, they assert, is and should be deeply ''unsettling'' to progressive and critical forms of theory and praxis, as its claims and imperatives are to some degree incommensurable, or at least not easily reconcilable, with the latter. Not only does a decolonial politics interrogate existing political institutions and the land on which these institutions are built, but it disrupts prevailing forms of knowledge and normativity. As Arturo Escobar writes, ''the decolonial turn is also an epistemic turn, a turn toward different

configurations of knowledge, ones that would be linked, and contribute to, worlds and knowledges otherwise'' (2008a, p. 132).

Against this backdrop, what is to be made of the relationship between democracy – that great hallmark of progressive and emancipatory politics – and decolonization? In what ways does decolonization unsettle the project of democracy, including its more critical or radical forms? In this article, I will offer the beginnings of a response to these questions by providing an account – only one among many possible accounts, to be sure – of the contested terrain of contemporary decolonial thought, and by illustrating the kinds of interventions it makes in relation to a prominent theory of radical democracy. My aim, then, is twofold. First, I seek to highlight and synthesize a number of key concepts, thematics, and interventions found within contemporary decolonial thought. The various literatures that comprise this field are grounded in or aligned with the struggles of formally or informally colonized peoples for survival (both physical and cultural), land (and water), liberation, and well-being. Still, these bodies of work differ in their geographical foci, some of their main terminology, and many of their resulting emphases and claims. Perhaps as a result, even the decolonial literatures that are written in or translated into English are often not read together. While trying not to collapse the differences between them, I weave together decolonial writings situated in the Latin American school that Escobar refers to as ''the modernity/coloniality research program'' ([2007]), as well as in Indigenous Studies and Settler Colonial Studies focused largely on the Anglo settler colonies of Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. Alongside other complementary thinkers, I draw out from these literatures three central but inexhaustive thematics of decolonial thought, which I address under the labels (1) modernity/coloniality, (2) land, and (3) ethico-political resurgences. My second aim is to use each of these sets of interventions to interrogate one of the most well-known examples of critical democratic theory: Chantal Mouffe's theory of radical democracy.1

What is perhaps most interesting about Mouffe for my purposes here, and the reason for focusing on her theory of radical democracy, is that she is actually more attentive to the central themes and targets of decolonial thought than are most Western democratic theorists. Especially in her more recent work, Mouffe engages with decolonial themes, authors, and arguments, and is explicitly critical of imperialism, coloniality, liberal-democratic universalism, and meta-narratives of Westernization and modernization. Nonetheless, by examining Mouffean radical democracy alongside decolonial thought, I highlight a number of limitations of her approach with respect to decoloniality, as well as continuities and complicities of her approach with coloniality. Indeed, Mouffe's professed commitment to decolonial themes, and significant attempts to incorporate them, make it all the more important and revealing to trace the limitations and complicities of her work. In the end, I argue that Mouffean radical democracy does not in fact appear very radical when examined from the perspective of a decolonial politics, and is not at all easily reconcilable with such a politics.

# Modernity/Coloniality

A crucial starting point for decolonial thought is the one for which its most prominent school – the Latin American modernity/coloniality (MC) research program – is named. This research program explicitly foregrounds the hegemony of ''modernity'' or the modern project, but also insists that it be understood as coupled with all that is subalternized by modernity – namely, coloniality. The central premise of the MC research program is that ''the proper analytical unit for the analysis of modernity is modernity/coloniality – in sum, there is no modernity without coloniality, with the latter being constitutive of the former'' (Escobar [2004], p. 217). ''Modernity'' is understood here not as an all-encompassing historical epoch of the present, but as an incomplete yet expansionary project and world system centered around the development and extension of capitalism, the state, and rational-autonomous forms of subjectivity and sociality. ''Coloniality'' is the constitutive underside of modernity and its condition of possibility; it signifies all that has been, and continues to be, denigrated, marginalized, suppressed, and rendered invisible by the modern project and its myriad forms of power/knowledge, as well as the structure and process by which this occurs. Escobar provides the following summary of the key interventions made by the MC literature in relation to conventional, Eurocentric theories of modernity:

The conceptualisation of modernity/coloniality is grounded in a series of operations that distinguish it from established theories. These include: (1) locating the origins of modernity with the conquest of America and the control of the Atlantic after 1492, rather than in the most commonly accepted landmarks such as the Enlightenment or the end of the 18th century; (2) attention to colonialism, postcolonialism and imperialism 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 phenomenon;

(4) the identification of the domination of others outside the European core as a necessary dimension of modernity; (5) a conception of eurocentrism as the knowledge form of modernity/coloniality – a hegemonic representation and mode of knowing that claims universality for itself, ''derived from Europe's position as center.'' In sum, there is a re-reading of the ''myth of modernity'' in terms of modernity's ''underside'' and a new denunciation of the assumption that Europe's development must be followed unilaterally by every other culture, by force if necessary – what Dussel terms ''the developmentalist fallacy'' ([2004], p. 217).

Closely related to, but also outlasting and extending beyond any specific instance of, colonialism, ''coloniality refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerge in

the context of colonialism, which redefine culture, labor, intersubjective relations, aspirations of the self, common sense, and knowledge production in ways that accredit the superiority of the colonizer'' (Mendoza, [2015], p. 114). One central aspect of this colonial system of power, according to Quijano ([2008], [2007]), is the way it develops and imposes complex racial hierarchies of being and non-being that facilitate the differentiation, ordering, and control of various human and nonhuman resources. This system of racial classification and hierarchy, which encompasses both biological and cultural aspects of being, develops as a central feature of the capitalist world system. Building on, but also challenging, Quijano's analysis, Lugones ([2007]) argues that the modern/colonial racial system cannot be understood apart from the modern/colonial gender system with which it is mutually constitutive. An analysis of the modern/colonial gender system reveals how sex, gender, and sexuality – more specifically, biological dimorphism, patriarchy, and heterosexualism – are key constructs and tools of the colonial project, and yet are configured and imposed differentially in ways that highlight the deep imbrication of gender, sexuality, race, and class (see also Mendoza, [2015]; Bhambra, [2014]). Indeed a multi-dimensional modern/colonial power matrix emerges as part of the capitalist world system that re-organizes life for the colonized along a number of structural axes, thereby displacing and subordinating a wide array of practices and forms of social organization along, across, and between those axes.

