

Decolonial Research Methods: Resisting Coloniality in Academic Knowledge Production (Webinar 4)

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SPEAKERS

Walter Mignolo

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So thank you very much for all the people attending. I like to... It's good for me to know, to have an idea that they're from different parts of the world. And that is very, very important in relation to... I don't know, if you the people in the audience today have been attending the other chats, but anyway you have seen the flyer. And in the flyer, you have seen it and I will kind of underscore, that the speakers are from Singapore, from Australia, from New Zealand, from Korea, India and Argentina. And that is very meaningful in itself. So, somebody... I saw, I saw a question on the chat if I can address the issue of "can Europeans think?" I will instead say what Dabashi, the question that Dabashi asks: "Can Europeans read?" But anyhow, this is a kind of thank you very much and I am glad to be in this context, in this kind of planetary context, where people all over the world have always been thinking. But the question is, as Mahbubani said, "Can Asians think?" and many other people say the idea was under this, basically a racial idea that disqualified people around the world epistemically and ontologically, ontological if people were inferior, and because they were inferior, well, they could think rationally and since they are seen as they cannot think rationally, they are inferior by what kind of rationality are we talking about? So, the idea of one rationality is very close to the idea of method.

Okay, so, I want to start with the definition of method, I mean, the word method, what the word method means. You have in the upper parts, a kind of general kind of reference, a themalogical reference. And in this bottom part is what interests me. Method means any way of doing anything orderly; orderly regulation of conduct with a view to the attainment of an end. So, the method, the way, is the way you do something, but doesn't depend any kind of disciplinary regulation. Everybody who wants to do and engage doing something needs, what is being called a method or way of doing anything. So, the question that I will address this morning is just to kind of, de-link from the idea of methods attached to the discipline, because methods attached to the discipline are the way of control. You have to follow the sociological methods or philosophical method, anthropological methods, etcetera etcetera etcetera. So

my talk is trying to make some points and make you understand what I mean by de-linking. And in this case, de-linking from disciplinary regulation, from disciplinary formation, because the disciplines they tell you what are the discipline for? To discipline you, to control you, what Foucault addresses in his own way, Discipline and Punish, but this is a discipline. So, I will talk about this points: one, two, three, four, five. I hope to address these kinds of points in 45 minutes, if not, you have it in front of you, and we can continue the conversation on this.

So my may general topic is: Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom. That is an article I published in 2010, so what I'm going to say today is an update, because I never stop thinking about that. So, the first point is that method depends on an ends and goals, as we saw in the themalogical definition of method, and in higher education, disciplinary methods regulate disciplinary formation, which is what I just said. So, the question is the colonial thinking for, for me and for people I work with, is not interdisciplinary is not transdisciplinary, it's un disciplinary. I mean, when I said "we", I refer to all the people who are working, starting from Quijano, the coloniality of power, and Maria Lugones, coloniality of gender. So, for all of us, following this kind of foundation, as I said, our work is undisciplinatory. We all belong to different discipline in the collective in the group, modernity, coloniality are philosophers, sociologists, artists, people working on pedagogy, myself, trained in semiotics, in history of religion, in history of art, etcetera etcetera etcetera. But we just come together around the concept of coloniality, coloniality of power and colonial matrix of power. So our way of thinking is, undisciplinatory in the sense that we don't follow any specific discipline to think about coloniality and coloniality of power.

So the question of the method is always the question of "how?", how you do something. And I have, I have been in higher education for probably close to 40 years and I have seen many, many, many students and I have been in many committees and the question, they ask to the student, "What, what is your method?" And I never understood that. I really... I always failed. I just got two grants. And in very specific grants that they then ask for my method. But when somebody asks for my methods, I say to them "No, I just think, I have a problem, I have questions". And I have been educated in semiotics and that has kind of given me a way to kind of address the questions and the problems I like to address. And then I just go. So what is my method? My method is just thinking around the question, and our questions and our problem or problems. So since 19, probably 1992-93. The only thing I think is that the problem and question I address is the coloniality of power, the colonial material power. Why? Well I will tell you later. So the question of the undisciplinarity is you are going to start from how, because if you don't have a problem, if you don't have a question, you don't need a method. You have to... So the question to ask first is what you want to do. That is, in general being asked: "Yeah, I want to study something I want to.. I want to investigate something". But what is less asked is "Why? Why do you want to do that? What does it mean to you? What does it do for you?" And most of the students are, when I ask this kind of question, why, kind of look at me and smile and in silence because they didn't think about that. They assumed that well, the discipline told them what to do. But they didn't think about why you as a person are involved in that. What that means to you, and when at that specific moment, and where are you doing it? And what for are you doing it? And then how the... it can be hard. But if you have all those questions addressed, the question of the how, the question of the method, is just coming by itself. You don't have to have a kind of, a pre-ordered number of points: you have to do that first and then that second and then that third etcetera etcetera.

