

The Violence of Settler Imperialism – and Why the Concept of Coloniality Cannot Grasp It

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Doerthe Rosenow 

Oxford Brookes University, UK

Abstract

Against a background of ongoing public and academic debate about how to best address the legacies of colonialism and slavery, there is now an ever-expanding body of International Relations (IR) literature that makes use of the concept of ‘coloniality’. Indeed, coloniality, which attempts to make sense of past and ongoing colonial oppression in global terms, seems a particularly apt concept for IR, which, after all, is interested in understanding the nature of global power. This article is critical of the way that coloniality is increasingly used in a unitary ‘catch-all’ manner to describe global colonial domination in often unspecific ways. It argues, based on an in-depth exegesis of key Latin American decolonial texts, that the way the concept has been developed makes certain colonial violence, and the resistance against it, invisible; with the violence of (global) settler colonialism being a prominent example. Using and further developing Jodi Byrd’s concepts of transit and settler imperialism, in dialogue with Latin American settler colonial literature and radical Black thought, this article aims to bring this violence to the forefront of IR debate. I will conclude by elaborating on the concrete consequences that understanding ongoing colonial violence with the help of these concepts has for thinking about decolonisation in IR.

Keywords

settler colonialism, Indigenous politics, coloniality

La violence de l’impérialisme colonial, et pourquoi le concept de colonialité ne peut l’appréhender

Résumé

Dans le contexte du débat public et académique actuel sur la meilleure manière d’aborder les héritages du colonialisme et de l’esclavage, il existe aujourd’hui une quantité croissante d’ouvrages

Corresponding author:

Doerthe Rosenow, Reader in International Relations, School of Law and Social Sciences, Oxford Brookes University, Gipsy Lane, Oxford, OX3 0BP, UK.

Email: drosenow@brookes.ac.uk

de relations internationales qui utilisent le concept de 'colonialité'. En effet, la colonialité, qui tente de comprendre les oppressions coloniales passées et présentes sur le plan mondial, semble être un concept approprié aux relations internationales, qui cherchent, après tout, à comprendre la nature du pouvoir mondial. Cet article se montre critique de la manière dont la colonialité est de plus en plus utilisée de manière unitaire et 'fourre-tout', souvent pour décrire la domination coloniale mondiale de manière vague. Il soutient, en se basant sur une exégèse approfondie des textes décoloniaux latino-américains majeurs, que la manière dont le concept a été développé rend invisibles certaines violences coloniales, et la résistance contre celles-ci; avec comme exemple flagrant les violences du colonialisme de peuplement (mondial). En utilisant et en développant davantage les concepts de 'transit' (*transit*) et d'impérialisme colonial' (*settler imperialism*) élaborés par Jodi Byrd, en dialogue avec la littérature coloniale de peuplement d'Amérique latine et la pensée radicale noire, cet article vise à mettre ces violences au premier plan du débat sur les relations internationales. Nous concluons en développant les conséquences concrètes que la compréhension de la violence coloniale actuelle avec l'aide de ces concepts a sur la manière dont nous pensons la décolonisation en relations internationales.

Mots clés

colonialisme de peuplement, politique autochtone, colonialité

La violencia del imperialismo de poblamiento y por qué el concepto de colonialidad no es capaz de comprenderla

Resumen

Frente a un trasfondo de debate público y académico en curso sobre cuál es la mejor manera de abordar los legados del colonialismo y la esclavitud, existe ahora un volumen creciente de bibliografía sobre las RR. II. que recurre al concepto de 'colonialidad'. Ciertamente, la colonialidad, que busca entender la opresión colonial del pasado y del presente en términos globales, parece un concepto particularmente adecuado para las RR. II., que, después de todo, están interesadas en comprender la naturaleza del poder global. Este artículo es crítico con la forma en la que se utiliza cada vez más la colonialidad de una manera unitaria como un comodín para describir la dominación colonial global, a menudo de forma inespecífica. Se argumenta, a partir de una exégesis en profundidad de textos decoloniales latinoamericanos clave, que la manera en la que se ha desarrollado el concepto vuelve ciertas violencias coloniales, y la resistencia a ellas, invisibles: un ejemplo destacado sería el de las violencias del colonialismo de poblamiento (global). Utilizando, y desarrollando ulteriormente, los conceptos de Jodi Byrd de tránsito e imperialismo de poblamiento, en diálogo con la bibliografía sobre colonialismo de poblamiento latinoamericana y el pensamiento negro radical, este artículo pretende colocar estas violencias en el primer plano del debate en RR. II. Concluyo profundizando en las consecuencias concretas que tiene entender la violencia colonial actual con ayuda de estos conceptos a la hora de pensar sobre la descolonización en las RR. II.

Palabras clave

colonialismo de poblamiento, política indígena, colonialidad

Introduction

On 20 April 2023, I am sitting in the library of All Souls College at the University of Oxford, watching the Unlock the Chains Collective's performance 'Still Breathing', which is part of the project 'Finding Our Way: Space, Reclamation, and the African

Caribbean Experience in Oxford'.¹ 'Still breathing' refers to the last words 'I can't breathe' by George Floyd, who was brutally murdered by Minneapolis police in 2020. As the Black performers climb up the pedestal of the infamous statue of Christopher Codrington, dancing, singing and, indeed, breathing, I am pondering how far we have come. Codrington, who was an All Souls Fellow and funder of the library, had his wealth largely derived from his family's slaveholding plantations in the Caribbean. Is it a sign of progress that now even All Souls, one of the wealthiest and most prestigious Oxford Colleges, is finally starting to address its legacy?

On its website, the College declares that it has started to take 'several steps to address the problematic nature of the Codrington legacy': erecting a memorial plaque, funding graduate studentships at the University of Oxford for Caribbean students and projecting the names of those enslaved by the Codrington family onto his statue in the library.² However, does this amount to more than a moral gesture if it leaves the fundamental structures of privilege and entitlement that the College represents intact? As one of the organisers said, 'these studentships will go to the children of lawyers and doctors – what about the children of Caribbean descent here in Oxford, who live on the estates in Blackbird Leys?'

This is a good example of the state of contemporary public debate about how to address the legacies of colonialism and slavery, in the UK and beyond. While there are ever more initiatives attempting to research, create awareness and put right past injustices (with these initiatives facing increasing backlash as well), there is so far little evidence that it is making an actual difference with regard to ongoing structural racism, violence and inequality. For this to happen, the wrongdoings of the past and their continuities today need to be grasped and addressed in all of their (interconnected) dimensions.

The concept of 'coloniality' seems to offer the right tool for such an all-encompassing understanding and analysis, and it might be for that reason that it is now increasingly used in the social sciences. Similar to what is going on in the public realm, academia also attempts to come to terms with colonial legacies. Anibal Quijano uses the term 'coloniality' to describe the continuities of global colonial rationalities and practices. 'Coloniality' names a system of capitalist-colonial expansion that started in the 15th century with the conquering of the Americas, relying on the creation of an exploitative global division of labour. This division of labour was based on and justified through the establishment of a sociocultural, racialised hierarchy, and went along with the suppression of any non-capitalist/non-European ways to know and live, on the basis of the project of 'modernity' at large. 'Coloniality', according to Quijano, has not ended, as formal colonialism did – it brought the world as we know it into being, and continues to hold it in its thrall.³

Because coloniality makes sense of past and ongoing oppression in global terms, it seems a particularly apt concept for International Relations (IR), which, after all, is interested in understanding the nature of global power. It might be for this reason that there is

1. 'Finding Our Way: Space, Reclamation, and the Afro-Caribbean Experience in Oxford', Available at: <https://www.mod-langs.ox.ac.uk/research/finding-our-way-space-reclamation-and-afro-caribbean-experience-oxford>. Last accessed May 5, 2023.
2. All Souls College, 'The Codrington Legacy', Available at: <https://www.asc.ox.ac.uk/codrington-legacy>. Last accessed May 5, 2023.
3. E.g. Anibal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America', *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1, no. 4 (2000): 533–80.

now an ever-expanding body of IR literature that uses the term, ranging from simply using coloniality as a non-distinct descriptor of global colonial relations, to being used in place of or in addition to terms such as ‘race’, ‘colonialism’, ‘raciality’, ‘slavery’ or ‘Eurocentrism’, to those scholars who situate themselves strongly in the Latin American decolonial tradition (sometimes even explicitly identifying themselves as ‘decolonial’ scholars).⁴

However, even when coloniality is used in a manner that demonstrates a strong understanding of its intellectual legacy, its suitability as a ‘catch-all’ concept that can describe our global condition at large is rarely interrogated. As Karen Tucker argues, there is a danger that coloniality becomes a way to describe ‘systems of oppression and domination’ as ‘uniform’ and ‘unitary’, at the expense of conducting ‘close, detailed analysis of the dispersed practices that produce racialized hierarchies and erasures’.⁵ In this article, I aim to demonstrate that this tendency to describe colonial oppression as unitary and homogeneous is inherent in the way that the concept was designed by Quijano, and then further consolidated by other decolonial scholars who became key reference points in IR. As I will show, this has problematic consequences, not only for understanding the nature of colonial oppression but also for the resistance against it. Coloniality is grounded in particular assumptions that not only render certain colonial violence invisible but are even in danger of reinforcing that violence.