It should be clear, then, that the MC researchers disagree with claims ''that modernity is now everywhere, a ubiquitous and ineluctable social fact'' (Escobar, [2007], p. 183), as proclaimed by those like Thomas McCarthy, who argues that the question facing all of us today is ''how best to be modern in a world in which 'we are all moderns now''' ([2009], p. 165). Once modernity is taken seriously as a totalizing, but always incomplete, project and system – one that operates through processes of exclusion, expulsion, and elimination, as well as through selective, conditional, and often forcible processes of inclusion and incorporation – it becomes sensible to speak of exteriorities to modernity, or of subalternity. To be clear, an exteriority should in no way ''be thought about as a pure outside, untouched by the modern; it refers to an outside that is precisely constituted as difference by hegemonic discourse'' (Escobar, [2004], p. 218). Subalternity occurs under conditions of ''dominance without hegemony'' (Guha, [1998]); it combines a positionality of structural domination with non-hegemonized discourses or practices, and is therefore perhaps less often a feature of persons themselves (''subaltern'' as a noun) than of specific discourses and/or practices engaged in by the structurally dominated (''subaltern'' as an adjective). The point, then, is that ''there are practices of difference that remain in the exteriority (again, not outside) of the modern/colonial world system, incompletely conquered and transformed, if you wish, and also produced partly through long-standing place-based logics that are irreducible to capital and imperial globality'' ([2004], p. 221). In order to begin to make visible these subalternized forms of difference, the MC research program is committed to what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls a ''sociology of absences'':

The sociology of absences consists of an inquiry that aims to explain that what does not exist is, in fact, actively produced as non-existent, that is, as a non-credible alternative to what exists. The objective of the sociology of absences is to transform impossible into possible objects, absent into present objects ... Non-existence is produced whenever a certain entity is disqualified and rendered invisible, unintelligible, or irreversibly discardable ([2004], p. 238).

But this privileging of subaltern or colonial difference by the MC researchers is not simply a sociological task of making visible that which has been rendered invisible, or of counteracting Eurocentric or otherwise distorted representations of colonial or post-colonial societies. Colonial difference is privileged in the MC framework as a crucial site and standpoint for decolonial *politics* (Escobar, [2004], p. 217). The politics at play here, to be sure, is not one primarily centered around the fight for ''inclusion'' of subalternized or exteriorized forms of difference into the modern/colonial project, but instead one that sees these forms of difference as sites, standpoints, and sources of alternatives to the modern/colonial project. In other words, the primary problem of the modern/colonial system is understood as the system itself, not some correctable exclusion within it. According to Nelson Maldonado-Torres, ''decolonization refers to the task of building an alternative world to modernity...[and] the dismantling of relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of racial, gender, and geo-political hierarchies that came into being or found new and more powerful forms of expression in the modern/colonial world'' ([2006], p. 117).

The MC program often situates itself as an intervention into a world filled with modern problems, of which the environmental crisis is perhaps the leading but just one, for which there are no adequate modern solutions: ''the modern crisis is a crisis in models of thought; modern solutions, at least under neoliberal globalization, only deepen the problems'' (Escobar, [2004], p. 209). This predicament leads the MC researchers to privilege ''subaltern difference as an important source for paradigms'' ([2004], p. 208) by taking seriously the epistemic force of local histories and thinking theoretically about the political praxis of subaltern groups and social movements ([2004], p. 217). These exteriorities can also provide sources of dialectical opposition that go beyond a dialectics of immanent critique or one that is limited to resolving the internal contradictions of modernity. An understanding of this kind of internal–external dialectics allows us to recognize dialectical movement as open-ended and not teleologically determined (Ciccariello-Maher, [2017]).

To be sure, Escobar and Walter Mignolo stress that even the simultaneously empirical and normative discourse of ''alternative modernities'' is far too constraining for a decolonial politics, because it ''incorporates the projects of the non-moderns into a single project, losing the subaltern perspectives and subordinating them, for even in their hybridity subaltern perspectives are not about being only modern but are heteroglossic, networked, plural'' (Escobar, [2007], p. 189). A decolonial politics requires ''delinking from coloniality and not looking for alternative modernities but for alternatives to modernity'' (Mignolo, [2011], p. xxviii). As Gurminder Bhambra argues, in

theories of alternative or multiple modernities the model of Western modernity remains the implicit point of reference: ''theories of multiple modernities continue to rest on assumptions of an original modernity of the West which others adapt, domesticate, or tropicalize. *Their experiences make no difference to the pre-existing universals*'' ([2007], p. 75, italics in original). While subaltern forms of politics on the exteriorities of modernity will surely have to contend and engage with modern problems and structures, and while these projects will undoubtedly be hybridized and draw on both modern and non-modern sources, this does not mean that they ought to be understood as simply alternative forms of the modern. To do so would be to reduce subaltern political practices to derivative discourses (Getachew, [2016], p. 822).

''Exteriority'' here does not point to the absence of any identifiably modern influences, but simply to the clear and significant presence of sources that are not reducible or attributable to the modern. It also points to the fact that no single aspect of the bundle or package of elements understood to constitute modernity must remain normatively essential or unquestionable. Modern elements can be selectively incorporated or valued without defining or determining the whole. The task of imagining a post-capitalist, post-liberal, and post-statist future requires, according to Escobar, that we also apply a different lens to the present, one that involves: a decentering of capitalism in the definition of the economy, of liberalism in the definition of society and the polity, and of the state forms of power as the defining matrix of social organization. This does not mean that capitalism, liberalism, and state forms cease to exist; it means that their discursive and social centrality have been displaced somewhat, so that the range of existing social experiences that are considered valid and credible alternatives to what exist is significantly enlarged (Escobar, [2010], p. 12).

Such a shift would involve, for example, being able to recognize ''the economy as made up of a diversity of capitalist, alternative capitalist, and non-capitalist practices'' (Escobar, [2010], p. 12; Gibson-Graham, [2006]).