So, I do make these points more concrete, I will give you two examples: one of Mahatma Gandhi and the other of Linda T. Smith, that he already many of you have read. Linda, Linda was very important in my thinking about this kind of thing since I read Decolonizing Methodologies. But let's kind of think about Gandhi and Linda Smith, in relation to this question. What Gandhi wanted to do, well he wanted to get the settler out of India. Why? Well, obviously, because the settler was disturbing the way of living of Indian people. You can say, well, you know, there was oppression in India and all this kind of thing, but India at that time, I mean, at the time of the India invasion was a Mughal sultanate, right? So, why? So, when? And some are specific moments, and he has started at the beginning of the 19th century about thinking about these issues and acts, first in South Africa, then in India. So where? In South Africa and India. And what for? Well, for liberation, for independence, and how he did it? Well, he did it through what he called civil disobedience. But civil disobedience, which he picked up from David Thoreau, a US thinker, writer, activist of the beginning of the first half of the 19th century, has a different meaning. And that is very important for the point I want to make. For Thoreau, civil disobedience meant disobedience to this state, because he was opposing the United States war against Mexico in 1846-48. And also because of the civil disobedience, he refuses to pay taxes, because the government was using taxes to kind of support that work. We know, we know how these things work even today. So because of that he was put in jail, somebody apparently paid the taxes for him. He was put in, he was getting out of jail. And he wrote this kind of essay in which the concept of civil disobedience was his proposal: we have to disobey to the state when we think that the state is doing things that are unjust, that are not fair, etcetera. So the point I want to make here is that when Gandhi talked about civil disobedience, the situation is very, very, very different. Why? Because Thoreau was thinking within the same Western cosmology that he was this he was disobeying. So the Western cosmology, which I mean, it's basically Christian theology, articulated in the 19th century with secular science and philosophy, is a cosmology, in the sense that all this is based on certain assumptions on the creation of the world on what's called our cosmogony, and the creation of the human being that was provided by the Bible at that time. And cosmology is kind of the discourse that people create around this basic foundation of the creation of the world and of the people who tell the story of the creation of the world, because the world then creates itself according to such or such narrative. So the narrated are the explanations that certain people find to make sense of why we are here, how we came to be here, etcetera etcetera. So while David Thoreau was within the same cosmology, he was disobeying. And in this case, let's say political theory and a political theory that kind of regulates the governance of this state. Gandhi was coming from a totally different cosmology, nothing to do, nothing to do with Western cosmology, until of course, the British invaded, settlers, and in the settler man and an invasion, they introduced a Western way of education. So, that is why Macaulay is so, so big, so loved and hated in India, because he kind of, through education, you impose a cosmology that doesn't belong to you. So, Gandhi was not very comfortable with that. His language was not English, his language was Gujarati and we know that India had many, many languages. So Hind Swaraj, his first three theses, kind of the foundation of his thoughts, was written in Guwahati and then translated into English. So, the point here is that again he took civil disobedience from Thoreau, but under this condition, what Gandhi was doing was epistemic disobedience, because he was disobeying the epistemic foundation of Western thinking, of Western thought. You can find that foundation in Hind Swaraj, and you then can find that in any other things you will read in Gandhi. So, then you have a kind of example. This is not the disciplinary. What he would wanted to do was to get the centre out of India. And the way he do it was through civil

disobedience, but also through epistemic disobedience. And so, he was not thinking about kind of implanting a nation state in India. He was thinking about reconstitution of the ram, which is kind of the communal organisation that came from the history of India itself, but then he was killed and came Nehru and Nehru kind of went with a nation state. So, the question the epistemic this will be the end of Gandhi... He was trained as a lawyer in England, so he knew what he was talking about. But was it an epistemic disobedience Lee and what was the end? What was it that was the way he found was epistemic disobedience. The way and and the goal, the end, was to get the settler out. And he did it.