One example is colonialism that characterises settler states, which will be the particular focus of this article. In the next section of this article, I will read first all Quijano (and Wallerstein), but then also Walter D. Mignolo and Nelson Maldonado-Torres through the lens of settler colonial theory and Indigenous writings on settler colonialism. This in-depth exegesis will demonstrate that the concept of coloniality divides the world into spatial and temporal binaries, in particular the (global) North versus South, and past (finished) formal colonialism vs. ongoing coloniality, which conceal settler colonial violence that criss-crosses these binaries. Moreover, it invisibilises particular forms of anti-colonial resistance: the ongoing struggle of Indigenous peoples in settler states for their (political) sovereignty and (related) return of their lands.⁶ To not reinforce the North/South binary myself, this article will address settler colonialism in the North and South, thereby pushing against the more common associations of settler colonialism with the ‘Northern’ Anglo-states. Given that decolonial thought focuses in particular on the Americas (as the geographical area from which coloniality emerged), my focus will likewise be there, including Latin America. I do not want to do away with binaries altogether – as I will demonstrate, the ‘North’ and the ‘South’ of the Americas (or better, ‘North America’ and ‘Latin America’) have emerged into the contemporary world holding different structural positions, which is clear even when the analysis is taking place through

4. See section 3 for citations.

5. Karen Tucker, ‘Unraveling Coloniality in International Relations: Knowledge, Relationality, and Strategies for Engagement’, *International Political Sociology* 12, no. 3 (2018): 222.

6. For the sake of transparency, I need to make clear that I am a white, European scholar living in the UK: in the imperial ‘heartland’, but outside of direct settler colonial contexts. In this article, I am not aiming to make any claims in the names of Indigenous people(s). All statements I make about Indigenous people(s) are either directly based on, or clearly confirmed by, Indigenous scholarship.

a settler colonial lens. But, as I will show, there are other concepts that are better equipped to capture the global dimensions of settler colonial violence.

In the section 'Coloniality and Imaginaries of (De-)colonisation in IR', I will elaborate on how identified problems have impacted on the use of coloniality in IR, and why this matters. The section 'The Transit of Settler Imperialism: Towards Conceptual Alternatives' will then move to a discussion of alternative concepts. For this, I will turn to the work of Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd, who develops the concept of 'transit' to make sense not just of past and present US settler colonialism, but of what Byrd calls US 'settler imperialism'.⁷ As Byrd demonstrates, the US imperial endeavour, past and present, fundamentally relies on the constant (settler colonial) transit of Indigenous lives. This, I will show, enables us to see and understand the ongoing workings of settler colonialism in the world at large. However, as I will also argue, Byrd's work remains US centric: it understands US imperialism as something that has been formed internally through settler colonial processes to then expand outwards. I will therefore complement her work and concepts with insights that have emerged from scholars who apply a settler colonial lens to Latin America. Due to the specificity of how settler colonialism has emerged in Latin American states such as Argentina and Brazil, this work helps us to situate settler imperialism 'within wider frameworks of global hierarchies'.⁸ In the section 'The Transit of Settler Imperialism: Towards Conceptual Alternatives', I will also briefly draw on radical Black thought, in particular the work of Tiffany Lethabo King, to contemplate the way that different oppressed groups relate to each other under settler imperial conditions, and what this means for decolonisation and liberation.⁹

In the conclusion, I will turn to the specific consequences this has (or should have) for decolonising IR. The concepts of settler imperialism and transit enable us to shift our focus to how the 'settler colonial imperative of dispossession/extraction/elimination',¹⁰ maintained through the ongoing transit of Indigenous lives, continues to be a 'structuring force' in global relations.¹¹ This requires that more attention be paid to the significance of the return of land and (relatedly) the need for Indigenous sovereignty – beyond Westphalian notions of the latter. Apart from shifting our understanding of what needs to be done to decolonise in practice, this should also lead to a reconfiguration of central concepts of the discipline: the state, sovereignty and territory.

7. Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

8. Lucy Taylor and Geraldine Lublin, 'Settler Colonial Studies and Latin America', *Settler Colonial Studies* 11, no. 3 (2021): 265.

9. Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019).

10. Shannon Speed, 'Structures of Settler Capitalism in Abya Yala', *American Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2017): 788.

11. Lourdes Gutiérrez Nájera and Korinta Maldonado, 'Transnational Settler Colonial Formations and Global Capital', *American Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2017): 809.

'[U.S.] Indians. . . were not colonized': Ánibal Quijano's History of 'the Americas'

'Iberian' Versus 'British' Colonialism? Invisibilising Settler Colonial Strategies

In 1992, Quijano and Wallerstein aim to demonstrate how and why, in the history of the Americas, the United States became a 'hegemonic power' and the Latin American South 'peripheralised'. They locate this divergence in the 18th century, resulting from differences between 'Iberian' and 'British' colonialism. An essential feature was the different attitudes that the respective colonisers displayed towards Indigenous inhabitants. The British 'constituted themselves initially as European-societies-outside of Europe, whereas the Iberian colonies were societies of European and Native Americans'. The British 'called the Native American societies "nations"'. They treated them as 'outside' (albeit 'subordinate') entities and finally 'preferred to exterminate rather than to colonize' them. By contrast, '[t]he Iberians' went on to conquer, initially destroy, but then also, importantly, 'enslave[. . .] Native American societies', in order to use them as 'discardable labour power'.¹²

These quotes indicate that for Quijano and Wallerstein, elimination is not identical to colonisation. Moreover, elimination was, they suggest, only later on the British agenda, while before we had different 'societies' (Indigenous and British) existing side by side. In one of his solo-authored articles, Quijano spells this out in more detail. He argues that before the American Revolution, the territory that the British settlers occupied was 'very small. The Indians did not inhabit occupied territory – *they were not colonized*'. In other words, 'Indians were not incorporated into the space of Anglo-American domination'. It was then only 'later' that 'they were dispossessed of their lands and were almost exterminated. Only then were the survivors imprisoned in North American society as a *colonized race*'.¹³

This account disregards what settler colonial theorists and Indigenous scholars in settler states have called a defining feature of settler colonialism: that the elimination of Indigenous peoples is a 'logic' that is 'structural' and continuous through time.¹⁴ The elimination of Indigenous peoples (as peoples rather than as individuals; either through actual physical destruction or strategies of individual assimilation) is necessary and inevitable because the primary settler colonial motive is 'access to territory'.¹⁵ Settler colonialism, so Glen Coulthard, has always been and continues to be a 'sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority'.¹⁶

12. Ánibal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein, 'Americanness as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World-System', *Determinants of Development* 134 (1992): 550–553.

13. Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power', 260 (emphases added).

14. Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 390.

15. *Ibid.*, 388.

16. Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 6–7.

A cursory, selective look at North American history backs this understanding. John G. Reid and Thomas Peace use the example of Wabanakia (today Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont) in the 1760s and 1770s¹⁷ to demonstrate the settler strategy of 'serial town settlement', which, among other reasons, led to 'rapid population growth'. Combined with the effect of epidemics, this led to the widespread 'destruction of Indigenous cultural and physical landscapes'; with formerly Indigenous land (particularly of the Massachusett, Pokanoket and Wampaoag peoples) being 'transformed into farms, workshops, mills, churches, schools and – in some places – urban space'.¹⁸ And even though it was, of course, true that for some time in its history, the United States and its British settler predecessor made treaties with Indigenous nations (but by far not with all!), those treaties were, as existing research has exhaustively shown, fraud with problems: from relying on European notions of private property and emphasis on the need for cultivation to the very manner with which these treaties were made – often with anyone willing to give land away, without necessarily having had the consent to negotiate.¹⁹ In short, in contrast to what Quijano and Wallerstein maintain, there was never a time of 'British' colonialism in the North of what is now known as the Americas that did not rely on the dispossession of land and the elimination of Indigenous peoples.

Indeed, even without this venturing into the specifics of North American settler colonial history, Quijano and Wallerstein's account begs the question of how land could be taken by the British to establish their 'European-societies-outside-of-Europe' without at the same time dispossessing Indigenous peoples. The very idea that this was possible flies dangerously close to the infamous colonial terra nullius ideology, as it seems to say that there was land that did not belong to anyone prior to the British arrival. As Lorenzo Veracini argues, 'triumphant settler colonial circumstance' has 'ceased being settler colonial' (in the sense of being visible as such).²⁰ The problem is that Quijano and Wallerstein, in their outline of the historical divergence of North and Latin America, (unintentionally) confirm this settler colonial rationale.

Quijano and Wallerstein also fail to recognise how settler colonial strategies have decisively impacted Latin America – albeit mostly *after* independence and the end of 'Iberian' colonialism. Indeed, their chronology, which treats both the US and Latin American states as more or less 'done and dusted' after independence (in other words, as formally 'postcolonial'), and being located in different positions in the world system, makes them overlook the similarities between settler colonial strategies in the North of the Americas and at least some states in Latin America after the end of formal colonial rule. As Shannon Speed poignantly argues, in Latin America, like in the North, 'white

17. Note that this was before the period that, for Quijano, constituted the beginning of North American Indigenous elimination.