Of course, this emphasis on alternatives to modernity and on going beyond an immanent or internal critique of modernity also means that decolonial thought maintains at least some degree of critical distance from modernity's pre-eminent ''progressive'' traditions, including Marxism and liberalism. With respect to Marxism, while decolonial scholars converge with Marxists on their understandings of many of the basic systemic imperatives and operations of capitalism, as well as on the need to critique and overcome capitalism, they also critique a number of prominent tendencies within Marxism. These include tendencies toward Eurocentrism and chauvinistic views of non-modern and non-Western forms of life; linear, developmentalist, and deterministic teleologies; instrumental views of land and nature; views that associate primitive accumulation and slavery only with earlier stages of history; and economic and class reductionism (Coulthard, [2014], pp. 6–15; Robinson, [1983]). In relation to the last of these tendencies, rather than maintaining an exclusive or even preponderant focus on capitalism as an economic system, decolonial thought confronts a deeply intersectional and heterogeneous ''colonial power matrix'' that ''challenges us to think about social change

and social transformation in a non-reductionist way'' (Grosfoguel, [2008]). Capitalism, then, should be understood as only one aspect of the ''European modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system.'' It is an important one, but not the sole one. Given its entanglement with other power relations, destroying the capitalist aspects of the world-system would not be enough to destroy the present world-system. ...decolonization and liberation cannot be reduced to only one dimension of social life. It requires a broader transformation of the sexual, gender, spiritual, epistemic, economic, political, linguistic, and racial hierarchies of the modern/colonial world-system (Grosfoguel, [2008]).

With respect to liberalism, decolonial scholars tend to converge with Marxists in understanding liberalism and liberal democracy as comprising the dominant political ideologies and institutions aligned with a capitalist economy. But decolonial thinkers tend to go much further than Marxists in their willingness to provincialize and decenter the limited set of modern, Enlightenment values that Marxists often share with liberals, in addition to the modernist teleologies that anticipate the full realization these values. Not only do decolonial thinkers tend to emphasize the myriad ways in which liberal-democratic discourses function to justify or legitimate colonial or imperial forms of power (Tully, 2008b; Brown, [2006]), many also argue for thinking beyond liberalism and liberal democracy, and for inquiring into the ethico-political alternatives to liberal democracy latent within diverse normative traditions and ways of life. Saba Mahmood, for example, argues that it is precisely because of liberalism's current global hegemony, and its displacement of other aspirations and alternatives, that it must be provincialized:

The precepts of liberal political philosophy were introduced into non-Western societies (including Muslim societies) through colonial rule and an expanding system of global capitalist power (through institutions of law, governance, trade, and commerce) over the course of two centuries. Liberal presuppositions about politics and society have over time become an intrinsic part of the sensibilities and institutions of these societies and form an important resource for indigenous critiques of Western power and domination throughout the colonial and postcolonial period. It is precisely because many aspects of liberal discourse have become a part of the language of resistance to Western forms of power that I think it is important to attend to its hegemonic qualities, its normative assumptions, and the ways in which it remains peculiarly blind to other kinds of political and social projects and moral-ethical aspirations (Shaikh, [2007], p. 149).

Similarly, Stuart Hall insists that ''liberalism is not the 'culture that is beyond cultures' but the culture that won: that particularism which successfully universalized and hegemonized itself across the globe'' ([2000], p. 228). David Scott argues that we should question ''the view that the ideals of liberal democracy – those of liberty and equality – are an unsurpassable political horizon'' ([1999], p. 150). And for Escobar, the privileging of colonial difference, and the articulation of struggles across differences

"may lead to the deepening of democracy – indeed, to questioning the very principles of liberal democracy" (2008b, p. 15).

So where does Mouffe's theory of radical democracy stand in relation to the decolonial critique of modernity/coloniality? To begin, it is crucial to note that Mouffe's articulation of the radical democratic project has, from its earliest to its most recent articulations, asserted its "modern" character. Especially in her earlier work (Laclau and Mouffe, [2001][1985]; Mouffe, [1993], [1996], 2000a), Mouffe provides an historical narrative of how "modernity" – explicitly understood in contrast to the "ancient" or "premodern" (all seemingly internal to the West) – brings about the dissolution of markers of certainty and shared conceptions of the good, which in turn gives rise to democracy and pluralism. We must not "go back to a premodern conception and sacrifice the individual to the citizen" ([1993], p. 56), or to a "premodern view of the political community as organized around a single substantive idea of the common good" ([1996], p. 23), but instead must pursue the unfulfilled project of modernity ([1993], p. 10). Far from tracing the origins of modernity to 1492, as decolonial theorists do, Mouffe argues that "the fundamental characteristic of modernity is undoubtedly the advent of the democratic revolution" ([1993], p. 11). Mouffe repeatedly locates radical democracy squarely within this history of the democratic revolution, which arises with the French Revolution and subsequently unfolds and progressively extends to more and more social spheres and locations, eventually giving rise to the new social movements of the 1960s and beyond.

This meta-narrative then provides the ground for much of Mouffe's argument for radical democracy. Radical democracy, she contends, best appreciates the epistemological and political conditions of modernity, and in particular the pluralism that is its key feature. As such, the objective of radical democracy "is the creation of a chain of equivalence among the democratic demands found in a variety of groups – women, blacks, workers, gays, lesbians, environmentalists – around a radical democratic interpretation of the political principles of the liberal democratic regime" ([1996], p. 24). In stark contrast to the emphasis in decolonial thought on going beyond a strictly immanent critique of modernity and on provincializing liberal democracy, Mouffe is explicit that radical democracy is in fact "radical liberal democracy"; its aim "is not to create a completely different kind of society, but to use the symbolic resources of the liberal democratic tradition to struggle against relations of subordination not only in the economy but also those linked to gender, race, or sexual orientation, for example" ([1996], p. 20).

In more recent work, Mouffe ([2005], [2008]) becomes more explicitly anti-imperial and engages with a number of decolonial themes and thinkers. While maintaining her basic picture of radical democracy within the West, Mouffe condemns singular modernization narratives that place all societies on a track toward "the Western liberal democratic model" ([2005], p. 129). She explicitly critiques the "pseudouniversalism" of liberal cosmopolitanists and others who want to impose this single type of political

regime onto the entire world in a kind of "civilizing mission" ([2005], pp. 83, 103, 117). She argues for taking seriously the possibility of "non-

Western enlightenments," which requires us to accept that there are other forms of modernity than the one which the West is trying to impose worldwide, irrespective of the respect of other histories and traditions. To defend a model of society different from the Western one should not be seen as an expression of backwardness and proof that one remains in a "premodern" stage. It is high time to abandon the Eurocentric tenet that our model has a privileged claim on rationality and on morality ([2005], pp. 124–125).

In shifting her attention beyond Western liberal democracies, a concern for a new form of pluralism emerges in Mouffe's work. Whereas initially Mouffe was only committed to the type of pluralism that is characteristic of, and internal to, liberal democracy, now she is committed to a pluralism of modernities that decenters "the Western model of modernity" and "undermines the claim of liberal democracy to provide the universal model that all societies should adopt because of its superior rationality" ([2005], p. 123). Adopting a "value pluralist" orientation toward diverse political regimes, Mouffe then argues for a multipolar world order in which hegemony is pluralized in a number of regional poles. Such a multipolar world order is what Mouffe calls – echoing but transforming a concept central to decolonial thought – a "pluriverse" ([2005], p. 115).