So in the case of Linda T. Smith, the conditions are different. So Linda operates between the academia. I thought that she was an anthropologist because the way that decolonizing methodology was written with a lot of kind of reference to anthropology and also she made a lot of anthropologists uncomfortable about the book. And at the same time, she kind of is active among Maori, what she calls social movement, or indigenous social movements, and also active among Maori think as an intellectuals. So Decolonizing Methodologies, what Linda was trying to do is say, "Well, when Maori kind of hear, listen, the word research, they know they are confronting a weapon to control them". So decolonizing methodology is a sustained argument for how to find the way to do their own research and what kind of knowledge the Maori already needs, why they need it, when they need it, where they need it. And what for. What for? Kind of, for liberation of the de-linking from the regulation of Western disciplinary formation, and Western myth of the method. And she does it in the second part of the book, and there is a lot of books now, there is a lot of book about indigenous way of thinking in terms of method. And that way of thinking method is not coming from the cosmology, Western cosmology, the kind of derivation that may be of Plato and Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, etcetera. But it's coming from Maori cosmology and that is what we see all around today. I mean, people who are de-linking from Western epistemology began the reconstitution of their own cosmology, the way of thinking of their ancestors, in their language that has been destitute by and during the invasion of settlements, which was not just political and economic, but basically through education. So Fanon has this very clear when he said that the coloniser is not just satisfied with kind of invading and settling the land, the coloniser kind of gets funnelled into the soul of the colonised people and tries to destroy their memories and their languages. So what we are seeing today, in this sphere of thinking, is the risk of the reconstitution of many different cosmologies around the world. And that is why I emphasised at the beginning that the speaker in this series come from different parts of the world. So what we around the world are kind of thinking about the question of methods and research and decoloniality, that is what they were trying to do in our local histories, in our personal history. There is no universal model for that. The only universal models were the universal models that were created in the constitution of Western civilization and the way of thinking and regulating thinking from 1500 to 2000, more or less. So for the world to come, if it has not being destroyed by nuclear war or climate change or pandemic, if there is a future of the world that the future of the world will not longer be regulated by one model. And that is what we call pluriversality, longer universality. And what, let's put it away. Western, what they consider Western universality, will become part of the universal way of thinking, which means that if North Atlantic, North Atlantic scholars or persons want to believe in what Haitian anthropologist Rolph Trouillot called abstract, North Atlantic abstract universal. Of course they have the right to think about that their way of thinking is universal. I don't have any objection about that. I have a section about the arbitration. They have no right to believe that their universal shall be the universal for all the people in the world. So that is the kind of what we are thinking about the pluriverse. So you see the question of what Gandhi is

looking for on what this Linda Smith is looking for, are different, but at the same time, have the same kind of, a common horizon. It's to get rid, delink from the imposition of Western invasion. Now, here is what bolder thinking, bolder dwelling and border thinking comes into the picture. Because there is no way that Gandhi or Linda Smith can go back to what Maori cultural civilization, way of thinking was before the invasion of the British and neither Gandhi can go back to the ram as it was before the British.

So the reconstitution of the destitute has to be done in confrontation with the education of Western civilization that is in all of us. Today, most of the people in the planet that have been through education, have been educated in the kind of the principal and the canon of Western civilization, or for the sum of the discipline. And why? Because since the 16th century, and that happened first in the Americas, the institution called university was a fundamental weapon of education, of colonisation of the colonisation of the mind. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o stated this about 30 years ago. So that was basically the Spanish and Portuguese university. But then, by the 19th century, with the expansion of British and French, he western model university began to be propagated and expanded in Africa, in Asia. Each region, each country have their own history, but since you are from different parts of the world, I invite you to think if you didn't already think about when a university was, the first university, was created in your region in your country. That doesn't mean that you didn't have education before. Everybody had education before. The Aztec had education, a complex system for education. The Incas had a complex system of education. The Maya had a very complex system of education. But came the university and destitute, dismantle, or as Fanon says, destroy, or try to destroy. They couldn't. There is something that I remember. Ranajit Guha, the Indian historian that initiated the subaltern studies group, or was a promoter of, said something that the British could never colonise was Indian memories. And I can say what the Spanish and the Portuguese could never colonise was the memory of indigenous, or the First Nations in this part of the world, and neither the memories of the African, the enslaved in Africa and the descendants of the African slave trade and slavery today. So, there is also in South America now a very important energy and push in the reconstitution of African memory, not the memory of Africa, but the memory how they African constituted themselves in this part of the world. Casey is a good case but it's a long history to talk about that. But just, so keep in mind what is going on now. What do we want to do decolonially? It's the reconstitution of the destitute. Why? Well because we don't like to be told what we have to do, and how we have to do it. And when we have to do it, and why we have to do it and what for we have to do it.