18. John G. Reid and Thomas Peace, 'Colonies of Settlement and Settler Colonialism in Northeastern North America, 1450-1850', in *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism*, ed. Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini (London and New York: Routledge), 82.

19. *Ibid.*, 83.

20. Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 18, 22.

Europeans came to stay. And stay they did'; 'fully realizing' their 'settler character' after independence.²¹ In Argentina, for example, concepts of *terra nullius*, which were 'largely absent from the colonial repertoire of oppression in Latin America', rose to prominence *after* the end of formal colonial rule, in the early 19th century, as a way to build a nation in which 'Indians' and 'Afro-Argentines' became erased.²²

The settler colonial literature on Latin America confirms Quijano's and Wallerstein's analysis of the enslavement of Indigenous people, and how this was different from what took place in the North; particularly in the United States, which relied on the labour of imported Black slaves. But as the previous example of Argentina demonstrates, colonial strategies of enslavement and elimination are not necessarily mutually exclusive, even under conditions of settler colonialism: Both can be inflicted on Indigenous people. At the same time, as the example of the US makes clear, Indigenous enslavement (for labour exploitation) is not intrinsically tied to colonisation, as it is maintained by Quijano and Wallerstein. It is this (false) distinction that makes them argue that colonisation mostly happened to the Indigenous people of Latin America. It also leads Quijano in his later work to maintain that this Indigenous colonisation is similar to the colonisation of Black people in the North when he argues that the 'so-called blacks. . . were not only the most important exploited group' in Anglo-America, but 'above all, the most colonized race, since Indians were not part of that colonial society'.²³ In sum, Quijano and Wallerstein miss both the settler colonialism that took place in Latin America *after* independence, and the settler colonial strategies of elimination that took place in the US *from the start*.

'North' and 'South', 'Past' and 'Present': From the Americas to Global Coloniality

Having explained how the 'pattern' of a capitalist world economy had emerged in the Americas, Quijano outlines how the 'control of global commercial traffic by dominant groups headquartered in the Atlantic zones', the 'expansion of commercial traffic' and the 'formation of regional markets increasingly integrated and monetarized' finally led to the constitution of 'a new geocultural *id*-entity: Europe – more specifically, Western Europe'.²⁴ For Quijano, this centring of global capitalism in Western Europe could not be explained by the mechanics of capitalism alone, but only through the already-embedded notion of white superiority.²⁵

It is within this geographical imaginary centred in/around '(Western) Europe' (and later the United States) that all other parts of the world find their place. Quijano emphasises that the ones who were most hit by European cultural-economic repression were 'the Indians of Ibero-America, who were condemned to be an illiterate peasant subculture stripped of their objectified intellectual legacy'. He argues that 'something equivalent happened in Africa',

21. Speed, 'Settler Capitalism', 785.

22. Lucy Taylor, 'Four Foundations of Settler Colonial Theory: Four Insights from Argentina', *Settler Colonial Studies* 11, no. 3 (2021): 351.

23. Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power', 534.

24. *Ibid.*, 537.

25. *Ibid.*, 538–9.

and was somehow ‘less intense in Asia’.²⁶ Similarly, in a later piece, Quijano evokes the by now familiar binary temporal imaginary that goes along with the spatial one. He claims that ‘the Eurocentred colonialism, in the sense of a formal system of political domination by Western European societies over others, seems a question of the past’. The successor of that formal colonialism is ‘Western imperialism’: ‘an association of social interests between the dominant groups (“social classes” and/or “ethnies”) of countries with unequally articulated power, rather than an imposition from the outside’.²⁷

Some of this analysis resonates with insights that have emerged from Latin American settler colonial studies. However, a settler colonial lens allows for a deeper and more complex probing of the relations between ‘North’ and ‘South’, both spatially and temporally. From this perspective, (white) Europe had settled in Latin America as it had in the North from the start. In other words, in many cases, Latin American elites do not just have close connections with dominant groups in European imperial ‘heartlands’ because of the history of the expansion of global capitalism: They are elites because they are descendants of settlers – in fact, *they are the settlers* (building on Wolfe’s argument of settler colonialism as a structure and not an event). As Speed points out, in an explicit (if sympathetic) critique of ‘coloniality of power analyses’, if settler colonialism is not addressed ‘*as settler*’, then the ‘basic premise that the settler has settled and is now *from here*, rather than acknowledging that there is a state of ongoing occupation, in Latin America as elsewhere in the hemisphere’, is accepted.²⁸

Likewise, Indigenous people(s) were and are eliminated, assimilated and oppressed (albeit in different ways), landing at the bottom of the socioeconomic hierarchy, *in the North as well as in the South*. This is invisible if the United States is simply taken to be the dominant centre of a wider imperialist structure that is oriented towards the ‘outside’, dominating and exploiting the Global South. As Byrd argues, normalising distinctions between the ‘internal’ (the ‘domestic’) and the ‘external’ is a central past and ongoing US settler strategy; insofar that it normalises US settler sovereignty and conceals the way the latter’s legitimacy has been questioned for centuries by Indigenous peoples, which continue to understand themselves as outside nations rather than internal ethnic minorities.²⁹ Despite Quijano’s acknowledgement that coloniality is now transnational and connects dominant social groups across the world, the *political* legitimacy of the sovereignty of key imperial states such as the United States is not questioned.

Now one could argue that Quijano does not ‘own’ decolonial thought – indeed, there have been major developments since his original earlier work on coloniality, and much of this comes from different theoretical and disciplinary perspectives. However, the argument that formal/political ‘colonialism’ is ‘over’ persists. In his seminal book *Local Histories/Global Designs*, Mignolo, for example, argues that the problem of the concept of colonialism lies in its inherent chronology: for those studying, for example, French colonialism, modernity is assumed to have come *before* colonialism, while for those

26. Ibid., 541.

27. Ánibal Quijano, ‘Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality’, *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 168.

28. Speed, ‘Settler Capitalism’, 786 (emphases in original).

29. Byrd, *Transit*.

studying Latin American colonialism, modernity is assumed to have come *after* colonialism had ended.³⁰ By contrast, the concept of ‘coloniality’ makes clear that the latter ‘constitutes modernity’ in the first place, which means ‘we are still living under the same regime’.³¹ Similar to Quijano, what underlies Mignolo’s definition of ‘colonialism’ in terms of actual historical periods is one that follows established temporal narratives of political colonialism and decolonisation. ‘[I]n the Americas’, Mignolo points out, ‘colonialism ended toward the first quarter of the nineteenth century’ – it ‘could be removed from the picture after the first (United States, Haiti and Latin American countries) and second (India, Algeria, Nigeria, etc.) waves of decolonization’. It is this taken-for-granted understanding of ‘colonialism’ that makes it possible to contrast it to coloniality as being ‘alive and well in the current structure of globalization’.³²

Similarly, Maldonado-Torres confirms that ‘[c]oloniality is different from colonialism and decoloniality is different from decolonization’. The former, he argues, commonly refers to ‘specific empirical episodes of socio-historical and geopolitical conditions’, while ‘decolonization’ refers to ‘past realities or historical episodes that have been superseded by other kinds of socio-political and economic regimes’.³³ Not only does this understanding implicitly confirm that the project of formal, political decolonisation has been ‘complete’, but it also fails to recognise that the project of ‘decolonisation’ (understood as moving towards those ‘other kind of socio-political and economic regimes’) might still be considered desirable for Indigenous peoples.³⁴

Moreover, ‘coloniality’ and the way it is argued to manifest itself in today’s racialised and sociocultural inequality continue to build on the particular North-South geographical imaginary that I have traced in Quijano’s work. Mignolo (like many other decolonial scholars) acknowledges that we can no longer think about the world in the spatial terms of ‘periphery’ and ‘centre’, as the domination of coloniality is now transnational and criss-crosses different societies.³⁵ However, when concrete examples of ongoing coloniality are given, the North-South imaginary still dominates. For example, in his seminal 2002 article, Mignolo locates the ‘critiques of modernity’ that rely on ‘Western logocentrism’ and ‘Eurocentrism’ in ‘Western Europe’ and ‘the United States’, and contrasts those to the places in which these critiques are not valid: ‘Asia, Africa, or Latin America’.³⁶ In a later text, Mignolo argues that when it comes to the Global North, it is the ‘immigrant consciousness’ that today connects to ‘decoloniality’s point of origination in the Third World’ – in other words, decolonial consciousness in the Global North is to

30. Walter D. Mignolo, *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 50.

31. Walter D. Mignolo, ‘The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (2002): 82.

32. Ibid.

33. Nelson Maldonado-Torres, ‘Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality’, Foundation Frantz Fanon, accessed January 17, 2022, http://fondation-frantzfanon.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/maldonado-torres_outline_of_ten_theses-10.23.16.pdf.

34. Cf. Sheryl Lightfoot, *Global Indigenous Politics: A Subtle Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2016), 13.

35. Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 62.