Despite these various gestures toward decolonial themes and commitments, a number of questions remain regarding how far Mouffe's theory has moved in a decolonial direction. These concerns can be addressed in relation to the two types of pluralism laid out above. First, while Mouffe claims to decenter liberal democracy on the international scale, she does nothing to fragment or decenter it within the various countries she includes within "the West," including those that are settler colonies. On the contrary, Mouffe doubles down on her long-standing claim that "It is not liberalism as such which should be called into question, for as an ethical principle which defends the liberty of the individual to fulfil his or her human capacities, it is more valid today than ever" (Laclau and Mouffe, [2001][1985], p. 184). Far from rejecting the hegemony of liberal-democratic values and norms, radical democracy within the West is a project meant to further the spread and ultimate realization of liberal-democratic ideals through an immanent critique of them:

...liberal democracy is not the enemy to be destroyed. If we take "liberty and equality for all" as the "ethico-political" principles of liberal democracy...it is clear that the problem with our societies is not their proclaimed ideals but the fact that those ideals are not put into practice. So the task for the left is not to reject them, with the argument that they are a sham, a cover for capitalist domination, but to fight for their effective implementation ([2005], p. 32).

Second, despite her explicit rebuke of liberal cosmopolitan theorists for their "modernization" narratives, Mouffe does not seem to recognize the work that "modernity" continues to do in her argument despite her shift to "alternative modernities."2 This shift, as Bhambra shows, characteristically gestures toward difference but interprets

it only as variation on an original European ideal type (Bhambra, [2007], p. 70); as such, "the paradigm of multiple modernities does not go very far in transforming the previous debate over modernization" (Bhambra, [2007], p. 64). Indeed all of Mouffe's moves toward value pluralism on an international scale exhibit this same tendency of maintaining the West as the referent and normative standard of comparison. She eventually makes clear that, while there are multiple modernities, they nonetheless remain modernities only insofar as they satisfy certain conditions; a political regime should only "be accepted as a *good regime*" (Mouffe, [2008], p. 456) if it meets the "necessary requirement[s] for classification as a good regime," which would appear to include a sufficient commitment to "human rights" and "democracy" ([2008], pp. 461–462). There will of course be various, contested understandings of these terms, according to Mouffe, but the point is that overall these diverse political regimes must serve the functionally equivalent role of protecting the dignity of the person that lies at the heart of the liberal-democratic version of human rights and democracy ([2008], pp. 456–462). Other societies, then, should be judged not on their sameness to the West per se, but on whether they possess "homeomorphic, i.e. functional equivalents" to Western modernity – a structure of argument that clearly retains the primacy of the West as the ultimate standard of development against which to evaluate others.

Given that elsewhere Mouffe argues that liberal democracy is a tradition that fuses the liberal commitment to individual liberties and human rights with the democratic commitment to equality and popular sovereignty (Mouffe, 2000a, pp. 1–10), in the end it is far from clear to what extent, if at all, Mouffe has actually decentered liberal democracy in her theory of multiple modernities. Despite her claims to the contrary, an historical narrative of, and commitment to, modernization appears to be doing a great deal of the work, on both the national and international scales, to circumscribe the permissible range of legitimate political regimes to those that are functionally equivalent to modern liberal democracy. In this theory, then, Western modernity appears to remain in the position of unidirectionally setting the terms and telos of political life.

# Land

Although the MC literature emphasizes that the condition of "coloniality" is marked by a modern/colonial power matrix that exceeds and outlasts formal colonial rule over territory, decolonial scholars in the fields of Indigenous Studies and Settler Colonial Studies (I will focus especially on those concerned with the Anglo settler colonies of Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand) make very clear that the issue of land remains at the heart of struggles for decolonization. Rather than beginning from the non-territorial aspects of coloniality often emphasized by those considered to be in a post-colonial condition, scholars in these fields tend to start where Frantz Fanon did: "For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land" (Fanon, [1963], p. 9). Pushing back against various usages of the term "decolonization" as a metaphor for any and all struggles for liberation, rights, and social justice, Tuck and Yang insist upon the specific and ongoing connection in settler colonial contexts between decolonization and the struggles of Indigenous peoples for their land:

Land is what is most valuable, contested, required [within settler colonialism]. This is both because the settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence ...In the process of settler colonialism, land is remade into property and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property. Epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relationships to land are interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward. Made savage ([2012], p. 5).

Settler colonialism not only dispossesses Indigenous peoples of their land but in doing so "impedes the transmission of knowledge about the forms of governance, ethics and philosophies that arise from relationships on the land" (Wildcat *et al*, [2014], p. I). In this aspect of the modern/colonial project, the conquest and seizure of land is also accompanied by the imposition of distinctively commodified, proprietary, and exploitative ways of understanding and relating to the land.3 Indigenous decolonization, then, according to Glen Coulthard, "is best understood as a struggle primarily inspired by and oriented around *the question of land* – a struggle not only *for* land in the material sense, but also deeply *informed* by what the land *as system of reciprocal relations and obligations* can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms" ([2014], p. 13, italics in original).

If "territoriality is settler colonialism's specific irreducible element" (Wolfe, [2006], p. 388), and access to, and control over, land its primary motive, then, according to Patrick Wolfe, settler colonialism has two closely related dimensions, one negative and one positive: the first is the destruction, dissolution, and/or strict containment of native societies; the second is the construction, consolidation, and expansion of the new colonial society on the expropriated territory. Far from being singular events, both of these dimensions constitute ongoing structural principles and processes of settler colonial society (Wolfe, [2006], p. 388). As such, decolonial research traces a whole host of both crude and sophisticated techniques by which settler colonial states attempt to further these two intertwined goals, as well as the wide variety of ways in which Indigenous peoples and others refuse and resist these techniques (Simpson, [2014], p. 21). One such set of techniques of settler colonial governance that has garnered significant attention among decolonial scholars involves the way in which settler states often utilize liberal regimes of rights, recognition, and pluralist-democratic inclusion to assimilate, incorporate, and conscript Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations into the settler colonial society. Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, for example, argues that the Canadian state has in recent decades developed a more concealed form of colonial governance that operates through state recognition, reconciliation, and accommodation, while nonetheless remaining oriented toward the goal of dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority ([2014], p. 25). Similarly, in *Mohawk Interruptus* Audra Simpson argues that Indigenous peoples' claims to sovereignty and nationhood are transformed into the cultural or identitarian claims of a racialized and minoritized population: "Recognition is the gentler form, perhaps, or the least corporeally violent way of managing Indians and their difference, a multicultural solution to the settlers' Indian problem" ([2014], p. 20). And as Jodi Byrd shows in *The Transit of Empire*, when the assertions of, and struggles for, sovereignty, self-determination, and land rights by colonized Indigenous nations come to be understood as the claims of internal ethnic minorities, the remediation, reparation, and redress for colonization paradoxically starts to look like greater inclusion and assimilation into the pluralistic, settler colonial nation-state ([2011], pp. xxiii–xxiv).

