

More often than not, such tensions end up yielding an ironic reading of some of the central arguments of the dialogue in question. Recalling the famously ironic lenses through which Leo Strauss and his disciples read Plato, LeMoine recasts the *Republic*, for instance, not as a blueprint for an ideal city but as a “thought experiment designed to help [Socrates’s] interlocutors understand the nature of their souls” (p. 94). The interpretations in *Plato’s Caves* accordingly invite some familiar risks—like that of going too far in disavowing the claims of the arguments in favor of stressing the ironic effect. They can also lead to some repetitive conclusions—such as the importance of self-knowledge and criticism, qualities so often valorized in “zetetic” portraits of Plato’s philosophy.

There are other ways in which the project seems to be constrained by the limits built into its approach. Although the book seems to suggest that foreigners in Plato’s dialogues consistently play the part of catalysts to critical reflection on one’s culture, it is not always clear how they go about doing so. At times, *Plato’s Caves* treats Plato’s foreign characters as products of their places of origin, even if they have spent long periods of their lives in Athens. But it also grants that certain foreigners can perform “assimilated” roles, as when the metics Cephalus and Polemarchus appear in the *Republic* to propose definitions of justice that reflect traditional Athenian values (pp. 99–101). Such complications also point to a more fundamental question at the heart of the study. One of the justifications for placing so much weight on passing allusions to foreignness in Plato’s work is that, when we reconstruct the significance they would have held for his immediate audiences, we can better understand his intent. It does not necessarily follow, however, that Plato always intended for the salience of these details to lie in the fact of their foreignness.

Nonetheless in pushing the project to its limits, *Plato’s Caves* offers us a remarkably coherent and compelling vision of what a Platonic theory of cultural diversity would entail. We might think of LeMoine’s book as doing the provocative work of the gadfly celebrated in its pages, prompting us to remember that there is still much in the thought of this seemingly familiar philosopher that remains to be better understood.

Constructing the Pluriverse: The Geopolitics of Knowledge. Edited by Bernd Reiter. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018. 352p. \$104.95 cloth, \$27.95 paper.
doi:10.1017/S1537592720002157

— George Ciccariello-Maher, *College of William and Mary*
gjcm@protonmail.com

We are witnessing an unmistakable decolonial turn in contemporary theory. If the “post” of postcolonialism suggested a misplaced optimism that colonialism was a thing of the past, decolonial thought today sets out from

those long-term legacies of colonialism that continue to scar the present. Colonization was never simply political (to be undone by formal liberation) nor purely economic (as in the neocolonialism that followed) but also saw the birth of new racial, gendered, and sexual orders and new forms of subjectivity, epistemology, and even ontology itself. The persistence of these deeply sedimented residues—what the late Aníbal Quijano termed “coloniality”—means that what Nelson Maldonado-Torres has called the unfinished project of decolonization remains an active imperative for the present and foreseeable future.

Bernd Reiter’s edited volume is one of the most recent contributions to this project. *Constructing the Pluriverse* seeks to enact a turn within a turn, pushing decolonial thought “beyond the critique of colonialism”—although it has never been only this—“to elaborate different ways to perceive and explain the world and find solutions for the many pressing problems of the Global South” (p. 1). For Reiter, pushing back against the universal pretensions of Western thought means, however, that these alternatives must instead be *pluriversal*, that we must establish—to borrow from the Zapatistas—a world in which many worlds fit, and that “all knowledge production must henceforth be partial, context specific, and limited” (p. 2). This implies new tools and new research methods that, by virtue of explaining “different, place-bound phenomena,” will be *more* objective, not less (p. 9).

The first three contributions—from Raewyn Connell, Sandra Harding, and Arturo Escobar—are among the best the volume has to offer, tackling head-on what it would mean to think pluriversally. Connell confronts the persistent coloniality of gender with specific attention to a global “economy of knowledge” (p. 21) that ensures what we might call a global structure of epistemological dependency, in which theory (the epistemological correlate to high value-added goods) is produced in the Global North with raw materials extracted from the Global South. There is no “deficit of ideas from the global periphery,” however; there is only a “deficit of recognition and circulation” (p. 22). Connell thus proposes not less interaction, but more, through a “solidarity-based epistemology” connecting different approaches globally in conversation with social movements (p. 31).

If Connell proposes a dynamic global solidarity, this is also reflected in Harding’s contribution, which interrogates the desirability of the “unity of science thesis” and the destruction of indigenous knowledges it has underwritten worldwide (p. 39). Without romanticizing indigenous knowledge but being resolutely attentive to the structured unreason of global elites, Harding proposes “keeping both eyes open—one on contemporary Western sciences and their philosophies and the other on other cultures’ scientific practices and legacies” (p. 41). If the unity of science gives way to standpoint epistemology, the practical task is to inhabit the interaction *between* different standpoints,

and Harding offers a useful series of strategies through which those in the Global North and South can reach out toward one another in collaborative ways.