36. Mignolo, ‘Geopolitics of Knowledge’, 85–6.

be found among those who have immigrated from the Global South.³⁷ But as, for example, the work of Lourdes Gutiérrez Nájera and Korinta Maldonado on the settling of Indigenous Mexicans in California makes clear, immigration from the Global South can also ‘reproduce[. . .] settler colonial logics of erasure and dispossession’. They analyse in detail how the settling of Indigenous Mexicans in, for example, Los Angeles (the Zapotecs, Mixtecs and Mixes being the most prominent groups) on land from which Native Californians (mostly the Tongva, Chumash and Tataviam) were displaced is celebrated by the city of Los Angeles in the spirit of multiculturalism; a valuing of the former’s culture leading to further invisibilisation of any traces of the latter.³⁸ This is a concrete example of the complexities of (ongoing) colonial violence and elimination that becomes visible through a settler colonial lens; disturbing easy spatial binaries of (subordinated) South and (dominant) North.

Decolonial Visions: Only From Latin America?

Towards the end of Quijano and Wallerstein’s 1992 article, the authors engage with the part of history that, in their argument, led Latin America to become part of the colonised ‘South’ while the United States became the global imperial centre. They also engage possible visions for a future beyond coloniality. At the end of the 18th century, they maintain, ‘Ibero-American colonies’ had become ‘stagnating economies, with their social and political patterns in crisis’, while the United States had become independent and established ‘a political regime based on a clear hegemonic social order, with a strong state, but also with civil society having the mechanisms to regulate its relations with state institutions’. They continue that ‘[t]he creation of the US as a directly capitalist society was the basis there of a utopia of social equality and individual liberty’.³⁹

It would be a mistake to simply read this statement as a critical diagnosis – there is also a note of admiration swinging here, particularly when they argue that, although ‘these images veiled of course very real social hierarchies and their articulation with power’, they ‘also hindered their legitimation, maintained the space for debate, and offered society the possibility to regulate the power of the state’.⁴⁰ In other words, Quijano and Wallerstein do not question the political structures of the final ‘settled’ state of the US – although they recognise the real-existing socioeconomic inequalities. As Quijano explains in 2000, because the Indigenous populations had been exterminated, ‘the new nation-state [of the US] was genuinely representative of the greater part of the population’ and offered, as a result of dispossession, a ‘basic resource of production: land’ in ‘abundance’.⁴¹ Quijano clearly recognises that the ‘coloniality of the new model of power’ lay in ‘American Indians and blacks’ not ‘hav[ing] a place at all in the control of the resources of production, or in the institutions and mechanisms of public

37. Walter D. Mignolo, ‘Geopolitics of Sensing and Knowing: On (De)coloniality, Border Thinking and Epistemic Disobedience’, *Postcolonial Studies* 14, no. 3 (2011): 274.

38. Gutiérrez Nájera and Maldonado, ‘Settler Colonial Formations’, 814.

39. Quijano and Wallerstein, ‘Americanness’, 555–6.

40. Ibid.

41. Quijano, ‘Coloniality of Power’, 560.

authority'.⁴² But the solution to this problem does not lie in questioning the authority and model of the new state as such: instead, it becomes about inclusion and having access.

With regard to Latin America, this position is understandable given the overall position of Latin American states in the 'world system', and it also resonates with much Latin American Indigenous demand and activism. As Lucy Taylor argues, the state as such (in the sense of questioning its right to sovereignty) is not often a target for Indigenous demands.⁴³ This, she maintains, is because, for example, in Argentina, strategies of elimination post-independence took place through 'capitalist enterprise' rather than 'the settler state'.⁴⁴ Because capitalism/neoliberalism was and continues to be 'rampant' in 'Latin American political formations' (with less state control than in the Global North, although we now have much erosion of state protection there as well), getting access to and transforming the state became a central Indigenous demand and focal point for activism.⁴⁵ In a similar vein, with regard to Brazil, Desiree Poets points out that, 'Indigenous peoples position themselves at the interstices of refusal and inclusion to make a claim to and transform, rather than straightforwardly refuse, or accept, the state'.⁴⁶

But it is important to recognise that this is often different when it comes to Indigenous activism and demands in the Northern Anglo-settler states. If recognition and reconciliation become central strategies of the settler state, as a way to 'include' Indigenous people into the remit of the state and thereby enshrining the latter's legitimacy (without at the same time making any material concessions, such as giving back land), as is the case with Canada, Indigenous strategies can become straightforwardly about refusal.⁴⁷ For Quijano and Wallerstein, this is not visible, because the ongoing presence of Indigenous peoples in the North itself is a thing of the past. They argue that Indigenous presence in the Americas today is most significant in Latin America. What Latin America offers (and what North America, by implication, does not) is 'the persistence of a Native American imagery' as the 'basis of a utopia of reciprocity, of social solidarity and of direct democracy'. By contrast, what the North offers is a functioning state based on ideals of individual liberty and equal citizenship. The final aim is to join 'these American utopias' together, 'to create and offer to the world a specifically all-American utopia'.⁴⁸

Through this move, Indigenous people(s) in the North have become doubly eliminated: physically through genocide and assimilation, and now also epistemically (in terms of their possible epistemic contribution). Fallen from view have thereby also alternative visions of decolonisation; particularly those that question the right of states to

42. Ibid., 561.

43. Taylor, 'Foundations', 349; Cf. Devine Guzman, *Native and National in Brazil: Indigeneity after Independence* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

44. Taylor, 'Foundations', 349.

45. Ibid., 350.

46. Desiree Poets, 'Citizenship and Settler Colonialism in Brazil: The *Toré* Ritual as a Decolonial Indigenous Practice in the Northeast Region', *Citizenship Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/13621025.2021.1984504.

47. See e.g. Coulthard, *Red Skin*.

48. Quijano and Wallerstein, 'Americanness', 557.

their sovereignty – however these states might be organised, whether they are authoritarian and/or capitalist, or truly socialist, democratic and/or egalitarian. Indeed, despite the aforementioned differences, these more fundamental critiques of the (settler) state can be of value for Indigenous strategies in Latin America, which, as already pointed out, do not often target the state as a problem as such. As Speed argues, settler colonial theory has the ability to show ‘the limitations of addressing the state as it ignores how its structure is grounded in [Indigenous] dispossession/elimination’, which, she says, should be more fully interrogated in Latin America.⁴⁹

Coloniality and Imaginaries of (De-)colonisation in IR

In this section, I will interrogate the implications of my previous analysis for the way the concept of coloniality is used in IR, and why it matters. Following Karen Tucker’s excellent overview, approaches in IR that make use of decolonial thought are divided into two strands.⁵⁰ The objective of the first body of literature is to ‘decolonise’ IR in the sense of bringing to light and dismantling ‘the deep political, ontological, and historical foundations of the discipline’.⁵¹ This literature often draws on the concept of the ‘coloniality of knowledge’; analysing how the ‘colonial matrix of power’ provides the ‘underlying criteria for classifying ways of knowing’, including what is central to IR: “the international” as an external and observable object’.⁵²

The second body of literature situated in the decolonial tradition aims ‘to interrogate instances of coloniality in particular political contexts’.⁵³ This literature has been ever-expanding over the last years with more and more authors turning to analysis using the concept of coloniality. One recent example are Shine Choi and Catherine Eschle, who want to ‘to take fuller account’ of how ‘the colonial matrix of power. . .exposes the racialized, gendered and colonial dimensions of nuclear discourses; and casts fresh light on the focus on the material colonial relationships at the heart of the global nuclear order’.⁵⁴ Another example is an article by Mariam Georgis and Riva Gewarges, in which they use the case of Iraq to argue in favour of decolonising economic sanctions in security studies; maintaining that the ‘locus of enunciation’ needs to be shifted from ‘the state to Iraqi people’s suffering’, to enable ‘a decolonial re-reading of the sanctions’.⁵⁵ Other examples include Michael Merlingen’s interesting work on the coloniality of the Global

49. Speed, ‘Settler Capitalism’, 789.

50. Tucker, ‘Unraveling Coloniality’, 221.

51. Lucy Taylor, ‘Decolonizing International Relations: Perspectives from Latin America’, *International Studies Review* 14, no. 3 (2012): 387.

52. Erick Viramontes, ‘Questioning the Quest for Pluralism: How Decolonial Is Non-Western IR?’ *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 47, no. 1 (2022): 46–7.

53. Tucker, ‘Unraveling Coloniality’, 221.

54. Shine Choi and Catherine Eschle, ‘Rethinking Global Nuclear Politics, Rethinking Feminism’, *International Affairs* 98, no. 4 (2022): 1132.

55. Mariam Georgis and Riva Gewarges, ‘Violence on Iraqi Bodies: Decolonising Economic Sanctions in Security Studies’, *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (2019): 317, 319.