These liberal techniques of settler colonial governance are not only used to attempt to break down Indigenous societies and assimilate Indigenous peoples into the settler state, but they also help consolidate the settler state through the incorporation of marginalized non-Indigenous populations, by cultivating their identification with and allegiance toward the settler state. Because many anti-oppression and social justice struggles are premised on a critique of exclusion and on a call for inclusion as full members in the settler colonial state, they often (sometimes unwittingly) reinforce the very structure of settler colonialism. As Byrd argues, multicultural liberal democracy rationalizes settler colonialism by often coercing the social justice struggles of queers, racial minorities, and migrants into complicity with settler colonialism ([2011], p. xvii). This occurs because the rights and recognitions that are struggled for and/or offered by

the settler colonial state ''are predicated on the very systems that propagate and maintain the dispossession of indigenous peoples'' ([2011], p. xix). It is for this reason that Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua argue that the theory and politics of antiracism needs to be decolonized, because by re-inscribing a liberal-pluralist framework of competing citizen interest groups, antiracism is often ''premised on an ongoing colonial project'' and actually furthers contemporary colonial agendas rather than challenging them ([2005], pp. 123–125).

The first thing to notice about Mouffe's theory of radical democracy in relation to these decolonial interventions is that Mouffe is almost entirely silent on the question of the land upon which radical democracy is to be built, despite the fact that her work clearly addresses a number of Western, liberal-democratic settler colonies. Instead, Mouffe takes for granted the progressive extension of liberaldemocratic values and rights to more and more groups within the radical democratic regime, such that the claims of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are to be posed and assessed precisely in the liberal-pluralist terms problematized by the decolonial authors above, and in ways that consolidate the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their land. Furthermore, Mouffe's theory of radical democracy would seem to preclude any claims made by Indigenous peoples – whether regarding shared relationship to the land, or issues of law, jurisdiction, governance, and/or authority – that are based in Indigenous frameworks or, in any case, are not couched in liberal-democratic terms.

A central feature of Mouffe's framework, articulated over a number of texts, is her assertion that (a) every political regime is founded on a discrete set of principles of legitimacy, and (b) no political regime can tolerate conflicting principles of legitimacy within its midst without endangering its very survival (2000a, [2005], p. 122). For Mouffe, all citizens of a political regime must share an allegiance to the basic principles of legitimacy of the political association – these are the regime's ''constitutional essentials'' or the ''ethico-political principles that are embedded in its constitution and constitute its *political grammar*'' ([2008], p. 463) – although their interpretations of these principles will inevitably be diverse and conflicting. This is what she calls the ''conflictual consensus'' that is required among the citizens of any and every political regime. By this framework, the principles of legitimacy of the political regime serve as a kind of container within which the internal politics of that regime take place; citizens struggle within the terms set by those principles, asserting conflicting interpretations of them, but never straying outside of those principles, lest they call into question the very existence of the political association.

The problem with this kind of argument in settler colonial contexts is that settler societies tend to be marked by deep and persistent questions of legitimacy that also map onto the spatial, social, cultural, and political divides between settlers and Indigenous peoples. As Audra Simpson argues, ''Like Indigenous bodies, Indigenous sovereignties and Indigenous political orders prevail within and apart from settler governance. This form of ''nested sovereignty'' has implications for the sturdiness of nation-states over all, but especially for formulations of political membership as articulated and fought

over within these nested sovereignties'' ([2014], p. 11). Indigenous peoples often occupy what Kevin Bruyneel calls a ''third space of sovereignty'', a space neither fully inside nor outside the settler state, in which ''indigenous tribes straddle the temporal and spatial boundaries of American politics, exposing the incoherence of these boundaries as they seek to secure and expand their tribal sovereign expression'' ([2007], p. xv). Settler societies are therefore faced with the central problem of ''how to govern alterity, how to order it, how to make sense of that which is not yours – a question that is not normative but rather tactical, and it reemerges, violently'' (Simpson, [2014], p. 16). It is because of these complexities, according to Simpson, that disciplines like political theory have generally done a poor job of understanding Indigenous politics:

Because of their Western, institutional, and statist focus, none of these disciplines have dealt evenhandedly, robustly, or critically with Indigenous politics and how they challenge what most perceive as settled. By ''settled'' I mean ''done,'' ''finished,'' ''complete.'' This is the presumption that the colonial project has been realized: land has been dispossessed; its owners have been eliminated or absorbed. This clean-slate settlement is now considered a ''nation of immigrants'' (except for the Indians). But this belief demonstrates a blindness to the structure of settler colonial nation-statehood – of its labor, its pain, and its agonies... ([2014], p. 12).

The settler colonial context, then, is not marked by a consensus on basic values and principles, which will now simply be contested in terms of their proper meaning and implementation. Rather, the liberal values that are presumed to be shared and capable of rendering justice are often the very same values that colonized peoples will experience as intrusive and forcibly imposed (Simpson, [2014], p. 14).