Escobar reminds us that globalization has not upheld but instead undercut relationality and that the crisis of this order raises the question of how we might transition toward something radically different. Focusing on Latin American movements, Escobar poses a three-way struggle “between neoliberal globalization (the project of the right), alternative modernizations (the leftist project at the level of the state), and the creation of post/noncapitalist and post/nonliberal worlds” (p. 64). Today’s Latin American movements, for Escobar, are activating relational ontologies and redefining their own autonomy, both of which are present in the indigenous notion of *buen vivir* (living well) that has been incorporated, however partially, into the constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia. Rejecting linear notions of development in favor of communal, noncapitalist alternatives, *buen vivir* is a relational epistemology that helps us grasp how “different ontologies do not mean separate worlds” (p. 83).

That *Constructing the Pluriverse* comes off as slightly eclectic would neither surprise nor concern Reiter, who is clear about its provisional, indeed experimental, nature. But the tensions that emerge in and between the different contributions point toward hard questions for the decolonial turn more broadly. For example, Reiter’s introduction praises Connell’s formulation of a “mosaic epistemology” of the pluriverse in which different approaches coexist side by side, but Connell herself insists that the mosaic approach can fall prey to essentialism and offers her interactive “solidarity-based epistemology” as an alternative. Is this simply a case of misreading or a tension that underlies the volume as a whole? Between universal and particular, the space is vast—where does the center of gravity fall?

Reiter explicitly rejects the twin dangers of romanticism and relativism: mere inclusion does not decolonization make, and adding “random non-Western epistemologies” or assuming that “one approach to explaining the world is as good as the next” is insufficient (p. 2). But here too there is considerable unevenness. Zaid Ahmad’s discussion of the fourteenth-century thinker Ibn Khaldun contributes to theoretical diversity but strains to speak to the present. Ehsan Kashfi’s analysis of Islamic reformism in Iran maps an interesting theoretical trend but fails to mention tensions between liberal democracy and decolonization. Contrast these, however, with Issiaka Ouattara’s excellent analysis of the West African griot as “a historian, a genealogist, a mediator, and a grand custodian of oaths” (p. 160)—all tendentially decolonial functions in their context—or Venu Mehta’s careful delineation of *anekāntavāda* epistemology in Jainism, whose foregrounding of different standpoints is quite literally pluriversal.

Romanticism is also palpable at moments. Ulrich Oslender offers a “deep ethnography” of the *aquatic*

epistemology of Afro-Colombian communities on the Pacific coast (p. 147), but the result is not so deep, and it reminds us that not every difference bears a distinct epistemology. Reiter’s own suggestion that indigenous peoples of the Americas offer the key to a “true democracy” is one that I sympathize with, but it homogenizes indigenous peoples across the Americas while excluding the communal forms practiced by many *cimarrón* communities of escaped slaves, for example. And like many inspired by the “indigenous” democracy of Mexico’s Zapatistas, Reiter neglects to consider that it emerged from the productive fusion of indigenous communities, communist militants, and left-wing Catholicism.

Further, Oslender’s central concept is Deleuze’s assemblage, and Reiter leaves the definition of democracy to Rousseau—at times, it is still easy to slip into a global division of intellectual labor in which theory comes from the North and experience from the South. This is transparently true of Jürgen Burchardt’s chapter on the value of two European thinkers—Spinoza and Norbert Elias—for decoloniality. Of course, this is not to say that no European thinker can prove useful for decolonial purposes, but only that the nature and extent of that contribution must be carefully specified. Speaking to the Ecuadorian context, Catherine E. Walsh wonders if the institutionalization of *buen vivir* has broken with or simply repackaged “the multicultural logic of neoliberal capitalism” and insists that “we must be ever-more vigilant” of the new guises that “colonial entanglements” (pp. 187, 192) can assume. We should take this concern seriously in a broader way as well, asking whether pluriversality runs the risk of simply repackaging neoliberal multiculturalism.

Here, two contributions are particularly instructive. On the one hand, Manu Samnotra finds a pluriversal kernel in Gandhi’s “dialogic engagement with others” (p. 168) and his advocacy of dialogue and “compromise” between “multiple truths” (p. 171). This view would seem to raise the possibility of a tension between the decolonial and the pluriversal. For Frantz Fanon, to take just one example, “truth is what hastens the dislocation of the colonial regime, what fosters the emergence of the nation” (*The Wretched of the Earth* 2004, p. 14). In other words, recognizing multiple truths and dialogue *within* that nation does not entail compromise with colonial oppressors. A similar concern arises from a different angle in Manuela Boatcă’s call to “creolize” Europe by including its Caribbean overseas possessions. Although this call is well intentioned, we could wonder whether such nuance is worth the risk of rehabilitating a category like Europe and effacing the colonial difference at its heart.