North war against misinformation and Robin Dunford's thoughtful work on food sovereignty and peasant activism.⁵⁶

Apart from these engagements, which use the concept of coloniality from within the intellectual tradition it has emerged from and explain why and how it has become useful for their interrogation, there is now also an expanding body of literature that brings in coloniality as a non-distinct descriptor, to be used in place of or in addition to terms such as 'race', 'colonialism', 'raciality', 'slavery' and even 'Eurocentrism' or 'settler colonialism'. Kwaku Danso and Kwesi Aning, for example, advocate for an 'alternative discourse' when it comes to making sense of Africa in IR, 'debunking entrenched knowledge derived from path dependence, *slavery*, *coloniality* or the continuing entrapment in *Eurocentrism* of scholarly and policy discourses'.⁵⁷ Their article provides a powerful intervention in a more mainstream journal in IR, *International Affairs* – but the (probably necessary) generality of their analysis comes at the expense of more detailed conceptual work that would, for example, explain what is to be gained by using the concept of 'coloniality', or how the latter hangs together with other concepts and practices such as Eurocentrism or slavery. Similarly, Alison Howell and Melanie Richter-Montpetit talk about the need for critical security studies 'to apprehend the *raciality* and *coloniality* of contemporary liberal order and war, including the *postcolonial* and *settler colonial* present'.⁵⁸ While there is nothing wrong with this claim, how the different parts of the 'liberal order' (coloniality, the postcolonial and the settler colonial present) are situated in relation to each other remains uninterrogated (which, to be fair, is not the objective of their article).

Last, we now also have a body of literature using the concept of coloniality to make a 'statement' about our global colonial condition in need of acknowledgement, rather than a specific tool and method driving the analysis. As I have argued elsewhere together with Lara Montesinos Coleman, here 'theories of a modern/colonial matrix of power or world history' become a 'structural background' for an analysis that might be situated within different epistemological coordinates.⁵⁹ Marta Íñiguez de Heredia, for example, uses Quijano's and Grosfoguel's work to 'expand[. . .]'

56. Michael Merlingen, 'Coloniality and the Global North War against Disinformation: The Case of the European Union', *Third World Quarterly*, online first (2022), DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2022.2154647; Robin Dunford, 'Peasant Activism and the Rise of Food Sovereignty: Decolonising and Democratising Norm Diffusion?', *European Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 1 (2017): 145–67. The examples here were chosen on the basis of me critically engaging them in more detail in a later part of this section – there are obviously plenty more.

57. Kawku Danso and Kwesi Aning, 'African Experiences and Alternativity in International Relations Theorizing about Security', *International Affairs* 98, no. 1 (2022): 80 (emphasis added).

58. Melanie Richter-Montpetit and Alison Howell, 'Racism in Foucauldian Security Studies: Biopolitics, Liberal War, and the Whitewashing of Colonial and Racial Violence', *International Political Sociology* 13, no. 1 (2019): 3 (emphasis added).

59. Lara Montesinos Coleman and Doerthe Rosenow, 'On Struggle as Experiment: Foucault in Dialogue with Indigenous and Decolonial Movement Intellectuals, for a New Approach to Theory', *Review of International Studies* (forthcoming).

Foucault's understanding of power and resistance as relational, and of discourses as 'circular, contradictory and tactical', to 'incorporate the fact that the effects of. . . discourses reach the global-colonial sphere of power – the matrix that since colonisation has constituted a global structure of power'.⁶⁰ Coloniality is here used to frame her 'more detailed Foucauldian-inflected analysis of discourses' – but Foucault's relational conceptualisation of power actually sits at odds with Quijano's strongly structural, world-system-inspired epistemology.⁶¹

The contribution that all of this work has made to efforts to decolonise IR cannot be overstated. However, even in the most thoughtful and in-depth engagements with 'coloniality', the tendency to take it as a unitary 'catch-all' concept persists. This 'catch-all' concept (implicitly) continues to reinforce the spatial and temporal binaries that I have analysed in the previous section. Quoting Randolph Persaud, Georgis and Gewarges, for example, point out that 'in contradistinction to consensus, the West – that is, *Euro-America*, has engaged in persistent, sometimes savage, but always debilitating violence, including full-scale wars, against *the Third World*'.⁶² Drawing on Arturo Escobar and Ramón Grosfoguel, Dunford emphasises that relations of domination that have been formed in colonial times and, indeed, 'have persisted *after formal colonial rule*' now work 'through development, loan conditionalities or democracy promotion'.⁶³ This list of features almost exclusively applies to the policies imposed on states and societies in the Global South. Last, Michael Merlingen continues to use generic terms such as 'Global North governments' and 'Global North actors' to describe how coloniality works in the 'global war on disinformation'.⁶⁴

It might seem unfair to pick on the use of singular words and terms – after all, the Global North/South terminology as a short-hand is very common (including the way I myself use it in this article!) and most scholars are aware of the problems of using it in this way. In her review of books that engage with the question of how to decolonise IR (some of them drawing on decolonial thought), Melody Fonseca argues that 'Global North' and 'Global South' are 'complicated categories' that should 'serve as tools to explain positionalities within power relations' rather than becoming 'reified, essentialised or generalised'.⁶⁵ Most scholars would agree with this. Moreover, as already pointed out in a previous section, there remains to be an important distinction between the states of the 'North' and the 'South', even if they are settler states (such as the difference between the US and Latin American settler states). But the problem is that when it comes to actual empirical sites and examples, specifically settler colonial practices and Indigenous struggles taking place in 'the North' itself are rarely mentioned

60. Marta Íñiguez de Heredia, 'Reversing 'Liberal' Aspirations: A View from 'Citizen's' Movements in Africa', *Global Society* 36, no. 3 (2022): 410.

61. Coleman and Rosenow, 'Struggle'.

62. Georgis and Gewarges, 'Violence', 321 (emphases added).

63. Dunford, 'Peasant Activism', 147 (emphasis added).

64. Merlingen, 'Coloniality', 1, 6.

65. Melody Fonseca, 'Global IR and Western Dominance: Moving Forward or Eurocentric Entrapment?', *Millennium* 48, no. 1 (2019): 59.

(see Choi and Eschle for an important exception⁶⁶). This reinforces (even if implicitly) the sense that the violence of coloniality is either exercised against ‘the South’ as a concrete geographical site or against those in ‘the North’ with a from-the-Global-South migrant background.

The same binaries appear when sites of decolonial struggle and decolonial knowledge production are invoked. Cristina Rojas, for example, argues for the need ‘to “take seriously the epistemic force of local histories”’ that ‘include experiences of decolonization’, mentioning as examples ‘the Tupac Amaru rebellion, the Haitian revolution, and the 1960s anti-colonial movements’.⁶⁷ Siphamandla Zondi points out how ‘IR as a discipline is dominated and controlled by men from Western Europe and other parts of the European diaspora, mainly *North America and Oceania*, commonly known as the *global North*’ while resisting ‘[v]oices’ are ‘arising from *Latin American* revolutionary and radical thought, *Asian* subaltern thought, [and] *African* epistemic rebellions’.⁶⁸ For some (even though often those who do not directly situate themselves in decolonial thought), Global South resistance is even coming from postcolonial states and needs to be valued as such. Mustapha Kamal Pasha, for example, who invokes the concept of coloniality in his valid critique of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s recent turn to the need for a new universalism in the face of the planetary condition of climate change, argues for the value of the postcolonial ‘political project of difference’, in which ‘postcolonial sovereignty’ as the ‘self-affirming desire for autonomous political existence and its attendant claims for recognition and redistribution’ needs re-emphasis (it is quite clear from the article overall that Pasha is invoking more traditional calls for sovereignty here, that is, those that have become key claims of Global South postcolonial states).⁶⁹ Similarly, Merlingen argues that ‘postcolonial sovereigns and . . . contender states challenge[. . .] the colonial matrix of power embedded in the liberal international order’.⁷⁰ Although Merlingen poses this as a challenge to decolonial thought, which is generally more state-critical and focuses on the

66. For Choi and Eschle it is clear that ‘peoples still struggling for self-determination and self-governance – such as the Indigenous communities in the occupied territories of Hawai’i, Guam/Guahan and the Marshall Island; First Nations and Aboriginal peoples . . . experience nuclear impacts today differently from those in postcolonial states and their diaspora who achieved political independence through the decolonization that started in the middle of the twentieth century’. (‘Global Nuclear Politics’, 1135). However, even in this more nuanced and in-depth engagement that wants to foreground complexity, the question is whether coloniality is the right ‘catch-all’ concept to describe it.

67. Cristina Rojas, ‘Contesting the Colonial Logics of the International: Toward a Relational Politics for the Pluriverse’, *International Political Sociology* 10, no. 4 (2016): 377 (quoting Escobar).

68. Siphamandla Zondi, ‘Decolonising International Relations and Its Theory: A Critical Conceptual Meditation’, *Politikon* 45, no. 1 (2018): 20, 29 (emphases added). Obviously, I do not expect every article to mention Indigenous people(s) in settler states. However, what is noticeable is that they are hardly *ever* mentioned as sites for the production of decolonial thought and practice.

69. Mustapha Kamal Pasha, ‘After the Deluge: New Universalism and Postcolonial Difference’, *International Relations* 34, no. 3 (2020): 356.

70. Merlingen, ‘Coloniality’, 13.

potential of grassroots movements, what I want to point out here is the extent to which it leaves the North/South binary intact – whether this binary is state-centric or not.