While in her more recent turn to the international scale Mouffe argues for a ''value pluralist'' recognition of diversity *among* and *across* political regimes, she nevertheless does not seem to want to tolerate, or even seriously acknowledge, that this deep value pluralism is also inevitably (and quite legitimately) found *within* particular regimes, especially settler colonial ones. Mouffe's understanding of radical democracy construes dissent over the prevailing principles of legitimacy, as well as any corresponding assertions of alternative principles of legitimacy, as existential threats to the political association, and therefore positions such dissenters as enemies of the state. In this profoundly conservative move, Mouffe in fact precludes any deep political challenges to the existing political regime as it is already constituted, including those almost inevitably waged by colonized peoples in the context of settler colonialism. Instead, the bulk of her argument quite intentionally functions to construe the kinds of political struggles engaged in by Indigenous peoples against dispossession as illegitimate and therefore as legitimately expelled from the terrain of ''radical'' democratic politics. Unsurprisingly, Mouffe expresses a general apprehension toward legal pluralism within states, arguing that it threatens the stability of any regime and violates the principle of equality of citizens ([2005], p. 122). And while she offhandedly suggests that certain exceptions might be made in special cases, such as that of Indigenous peoples, the only research she cites approvingly in this regard is that of liberal multicultural rights theorist Will

Kymlicka ([2005], p. 122). Mouffe, then, does not engage with, and in fact precludes, what many scholars regard as key possibilities for decolonial futures in current settler colonial contexts, namely, forms of treaty federalism or treaty constitutionalism, and/ or various other legal pluralist expressions of nation-to-nation relationships on shared land (Tully, [1995], 2008a; Ladner, [2003]). In short, Mouffe does not take seriously issues of land in settler colonial societies, including the various conflicting values and principles around legitimacy, law, governance, and humans' relationship to the land (and water) that arise in such settings. As such, it is likely that Mouffean radical democracy would actually serve to consolidate, rather than challenge, the dispossession of Indigenous peoples by settler colonial states.

# Ethico-political Resurgences

Decolonization is an epistemic, ethical, and political project that not only seeks to dismantle the modern/colonial matrix of power, but to do so from standpoints and traditions grounded in colonial difference. Recognizing that modernity/coloniality operates through totalizing yet incomplete economic and political structures, as well as through the dissemination and regulation of forms of knowledge and subjectivity, decolonial approaches emphasize the necessity of confronting modern/colonial structures and subjectivities, as well as of (re-)asserting alternatives to both that have been discredited, suppressed, and/or marginalized. These approaches tend to prioritize, then, a kind of ethico-politics of ''projecting and imagining, ethically and politically, from subaltern perspectives'' (Mignolo, [2000], p. 743).

A number of recent Indigenous scholars have theorized the (re-)assertion of Indigenous practices and traditions as a form of Indigenous ''resurgence,'' which is seen as closely coupled with the ''refusal'' of, or the ''turning away'' from, the liberal-democratic politics of recognition and inclusion described in the last section (Simpson, [2017]; Simpson, [2014]; Coulthard, [2014]). Instead, the focus here is on the regeneration and fortification of threatened Indigenous practices and ways of life. Indigenous resurgence is a form of critical traditionalism that involves ''reinvesting in our own ways being: regenerating our political and intellectual traditions; articulating and living our legal traditions; language learning; creating and using our artistic and performance based traditions'' (Leanne Simpson quoted in Coulthard, [2014], p. 155).

One feature of this type of subaltern4 resurgence is that it tends to proceed by tying ethics and politics closely together. It does so by using the micro-political practices of the self and of the community as a clear starting point, while nonetheless maintaining a robust commitment to, and working toward, broader macro-political transformations. In fact, such an ethico-politics breaks down the division between ethics and politics by (a) tending to assert a common set of values to guide action in both realms (Simpson, [2017], p. 24); and (b) emphasizing that subjectivities and social structures are both constituted by assemblages of practices

– practices that are concrete, patterned, performative, place-based, and oriented toward particular norms and goods. A ''practice,'' according to Fuyuki Kurasawa, ''represents – and simultaneously produces – a pattern of materially and symbolically oriented social action that agents undertake within organized political, cultural, and socioeconomic fields'' ([2009], p. 87). Practices are both structured and structuring, which means that social structures are always susceptible to modification or transformation through the re-orientation and re-iteration of practices.

Ethico-political movements need not be limited to what Day ([2005]) calls a "politics of demand"; in other words, they do not need to focus solely on making demands on the state or other hegemonic institutions for rights, representation, recognition, and/or inclusion. Instead, they can prioritize what Day calls a "politics of the act" – that is, a politics that enacts or actualizes a different way of life here and now through concrete, embodied practices. They can be oriented toward any number of non-statist and non-hegemonic goods, and are therefore able to enact forms of politics grounded in a wide variety of non-statist, non-juridical, and/or place-based subaltern normativities. Self-determination, here, becomes first and foremost a practice, rather than an institutional goal or status to be demanded of, and bestowed by, others (Singh, [2014]).

Another feature of an ethico-politics, then, is that it tends to narrow the gap between means and ends. On one level, the collapse of the gap between means and ends occurs straightforwardly because the subaltern peoples and communities enacting a politics of resurgence are often facing elimination, in the sense that either their physical or cultural survival is directly under attack by the modern/colonial project. In this context, the refusal to disappear, the insistence upon your own physical and cultural survival, and the resurgent practice of your own traditions and way of life, is a key goal in itself (Simpson, [2014]). The means are the end.

But even when means and ends are not entirely collapsed together in this way, an ethico-politics of resurgence nonetheless understands the means used to be generative of the ends produced in vital ways, such that the ethico-political practices that are central to this resurgence are understood to be both inherently and instrumentally valuable. Rather than enacting the wide separation of means and ends that is required when attempting to use the master's tools against him for your own purposes, this approach decenters the instrumental and immanent critique of the colonizer's traditions and institutions as the primary means to liberation, and instead foregrounds the immediate actions and immanent meanings of a community or people grounded in its own traditions:

[The resurgent approach] explicitly eschews the instrumental rationality central to the liberal politics of recognition and instead demands that we *enact* or *practice* our political commitments to Indigenous national and women's liberation in the cultural form and content of our struggle itself. Indigenous resurgence is at its core a *prefigurative* politics – the methods of decolonization prefigure its aims (Coulthard, [2014], p. 159).

Because these resurgent movements need not remain fixated on the state or global institutions, they need neither be contained within, nor directly oppositional to, the dominant, official languages and norms of the hegemonic political association. Ethico-political movements can travel at oblique angles to the state and its hegemonic discourses by prioritizing micro-political practices in the here-and-now that keep subaltern difference alive, experiment with alternative possibilities, and either prefigure or actualize concrete, material transformations.