Ironically, the least satisfying chapter in *Constructing the Pluriverse* comes from its most well-known contributor. Walter Mignolo frames the global crisis of the present as the inevitable failure of a 500-year process of Westernization, which today confronts two antagonists: on the one

hand, the state-led de-Westernization that has—through the efforts of Russia and China in particular—yielded a multipolar world, and on the other, pluriversality as a nonstate alternative that refuses the terms of modernity in toto. Although these three terms—Westernization, de-Westernization, and pluriversality—are instructive as ideal types, as Mignolo deploys them they are simply too loose, the distinctions between them too stark, and the causal historic claims they uphold too unconvincing.

Most worrying, however, is the oddly sanitized formulation of coloniality that undergirds his analysis. Quijano was careful to stress the material element of coloniality; the centrality of race, class, and gender to its function; and the importance of material struggles for decolonization. Mignolo instead argues that “the essential feature” of

coloniality “is the domain of knowledge” (p. 99) and that decoloniality is therefore fundamentally about “changing the terms of the conversation” (p. 105). Mignolo’s argument that “the pluriverse cannot be enacted if there is no conceptualization of the pluriverse” (p. 108) risks erasing the actually existing pluriverse and privileging academic interventions over concrete struggles.

As Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang remind us, decolonization is no metaphor, nor an idea or a conceptualization, but above all a material practice. Those of us who care deeply about the unfinished project of decolonization are well advised not to forget it. As a contribution to this task, *Constructing the Pluriverse* is a mixed bag, providing useful tools but delivering only partially on its promise.

AMERICAN POLITICS

Fighting the US Youth Sex Trade: Gender, Race, and Politics.

By Carrie N. Baker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 270p. \$89.99 cloth, \$29.99 paper.

doi:10.1017/S1537592720001528

— Samantha Majic , John Jay College of Criminal Justice
smajic@jjay.cuny.edu

In a 2014 *Washington Post* op-ed, human rights lawyer Malika Saada Saar described how Sandra, a 12-year old girl, ran away from an abusive foster home in Florida. A man then found her at a bus stop and forced her to sell sex on a nightly basis. Although Sandra was well below the state’s age of consent, when she encountered the police they arrested her for prostitution. In response, Saar’s op-ed is titled “There Is No Such Thing as a Child Prostitute,” and it speaks for a social movement that has worked to change how youth who trade sex are viewed and treated in public discourse and under the law. At first glance, this movement may seem unnecessary: after all, no one favors sexually exploiting youth, commercially or otherwise. Yet in the United States, changing social attitudes and achieving related legal reforms has been a fitful, uneven, and highly contested process.

Carrie Baker’s *Fighting the US Youth Sex Trade* offers a thoughtful and comprehensive examination of this movement. Drawing on Black feminist and social movement theories, existing scholarly research, media sources, campaign materials, and interviews with advocates and elected officials, Baker argues that activism against the US youth sex trade has surged when social changes related to gender, sexuality, race, economics, and immigration have fueled concerns about youth safety. By using narratives that resonate with and reflect long-standing beliefs about race and sexual victimization, she shows how this movement has often exaggerated and sensationalized youth’s

engagement in the sex trades; ignored the heterogeneity of their experiences; reinforced racial, gender, and sexual ideologies; and promoted neoliberal economic and carceral policies. Although many activists in this movement have challenged these tendencies, its more influential segments have not, and as a result it “has not done enough to address the underlying conditions that make youth vulnerable to entry into the sex trade in the first place” (p. 239), such as underemployment, racism, and homophobia.

The book’s first three chapters provide the historical context for contemporary activism against the US youth sex trade. Chapter 1 documents how late nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century campaigns to control and protect young women’s sexuality, along with mid-twentieth-century social and political shifts, provided the grounds for this movement. Chapter 2 turns to campaigns against juvenile prostitution that emerged in the late 1970s and inspired the passage of laws and policies emphasizing criminal justice solutions over social service provision. Chapter 3 discusses the emergence of “survivor activists” in the 1990s, whose efforts encouraged Congress to pass the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in 2000.

Chapters 4–6 consider how the movement reframed youth involvement in the sex trades as domestic minor sex trafficking. Chapter 4 illustrates how activists used political opportunities created by the TVPA to push for new laws to assist youth at the federal, state, and local levels. Chapter 5 considers the ideological diversification of the movement as it expanded to include evangelical Christians, sex worker rights advocates, and youth empowerment organizations, which often worked across differences (or at arm’s length) to achieve common goals. Chapter 6 then documents how the movement expanded its efforts in the 2010s to reform the child welfare and criminal justice systems, target men who purchase sex, and draw attention to a wider range of youth in the sex trades, including girls