When Indigenous thinkers, writers and activists from ‘the North’ are engaged, it often happens in a decontextualised manner. Rojas, for example, cites Coulthard and the Dene Nation in Canada as an example of a nation that understands ‘land in relational terms’.⁷¹ This statement is then followed by a reference to Escobar and his emphasis on the need for a ‘relational ontology’. In the words of Tucker, there is a danger that the contexts and practices the cited thinkers are wedded to ‘are not given space in their own right, but are mobilised in support of discipline-focused arguments, such as the need to pay greater attention to ontological politics in decolonial IR’.⁷²

This tendency to not take writers and activists on their own terms and analyse their work as emerging from particular places, but to mobilise them to validate a framework, is already present in Mignolo’s work. For example, in *Local Histories/Global Designs*, Mignolo draws on the thought of Vine Deloria Jr, and he does this again in 2002 when he compares the thought of Deloria Jr to the thoughts of decolonial philosopher Enrique Dussel and argues that they both come to similar conclusions.⁷³ However, the work of Deloria Jr is displaced and (curiously enough for an author who rejects universalism) not analysed as emerging from a very concrete and particular (settler) colonial context and history. Vine Deloria Jr was a central figure in the US Red Power militant movements in the 1960s and 1970s and was at the forefront of thinking in practical terms about how to achieve sovereignty for Native American tribes.⁷⁴ Instead of considering this context, Mignolo invokes Deloria as a generic Indigenous thinker who is able to make sense of the ‘colonial difference’. To paraphrase Byrd, Deloria’s ‘wisdom’ is mobilised for decolonial analysis and vision, but without this analysis and vision becoming ‘accountable to and actionable for ending the colonization of. . . American Indian peoples’, as none of the concrete demands that Deloria makes for ending this colonisation are mentioned.⁷⁵ Something similar can be said for the way Coulthard is used in Roja’s article. The central purpose of Coulthard’s book is to argue against the politics of recognition in settler colonial states such as Canada, and the need for an analysis of the dispossession of Indigenous lands as a central feature of settler colonialism.⁷⁶ All of this is in danger of becoming invisible in generic decolonial IR work.⁷⁷

The problem of mobilising specific Indigenous experiences to validate what is argued to be a decolonial framework can also be detected in the otherwise excellent early work

71. Rojas, ‘Colonial Logics’, 379.

72. Tucker, ‘Unraveling Coloniality’, 223.

73. Mignolo, *Local Histories*, 8; Mignolo, ‘Geopolitics’, 67–9.

74. See e.g. Kevin Bruyneel, *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of U.S.-Indigenous Relations* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 134–67.

75. Byrd makes this argument in relation to the way that Gilles Deleuze invokes the Hopi people. *Transit*, 31.

76. Coulthard, *Red Skin*.

77. Cf. Doerthe Rosenow, ‘Decolonising the Decolonisers? Of Ontological Encounters in the GMO Controversy and Beyond’, *Global Society* 33, no. 1 (2019): 82–99.

of Lucy Taylor – whose more recent work I have already extensively and favourably cited with regard to settler colonial approaches coming from Latin American studies. Taylor's early work is a rare example of IR decolonial research that explicitly invokes the history and ongoing nature of the US as a settler state, as well as the significance of Indigenous resistance in what is now known as North America. One of her central arguments is that there is a need 'to disturb US global hegemony from the inside out by questioning the idea of "America" as a unified, unproblematic, and settled settler society'.⁷⁸ Taylor defines ongoing Native American presence and resistance in what is today North America as central to coloniality and the decolonial challenge: 'Native Americans have never ceased to resist [the] onslaught and to express the agonies of the colonial wound and the fresh imaginaries of the colonial difference'.⁷⁹ However, the problem is yet again that Native American struggle and demands are not taken on their own terms, in their own (specific) context, but are transformed into generic experiences of the colonial difference and struggles against coloniality. Moreover, the article yet again invokes the differentiation between 'colonialism' and 'coloniality'. Taylor maintains that the struggle of the Native Americans 'assumes that relationships of coloniality *are not confined to the official "colonial period"* but are operating to generate and re-create hierarchies of knowledge and practices of domination'.⁸⁰

Last, Taylor uses the concept of the 'domestic' to define coloniality in the US: settler colonialism, she maintains, is "'domestic" coloniality', confronting 'the Native American other'. The other side of the coin is "'international" coloniality and the Latin American other'.⁸¹ But who defines what is (and was) 'inside' and what is 'outside', or 'international'? As already mentioned in the previous section, Byrd argues that normalising distinctions between the 'internal' (the 'domestic') and the 'external' is a central past and ongoing US settler strategy.⁸²

The Transit of Settler Imperialism: Towards Conceptual Alternatives

In her book *The Transit of Empire*, Jodi Byrd challenges understandings of colonialism that rely on the sort of binaries that I have analysed in previous sections of this article. With the help of the concept of *transit*, Byrd brings into view not only the significance of the identity of the United States as an ongoing settler state but also the need to challenge established (including, in my argument, decolonial) understandings of US imperialism. The concept of transit not only allows for an understanding of US imperialism that is, and has been, in constant movement (which Byrd calls *settler imperialism*), and challenges notions of what is internal (domestic) and what is external but it also opens up a notion of colonial oppression(s) as radically relational.⁸³

78. Taylor, 'Decolonizing International Relations', 386.

79. Ibid., 392.

80. Ibid., 394 (emphasis added).

81. Ibid., 391.

82. Byrd, *Transit*.

83. Taylor, 'Foundations', 354.

Although Byrd comes to her topic from a US Native American perspective, I will argue that her point about the (US) settler imperative of the continuous transit of Indigenous lives applies more widely, including in Latin America; particularly if brought together with two additional dimensions taken from Latin American settler colonial literature: the role of (global) capitalism in the imperial transit of Indigenous lives, and the acknowledging of the significance of context when thinking about the 'fluid and systemic interrelationships' of diverse oppressed groups.⁸⁴ An analysis of both of these dimensions takes us beyond an outlook that starts from the internal dynamics of one settler state (the US) to then expand outwards and allows instead for an investigation that understands settler imperialism as an interconnected, global phenomenon from the start.

Beyond Inside/Outside: Sites of Settler Imperial Transit

For Byrd, the concept of transit challenges the idea that US imperialism only emerges when the US starts to acquire territory outside of its domestic arena. As Byrd demonstrates, most historians usually date the start of US imperialism back to the 1898 Spanish-American War and the US take-over of the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Cuba and Guam; or, alternatively, the 1846 American-Mexican War.⁸⁵ Moreover, and particularly relevant for IR, the end of the Cold War and even more so the events of 9/11 and the War on Terror have led scholars to define contemporary imperialism as a 'predominantly postmodern phenomenon', captured through concepts such as bio- and necropolitics.⁸⁶ In all of these accounts, the 'regrettable colonization and genocide of American Indians is a truth almost universally acknowledged. . .and simultaneously effaced and deferred'; a 'domestic' phenomenon not considered relevant for analyses of US imperialism.⁸⁷

By contrast, for Byrd, the colonisation and genocide of Indigenous/Native American peoples in what is now the US needs to be understood as central to the way in which 'U.S. empire orients and replicates itself'.⁸⁸ '[T]he Indian' is the 'ontological ground through which U.S. settler colonialism enacts itself as settler imperialism'.⁸⁹ US 'pioneer logics' led to 'the Indian' having had 'to vanish' (lamentably, but inevitably so), and these pioneer logics (still) motivate US imperialism, constantly 'transforming those to be colonized into "Indians". . .whether in the Pacific, the Caribbean, or the Middle East'.⁹⁰ '[T]he Indian is the original enemy combatant who cannot be grieved'; and has thereby become a site of *transit* for every imperial move, both 'inside' and 'abroad'. Every overruling of Indigenous/Native American consent to a pipeline, every war, every territorial acquisition is 'manifest destiny' reloaded.

The concept of transit can be connected to Veracini's outline of settler colonialism as the desire for constant transformation and regeneration: settler societies distance

84. Ibid.

85. Byrd, *Transit*, 4.

86. Ibid., 5.

87. Ibid., 7.

88. Ibid., xiii.

89. Ibid., xix.

90. Ibid., xiii.

themselves from both their European origins *and* the Indigenous other, by constantly attempting to become Indigenous themselves and, in Byrd's words, 'transiting the Indian' in order to do so. 'Manifest destiny' is always about 'a society "to come", characterised by the promise rather than the practice of a truly "settled" lifestyle'.⁹¹ Wishing for constant transformation and regeneration of the 'society to come', the ambivalence that goes along with this desire, and the way this continues to manifest itself in the ongoing transit of actual Indigenous life, are decisive features of what Byrd defines as US settler imperialism. It is these features that the concept of coloniality, which enshrines the US as a unified, hegemonic 'Global North' entity dominating outwards, does not capture.

Transiting Indigenous lives through the parallel moves of distancing and identification can also be observed in Latin American settler colonial contexts, and how they connect to wider imperialist processes. However, rather than transiting Indianness on the basis of discursive elimination, 'Indianness' became, discursively, an essential ingredient of the building of Latin American postcolonial nation-states. Celebrating the 'racial mix[ing] of Indian and Spaniard' – *mestizaje* – became a way of acknowledging the actually existing diversity of Latin American postcolonial societies while at the same time rendering actual Indigenous peoples 'a part of the. . . historic past'.⁹² In other words, if everyone is a 'little bit Indian', then a distinct Indigenous presence becomes invisible. While the US 'pioneer logics' transforms every 'combatant' into the (ungrievable) 'Indian' (internally and externally), Latin American settler states transit Indigenous lives through explicit, discursive incorporation into their (state) identities, enshrining their legitimacy *as states* and obfuscating their ongoing internal oppression at the same time.