To be clear, the emphasis within this approach on "turning away" from hegemonic power structures does not mean that it denies the necessity of, at various times, appealing to, engaging with, or directly resisting those structures. Colonized and oppressed peoples are placed in positions of vulnerability, precarity, and domination that certainly do not allow them to ignore hegemonic institutions, and regularly require them to confront, negotiate with, or make claims on these institutions. The moment of "turning away" is therefore regarded as a precondition for, and as necessarily coupled with, an "outward resurgence and contestation with settler colonial incursions and violence...against Indigenous peoples, knowledges, languages, and the relationships with the land that sustain these" (Wildcat *et al*, [2014], p. IV). Practices of refusal and resurgence are preparatory for outward confrontations with state institutions: "It is only by privileging and grounding ourselves in these normative lifeways and resurgent practices," writes Coulthard, "that we have a hope of surviving our strategic engagements with the colonial state with integrity and as Indigenous peoples" ([2014], p. 179). This conjoining of refusal, self-grounding, and strategic institutional engagement also resonates strongly with calls within the Black radical tradition for fugitive study, planning, and struggle from the undercommons – "a subaltern, subversive way of being in but not of the university" and other similar institutions (Kelley, [2016]; Harney and Moten, [2013]).

Finally, just as the colonial matrix of power built by the modern project is highly complex and differentiated – entrenching systems for the production, organization, and control of race, gender, sexuality, language, ability, religion/spirituality, land, politics, and economy – subalternized forms of difference are similarly complex and variegated. Indeed, each of these structural axes of modern power/knowledge, as well as their manifold intersections, are potential sites and standpoints of subaltern/colonial difference and therefore of decolonial ethico-politics. In other words, these exteriorities are not only sites of negative difference (inequality, oppression, subordination, Othering), but also of positive difference (sources of knowledge, ethics, politics, utopian alternatives, and imagined futures) (Singh, [2015]). As Escobar writes:

The notion of exteriority arises chiefly by thinking about the Other from the ethical and epistemological perspective of a liberation philosophy framework: the Other as oppressed, as woman, as racially marked, as excluded, as poor, as nature. By appealing from the exteriority in which s/he is located, the Other becomes the original source of an ethical discourse vis-a'-vis a hegemonic totality. This interpellation of the Other comes from outside or beyond the system's institutional and normative frame, as an ethical challenge ([2007], p. 186).

As such, forms of decolonial ethico-politics can be grounded in any number of subalternized standpoints or axes (or intersections/deconstructions thereof), including race, gender, sexuality, Indigeneity, religion/spirituality, class, and dis/ ability. For example, a number of scholars have theorized an ethico-politics at the intersection of Indigeneity and sexuality or queerness (Simpson, [2017]; Hunt and Holmes, [2015]; Tallbear, [2018]),

while others like Rinaldo Walcott have analyzed the category of queerness itself from a decolonial perspective as a potential site of recuperation of subaltern difference:

Indeed, the ''queer-homo'' (to suggest a phrase) remains outside such political imaginaries, by which I mean those nonheterosexual and heterosexual beings who refuse the normative modes of the modernist imaginary and for state recognition of their sexual beings. ...To recall such articulations and utterances of queer is to throw state recognition and its rights regimes into chaos and to demand a world where the colonial project might be imagined to reach a potential conclusion. ...it is my contention that notions of ''queer'' could offer other possibilities for new horizons and imaginaries. In particular, such imaginaries might be characterized as a politics of just *be*-ing (Walcott, [2015], p. viii, italics in original).

And in a similar fashion, albeit a different context, Saba Mahmood's study of a women's Islamic revival movement highlights the existence of movements not primarily oriented toward a demand for rights, recognition, and/or political representation, ''but rather toward the retraining of ethical sensibilities so as to create a new social and moral order'' in ways that are profoundly challenging for the politics of secular-liberal modernity ([2005], p. 193).

Returning once again to Mouffe, it is interesting to note that her theory of radical democracy also places a great deal of emphasis on ethico-politics. Indeed much of Mouffe's work is spent clarifying that liberal democracy (and radical democracy more specifically) is not simply a set of institutional, procedural norms or a set of quasi-transcendental rational principles that stands above diverse forms of life; rather, it is itself constituted by a particular form of life. Mouffe rejects attempts by deontological, moral-universalistic approaches to place liberal-democratic norms above contestation and difference by presenting them as moral or rational necessities. Instead, she situates her own view within a Wittgensteinian, practicebased account of rationality, knowledge, normativity, and procedures:

Indeed, procedures only exist as a complex ensemble of practices with their ethico-political dimensions. Those practices constitute specific forms of individuality and identity that make possible the allegiance to the procedures. It is because they are inscribed in shared forms of life and agreements in judgments that procedures can be accepted and followed. ...Rules are always abridgements of practices; they are inseparable from specific forms of life with their specific ethos'' (Mouffe, 2000b, p. 90).

As such, the radical democratic project cannot simply be concerned with an institutionalized form of politics, but must also be concerned with promoting a form of life, an ethics, that permeates all social relations and orients subjects toward the norms and goods of the political order. There is a need today ''to reestablish the link between ethics and politics'' and ''to create a strong allegiance to the ethical–political principles of modern democracy'' (Mouffe, [1996], p. 22).

Of course, the central point of departure between the type of ethico-politics articulated by Mouffe and the decolonial ethico-politics discussed above is the former's emphasis on hegemony, in contrast to the latter's emphasis on subalternity. One of

the central interventions of her early work with Ernesto Laclau, and continuing on in her subsequent writings, is a poststructuralist insistence upon the fundamental contingency and undecidability of politics, which in turn necessitates the establishment of hegemony. A moment of closure must be imposed upon the flux, contingency, and endless particularities of political life, so that ultimately a collective (and necessarily exclusionary) ethico-political identity can be forged; a common system of meaning established; and overarching powers of decision-making and enforcement constituted (Laclau and Mouffe, [2001][1985]; Mouffe, [1993], 2000a).5 This commitment to hegemony is the reason that Mouffean radical democracy is restricted to a "conflictual consensus" on liberal-democratic values and practices: "To be sure, pluralist democracy demands some form of consensus, but such a consensus concerns only its ethico-political principles" (Mouffe, 2000b, p. 92). As we have already seen, any other forms of ethico-politics are positioned by this theory as a threat to the social order that cannot be tolerated. Mouffe's preoccupation with hegemony therefore construes decolonial resurgences in one of two ways. On one hand, if a form of decolonial ethico-politics is not trying to establish a counter-hegemony, then it is rendered non-political and insignificant. It is, in a sense, simply an ethical movement, not a properly political one, unless and until it articulates with other struggles who together seek to build a counter-hegemonic alternative ([2005], pp. 112–115). On the other hand, if a decolonial ethico-politics were to actually seek to build a counter-hegemonic alternative that confronted and challenged the values, principles, and institutions upon which the current regime is founded, then it would be treated as an existential threat that ought to be forcibly eliminated.

A position closely aligned to Mouffe's is articulated more recently and in greater detail by Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, who offer a comprehensive critique of the kind of ethico-politics described above. Invoking a term commonly used to point to that which is outside of the modern, Srnicek and Williams repudiate the recent turn toward what they call "folk politics" on the left. While folk politics prioritizes the local, ethical, particular, and non-hegemonic, this form of politics cannot mount an effective opposition to neoliberal capitalism ([2015], pp. 9–13). Srnicek and Williams argue instead for a full-throated embrace of the politics of hegemony, universalism, and the fulfillment and culmination of the project of modernity. By redoubling its commitment to, and its ongoing immanent critique of, the universal ideals of modernity – progress, reason, freedom, democracy, secularism, and technological advancement ([2015], p. 71) – the ambition of the left should be to build "a world more modern than capitalism will allow" ([2015], p. 3).

To be sure, Srnicek and Williams go farther than Mouffe in their commitment to a strong universalism, but their general orientation toward a hegemonic politics, as well as to the fulfillment of the ideals and project of modernity (or multiple modernities), remain in step. As such, the decolonial emphasis on proceeding from subaltern difference – which is, by definition, *non-hegemonic* – is a key point of divergence between these authors and decolonial thinkers. While the former's commitment to hegemony raises critical questions regarding the need and method by which to "scale up" to

confront the systemic and hegemonic forces of capitalism – questions that admittedly have not always received enough sustained attention from decolonial scholars – authors like Mouffe and Srnicek and Williams are insufficiently attentive to the fact that an ethico-political response is often, first and foremost, the necessary response of a people trying to defend their very survival and their particular way of life. Modern/colonial efforts to contain, control, assimilate, and/or eliminate subalternized peoples and their practices, traditions, and ways of life are unsurprisingly met by an insistence on maintaining, relearning, and/or asserting that which is threatened – in short, by an ethico-politics of resurgence. Furthermore, the champions of hegemony do not seem sufficiently concerned about whether subaltern ways of life will survive the construction of their modernist counter-hegemonic project (a project that happens to be a projection of their own way of life), let alone whether *any* humans (and many nonhumans) will be able to survive the continuation and culmination of the modern/colonial project.

This is not at all to say that decolonial scholars are not interested in or concerned with how various ethico-political resurgences can build a broader collective response to capitalism, or to modern/colonial power more generally. Rather, it simply means that decolonial thinkers tend to view the imposition of a "dogmatic signifier" (Robinson and Tormey, [2008]), in the form of a pre-determined and already-hegemonic set of modernist universals, as not the best way, either strategically or in principle, to build pluriversal solidarities. Far from Mouffe's notion of a pluriverse as a multipolar world order comprised of competing, regionally hegemonic modernities, decolonial thinkers tend use this concept to point toward a much deeper diversity of cosmologies, epistemologies, and ways of life across and beyond what now constitutes the modern/colonial divide. In order to actualize a world in which many worlds can co-exist and flourish, these thinkers emphasize the development of alternative principles and logics, beyond that of hegemony, by which various resurgent movements can articulate, converge, and cooperate. These include principles of solidarity, hospitality, relationality, intersectionality, interdependence, or simply the common opposition to mutually threatening forces and systems (Conway and Singh, [2011]). As Leanne Simpson describes her own project: "This is a manifesto to create networks of reciprocal resurgent movements with other humans and non-humans radically imagining their ways out of domination, who are not afraid to let those imaginings destroy the pillars of settler colonialism" ([2017], p. 10).

# Conclusion

In this article, I have attempted to both tease out and draw together a number of key strands of contemporary decolonial thought, and to show how a decolonial critique reveals the continuities and complicities of one rather prominent and critical theory of radical democracy. I have argued that decolonial approaches foreground at least three thematics: one that critiques modernity/coloniality as a project and world system, and attempts to move beyond an immanent or internal critique of this system by prioritizing subalternized difference on the exteriorities of modernity; a second that centers land, and examines the myriad techniques by which settler colonial projects are consolidated, the various harms caused by the dispossession of Indigenous peoples, and the many ways in which this dispossession is resisted; and a third that emphasizes the central role and features of ethico-political resurgences within decolonial political struggles. Further, I have argued that, despite its gestures to move beyond it, not only does Mouffe's version of radical democracy re-inscribe and champion the hegemony of the modern/colonial project, but it is also insufficiently attentive, and at times openly hostile, to ongoing struggles over land in settler colonial contexts, as well as to the ethico-political movements that are so crucial to a decolonial politics.

Despite its title, this article has not directly addressed the particularly difficult question of whether there could or should in fact be something like a decolonized theory of democracy, or whether, on the contrary, the ''authoritarian demand'' to frame all decolonial political horizons in terms of a theory of democracy itself constitutes a certain ''blackmail'' that should be resisted (Scott, [2012], pp. 219–223). Rather, I have simply illustrated some key elements and trajectories of decolonial critique and the types of profound challenges it presents to theories of democracy. As such, this article poses anew, but continues to leave open, Wendy Brown's prescient and pressing questions, now from a decolonial perspective: ''What possibilities are there, in theory and practice, for resurrecting or rehabilitating the radical promise and potential of democracy? Alternatively, given the disrepair and misuse into which it has fallen, ought democracy to be abandoned for other visions and practices of popular justice and shared power?'' (Brown, [2010]).

# Acknowledgements

# About the Author

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# Notes

1 This critique builds upon and complements my earlier research with Janet Conway. See Conway and Singh ([2011]).

2 For more critiques of the ''alternative'' or ''multiple modernities'' paradigm, and the ways in which it re-inscribes a Eurocentric telos and meta-narrative, see Escobar ([2010]), Cooper ([2005]), Blaser ([2009]), Thomassen ([2012]) and Dirlik ([1999], [2003]).

3 For a crucial analysis of the ''recursive logic'' of dispossession – or the way in which property is both forcibly transferred and transformed into property – see Nichols ([2017]).

4 I am cognizant and cautious here about my occasional description of Indigeneity as ''subaltern.'' While Byrd and Rothberg ([2011]) helpfully trace the different meanings and lineages of these terms, they also make clear that both concepts point toward colonized forms of difference that retain a degree of externality and incommensurability with respect to hegemonic (colonial) discourses, practices, and institutions. It is in this specific sense that I am categorizing Indigeneity as (at least potentially, or to some degree) subaltern.

5 For further analysis and critique of the concept of hegemony in Mouffe and Laclau's work, see Conway and Singh ([2011]/[1985]), Robinson and Tormey ([2008]) and Day ([2005]).

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