Moreover, a Latin American perspective allows us to see that settler imperial relations are more complex than described by Byrd. They work through the relations of different settler groups with each other. After independence, Latin American settlers became positioned 'under the influence of British and French imperial interests, rather than the Spanish or Portuguese' ones, and acted accordingly.⁹³ In Argentina, for example, 'Anglophone settler colonies and the British Empire' became the 'badge of geopolitical powerfulness', to be identified with 'in order to claim higher status for the nation, both within Latin America and on the world stage'. 'Emulating Anglophone modes of interaction with "subordinate races"', through whitening Argentinian society (albeit through discursive strategies of *mestizaje*), became 'a way of masking national subordination to Britain'.⁹⁴ What this shows is that although there are indeed broader relations of superiority/subordination between the American 'North' and the 'South', a settler colonial perspective sheds light on the aligning and common interest of different groups within these states – not just economically

91. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 23.

92. Speed, 'Settler Capitalism', 787.

93. Peter Baker, 'Unsettling the Language of Settlement: Imaginaries of Race and Experiences of Settlement in Contemporary Bolivia', *Settler Colonial Studies* 11, no. 3 (2021): 371.

94. Taylor, 'Foundations', 352.

(which is the more commonly held assumption), but grounded in settler colonial history, strategies and relations.

Capitalism and the State

Capitalism plays a significant role in the processes of land dispossession in North and Latin America. As already pointed out, settler colonialism is focused on access to land and its resources. Critically engaging with Marx, Coulthard argues that what the former called the phase of 'primitive accumulation' – capturing the transition from feudal to capitalist social relations, through 'violent dispossession' – did not just provide the (past) 'stage for the emergence of capitalist accumulation', but constitutes an ongoing colonial practice.⁹⁵ This regime of 'colonial rule' needs to be analysed 'on its own terms and in its own right', as one that is 'entangled' with capitalism, but not just the latter's instrument or foundation.⁹⁶ But this (correct) insistence harbours the danger of over-emphasising settler colonial rule as a project of *the state*. This is related to the context Coulthard finds himself in: In Canada 'colonial domination continues to be structurally committed to maintain. . . ongoing state access to. . . land and resources', through 'force, fraud, and more recently, so-called "negotiations"', enabling 'colonial state-formation, settlement, and capitalist development'.⁹⁷

By comparison, capitalism had a different role in the processes of Indigenous dispossession in the settler states of Latin America. Taylor mentions the example of the Argentinian Toba people, who were forced to work in the sugar cane fields and mills in the Chaco region in the late 19th century. As their work was seasonal, they were sent back to their own lands for parts of the year, so they would not have to be sustained during 'unproductive' times. As Taylor points out, '[w]hile their sovereignty was eliminated (they became subjects of the Argentine state) they remained on their land and lived autonomously as Toba for six months of the year'. Processes of Indigenous elimination were driven by 'capitalist enterprise' rather than 'the settler state',⁹⁸ and this led to labour exploitation and land dispossession being intertwined. But because settler colonial theory is dominated by research and activism in the Anglo-settler states, the role that capitalism played (and plays) in settler colonialism sometimes remains 'strangely under-theorized'.⁹⁹

Capitalism is important for understanding settler imperialism. The 'settler colonial imperative of dispossession/extraction' of land has decisively shaped global capitalist expansion, and continues to be a crucial imperial strategy today.¹⁰⁰ Settler colonialism continues to be 'a structuring force that in coproduction with the transatlantic slave trade, indentured labour, and other forms of racial ordering enables particular racial logics and forms of exclusion integral to global capital and empire'.¹⁰¹

95. Coulthard, *Red Skin*, 7.

96. *Ibid.*, 10–11.

97. *Ibid.*, 7.

98. Taylor, 'Foundations', 349.

99. *Ibid.*, 350.

100. Speed, *Settler Capitalism*, 788.

101. Gutiérrez Nájera and Maldonado, 'Settler Colonial Formation', 809–10.

Race, Colonialism and Indigeneity: Towards Decolonising in Relation

For Byrd (as for many other Indigenous and settler colonial writers), an adequate understanding of settler colonialism and its significance for US imperial transit needs to recognise that settler colonisation is a distinct form of domination – intertwined with but not identical to racialised oppression. Byrd emphasises that ‘[r]acialization and colonization have worked simultaneously to other and abject entire peoples’.¹⁰² But crucially, under conditions of settler colonialism, they are not identical: struggles for racial justice are generally situated at the inclusion/exclusion axis, seeking recognition and equality for racialised minorities. If Indigenous people are simply incorporated into those struggles, as ‘ethnic minorities’, the ‘colonial injury’ is in danger of being further inscribed.¹⁰³ Because in those struggles, the state, qua definition, has become ‘a legitimate framework within which Indigenous peoples might be more justly included’; its sovereignty over its territory and the peoples within not being contested.¹⁰⁴

This argument has become challenged over the last few years by writers and activists working from within radical Black traditions. First, they critique the reduction of anti-racism to ‘the theme of liberal multiculturalism’, as it marginalises radical approaches aiming for Black internationalism, anti-colonialism and abolition.¹⁰⁵ Secondly, despite not wanting to hierarchise the different struggles against oppression, the problem is that Byrd still defines ‘the Indian’ as the (by implication exclusive) ‘ontological ground’ for ongoing US colonialism/imperialism.¹⁰⁶ This results from the author working from within an (implicit) temporal and spatial framework that takes the internal constitution of the United States as a settler state as ‘ground zero’. Paradoxically, despite her previously mentioned critique of the domestic/international divide in definitions of US imperialism, she herself moves from what she assumes to be the ‘inside’ of the United States as a settler state (with the logic of elimination and Indigenous dispossession as foundational) to the ‘outside’ of its (settler) imperialism. This ignores what has led to the self-constitution of the ‘settler’ and his understanding of ‘land’ as accumulable and possessable in the first place.

Drawing on the work of Sylvia Wynter and Hortense Spillers, Tiffany Lethabo King as well as Tapji Garba and Sara-Maria Sorentino argue that to understand this, we need to turn our attention to what happened before 1492, which is assumed to be the inaugural moment for the ‘New World’ for both decolonial thought and much of settler colonial theory.¹⁰⁷ In the early 1440s, the Portuguese landed on the shores of West Africa, which

102. Byrd, *Transit*, xxiii.

103. Ibid.

104. Coulthard, *Red Skin*, 36.

105. Justin Leroy, ‘Black History in Occupied Territory: On the Entanglements of Slavery and Settler Colonialism’, *Theory & Event* 19, no. 4. Available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/633276/summary>. Last accessed January 17, 2022.

106. Byrd, *Transit*, xix.

107. King, *Black Shoals*; Tapji Garba and Sara-Maria Sorentino, ‘Slavery is a Metaphor: A Critical Commentary on Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang’s ‘Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor’’, *Antipode* 52, no. 3 (2020): 764–82.

led to the introduction of Black Africans 'to the European market of servitude'.¹⁰⁸ This allowed for white Man to self-actualise himself as 'human' (through dehumanising Black/native life) and as a 'conqueror', which laid the foundation for the post-1492 New World, including the centrality of notions such as possessive territory, enslavement and (native) genocide.¹⁰⁹

A Latin American settler colonial perspective allows for further tracing of the complexities of the relationship between racialisation, enslavement, conquest and Indigenous dispossession. Not only were both Indigenous and Black people enslaved in Latin America, but slavery itself was diverse: plantation slavery took place in Brazil and Venezuela but was different elsewhere.¹¹⁰ In Argentina in 1800, 'African slaves were not employed in plantations but were owned in ones and twos by the lower-to-middling classes. . .working outside the home'. Here they came in contact with other 'impoverished people who were not slaves, yet who were. . .also oppressed by capitalist modernity' (including Indigenous people). 'Intimate, affective relationships. . .developed between the black, indigenous and poor "white" people, generating mestizo families at the bottom of the social pile'.¹¹¹ In Brazil, meanwhile, the ongoing existence of the *quilombos* – Black communities strongly linked to ancestral lands and grounded in their own cosmologies – makes clear that land repatriation as a central strategy of decolonisation, and Black liberation, are not necessarily 'poles apart' in all settler contexts – there is a danger in taking the 'North American experience as paradigmatic'.¹¹²

What are the consequences for decolonisation and liberation in the context of settler imperialism? As Tiffany King's work points out for the North American context, while calls for liberating Black lives might be at odds with calls for Indigenous sovereignty if the latter is following a Westphalian notion, this is not necessarily the case with the relational notions of sovereignty that are inherent in most Indigenous understandings. IR scholar Hayden King, from within Anishinaabe intelligence,¹¹³ takes the nation to be 'fluid and radically autonomous' at the same time.¹¹⁴ Drawing on Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (who again draws on Basil Johnson), he also uses the image of the nation as 'an interconnected web of hearts', where communities form and act (and dissolve) from within 'radiating circles': sometimes as 'a small grouping of families, usually in times of

108. Hortense Spillers, quoted in Tiffany Lethabo King, 'New World Grammars: The 'Unthought' Black Discourses of Conquest', *Theory & Event* 19, no. 4. Available at https://muse.jhu.edu/article/633275/summary#info_wrap. Last accessed January 17, 2022.

109. King, 'New World Grammars'.

110. Taylor, 'Foundations', 354.

111. *Ibid.*, 355.

112. *Ibid.*; cf. Desiree Poets, 'Settler Colonialism And/In (Urban) Brazil: Black and Indigenous Resistances to the Logic of Elimination', *Settler Colonial Studies* 11, no. 3 (2021): 273.

113. I have taken the word 'intelligence' from the work of Leanna Betasamosake Simpson, who uses it to build theories and understandings from within the thought and ontology of her own (Nishnabeeg) people. See e.g. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 72.

114. Hayden King, 'Discourses of Conquest and Resistance: International Relations and Anishinaabe Diplomacy', in *Race, Gender, and Culture in International Relations*, eds. Randolph Persaud and Alina Sajed (London: Routledge, 2018), 143.

abundance and peace, and at other times expansive confederacies'.¹¹⁵ This can be related to Mishuana R. Goeman's understanding of the land, which Tiffany Lethabo King uses: like Hayden King, Goeman makes clear that Indigenous sovereignty is always grounded in 'land', but this 'land' is a 'meaning-making process rather than a "claimed object"'.¹¹⁶ If sovereignty is understood as a 'process', then it can be connected to the processes of homemaking that King identifies as emerging out of the 'exilic relationship' that is particularly significant for Black people.¹¹⁷ Last, it also brings us back to Byrd's use of the concept of transit – though this time as a strategy of liberation rather than oppression. Because as Byrd also emphasises, those who are put 'in transit' are 'in the active presence of a world of relational movements and countermovements. To be in transit is to exist relationally, multiply'.¹¹⁸

Moreover, from a Latin American perspective, Black life is not necessarily grounded in an inability to lay claim to anything, as Garba and Sorentino suggest, pointing at the implications of chattel slavery.¹¹⁹ Rather, as the example of the Brazilian *quilombos* shows, they can, in specific contexts, be linked to lands and related identities in the same way as Indigenous communities. Moreover, *mestizaje*, and the way it has created natural affinities between poor, Indigenous and Black folks, could be a way towards liberation: to resurge, (re-)connect, invent and renew.¹²⁰ Hayden uses the term 'siblings' to talk about the relationships between different Anishinaabeg nations – and maybe this term can be useful for understanding relationships between oppressed people(s) more generally. Siblings have a 'desire for unity, when required', but are also inherently autonomous from each other.¹²¹ Siblings are normally 'born and raised together' before going their independent ways, which seems to resonate more with Indigenous notions of inherent peoplehood (through a shared territory, language, culture, legal order, etc.).¹²² But, I maintain, siblings can also be adopted, fostered, joining each other at later points in their lives in 'patchwork' families. In the context of settler imperialism, what brings siblings together might be the subjection to similar processes of dispossession, elimination, exploitation. The resulting relationship might be close to what Tiffany Lethabo King attempts to describe with the metaphor of the 'interweaving of textiles': 'While each form of violence and the Native and Black responses to [specific though interrelated violences] have irreducible stress points and textures, they can never be bracketed off or sequestered from one another in North, South, or Central America or the Caribbean'.¹²³ What matters is a tracing and an understanding of *how* these textiles are woven together, and for what reasons, to move towards decolonisation/liberation relationally.

115. King, 'Discourses of Conquest', 144.

116. Quoted in King, *Black Shoals*, 191.

117. Ibid.

118. Byrd, *Transit*, xviii.

119. Garba and Sorentino, 'Slavery', 774.

120. Taylor, 'Foundations', 369–70.

121. King, 'Discourses of Conquest', 145.

122. Ibid., 145, 142.

123. King, *Black Shoals*, 200–1.

Conclusion: Decolonising IR

In this article, I provided a detailed analysis of the seminal Latin American decolonial texts in which the concept of coloniality was developed. I have critically interrogated the ever-increasing use of the concept in a 'catch-all' manner to describe ongoing global colonial violence in IR, and have argued that the inherent spatial and temporal binaries in which the concept is grounded render certain colonial violence invisible, or are even in danger of reinforcing it. The particular focus of this article was the violence of settler colonial states and their global dimensions. I have also explored the potential of conceptual alternatives that, to my mind, are better equipped to see and understand these violence. I have engaged with Jodi Byrd's concepts of transit and settler imperialism, complemented with perspectives from Latin American settler colonial scholarship and from radical Black thought, for that purpose.

In sum, what the concepts of transit and settler imperialism allow us to see is, first, how the settler colonial imperative of dispossession and extraction of resources and labour from/of *land* have shaped global colonial-capitalist expansion, and how this is still a crucial imperial strategy today. And secondly (and relatedly), how settler colonial strategies of Indigenous (and Black) elimination, which Byrd captures with the concept of transit, continue to shape imperial strategies that criss-cross the borders of states, questioning the distinction of what is 'domestic' and what 'external'. In the last section prior to this conclusion, I have indicated what steps could be taken to move towards decolonisation/liberation in a context of settler imperialism: to focus on and support Indigenous strives for sovereignty and (relatedly) a reclaiming of land without falling prey to the dominant Westphalian notion. The latter relies on fixed boundaries that necessarily entail exclusion: territory belonging to one group cannot belong to another. Instead, I have drawn upon Indigenous and radical Black scholarship that describes sovereignty as an 'interconnected web of hearts' in which boundaries are fluid and relational, allowing for connections and relations between different oppressed people(s), being situated in different contexts and different political struggles, while still being connected and shaped through settler imperial oppression: a relationship that I attempted to describe with Hayden King's metaphor of 'siblings'. Importantly, coming back to my original critique of the concept of coloniality, this understanding of sovereignty and relationality takes us beyond (spatial or temporal) binaries, or at least allows us to situate the latter in wider relations and movements of transit, which, as I have also indicated in the last section on the basis of Byrd, can also, as a strategy of relational movement, lead to liberation.

What are the consequences of decolonising IR? Concepts such as sovereignty, territory, the state, etc., are foundational to our discipline, which is why Hayden King, as an IR scholar, is keen to use his own (Anishinaabe) intelligence to invite us to rethink them. Reconfiguring these terms in non-Westphalian ways is pointing us towards significant strategies of decolonisation that are still not at the forefront of IR debate, but need to be foregrounded if we want to tackle settler imperialism. It would allow for new interventions into important existing debates in post- and decolonial IR scholarship, such as the one about the question of whether the climate emergency requires a new universal planetary consciousness, or ongoing insistence on 'postcolonial difference' (going along with the

hard-won right for self-determination of postcolonial states).¹²⁴ An understanding of settler imperialism, and related Indigenous claims to sovereignty (which are often made against postcolonial states themselves), allows us to formulate standpoints that neither advocate for universal human consciousness and agency (like Dipesh Chakrabarty does), nor for traditional national notions of postcolonial self-determination.

Moreover, Indigenous IR/Political Science scholarship is often determined by Indigenous activism and claims in ‘the North’, focused on fundamentally challenging the legitimacy of the sovereignty of settler states.¹²⁵ By contrast, in much Latin American Indigenous activism, the state as such is not necessarily the target: the question is whether it can be transformed. This has to do with a history in which settler colonialism has often been driven by capitalist enterprise rather than (primarily) the settler state. As Devine Guzman points out, the question is whether the link between the state and colonial capitalism can be broken and whether the state can become ‘a critical purveyor of heterogeneity’ rather than ‘the primary vehicle for the capitalist axiomatic’.¹²⁶ But as I have pointed out in this article, drawing on Speed, this approach also has limitations, as it disregards how the structures of the state might be irredeemably colonial. Is there may be a strategy of decolonisation in between – one that refuses and seeks to transform at the same time?¹²⁷ This question relates to the previously mentioned debate in IR about the need for ‘colonial difference’, and what this should concretely entail for the role of the state in processes of decolonisation.

After having successfully shed light on how ‘coloniality’ continues to be at play in the domination of the colonised ‘other’ today, it might now be time for critical IR to move away from the use of coloniality as a ‘catch-all’ concept, to see its inherent problems, and to explore the value of different concepts that enable us to see global colonial processes in more complex ways, including our thoughts on and strategies of decolonisation.

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124. Cf. Pasha, ‘After the Deluge’.

125. E.g. King, ‘Discourses of Conquest’; Lightfoot, *Global Indigenous Politics*; Matthew Wildcat, ‘Replacing Exclusive Sovereignty with a Relational Sovereignty’, *Borderlands* 19, no. 2 (2020): 172–84.


126. Guzman, *Native and National*, 175.

127. Cf. Poets, ‘Citizenship’.

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ORCID iD

Doerthe Rosenow  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8540-3209>