So that for me are the fundamental questions of decolonial research that I talk instead. My latest book is Decolonial Investigations. I want to just stay away from the concept of research, because research is the key word of the kind of the university system on all the kind of statements of foundation that offer grants and fellowships to students and faculty. And also investigation goes beyond the university. Everybody here... I mean the police does a lot of investigation. Those of you in this country or another country that watch The Wire, that very interesting TV series, well, they have a whole kind of department of investigation of homicide. But Sherlock Holmes. Sherlock Holmes is a good model for me. He was a tremendous investigator. And so the question was, what to investigate? A crime. Why? Well, because he wanted to just implement justice, when, where etcetera, etcetera. So the method of Sherlock Holmes comes out of each specific case, but each specific case is a general instance of something more general that crimes are committed and the criminal has to be identified and punished. Okay. So, I thought that my example of Gandhi and Linda makes clear what I mean by epistemic disobedience.

So, why disobedience? I already mentioned or said something. And that is not... And that is a lot of people who are asking, who or has been asking that. So the question, of can non-Europeans think, was a recent formulation by Dabashi, but that question was asked before by Kishore Mahbubani. And Kishore Mahbubani is not a decolonial thinker by any means. Those of you who are not familiar with Kishore Mahbubani, he was the ambassador of Singapore on the United Nations in the 90s. And then he became the first director and founder of Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy in Singapore. However, in 99, and from the experience of being in the United Nations, he wrote a landmark book *Can Asians Think?* And the question was very obvious for a lot of people. It doesn't matter what level and what sphere of society you are, that if you are not European, you cannot think.

So Rodolfo Kusch, who was a philosopher, Argentinian philosopher, and he formulated in different words. He said, "Well, what happened in Argentina, and in America...". He didn't use Latin America, he used America, but he referred basically, to Spanish and Luso America. "The problem that we have in this part of the world, is that we are afraid of thinking in our own terms. We need the security blanket..." Since he was a philosopher, so the security blanket of Heidegger, of Nietzsche, of Kant, of Hegel. "That gave us a kind of security and a sense of relevance, made us feel kind of secure and important, because we can talk about Hegel and Heidegger." And he says, he just turned around and began to think, from the thought of indigenous people and peasants, the popular thinking. And one of the crucial books was *Popular and Indigenous Thinking in America*, so he turned... He shift, he shifted the geopolitics of knowing and knowledge. So instead of using Heidegger or Hegel or Lévi-Strauss, that at his time were kind of big names and in South America, instead of using Lévi-Strauss to study the Indian and the popular culture as if they were insects, they, he grounded himself in popular thinking and indigenous thinking, to think Lévi-Strauss and to think Hegel and to think Heidegger and to think Nietzsche, and to show the kind of the limitation. The great thinkers they were, but at the same time the short vision they have, and that we cannot longer think our problems as questions, is starting from the canon of European philosophy. We got to kind of come to our own, think our own local history.

Okay, I have five more minutes and I will be kind of closing this. So, the names I put there in kind of bold are the the references I have in my thinking. I don't have much time to talk about with you, those of you who are interested can do some kind of research. So Lloyd Best was a Trinidadian thinker, economist, activist, brilliant. And my essay, *Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom*, is a kind of conversation with Lloyd Best's fundamental article that is called *Independent Thought and Caribbean Freedom*, something like that, and that was in an article published in 1972. So Sylvia Wynter is a Jamaican, is a Jamaican writer, thinker, etcetera, that also is fundamental in asking that kind of question of kind of... For Sylvia Wynter, the fundamental question is to delink from the Western concept of the human and the humanity, because she sees very clearly that the very concept of, the Western concept of the human, is not universal. It's a Western way of thinking about, about animal species that walk into extremities, use the upper hand to hunt and to create agriculture and to create computers, create system of thought that disqualify other people, but also a system of thought that not only disqualifies other people, disqualifies all the living on Earth and the universe that has been reduced to one concept: nature. So nature is not an entity. Nature is a fiction. Nature is a noun. The Living reduced to a noun, to an entity, that can be exploited and extracted, and

extracting wealth. And that is what we are talking about natural resources. And that's why we have a problem with extractivism. And that is why we have a problem with climate change etcetera, etcetera.

So, my own research, and this is my last point, that you have in point five... So what I did so far, I gave you a context of the problem of the method and epistemic disobedience. My own research is going in that direction and it's based on the belief that there needs to create concept because the concept that exists, we cannot ignore it. But the concepts that are kind of available in any other discipline were created to respond to questions that are not my question. To places that and history that were not my history. The reason, the why, that is not why I'm doing research. So, that is fundamental. The creation of concepts that we need in order to articulate our experience, not to transform the discipline. It's to kind of affirm ourselves as thinkers and doers in the world. So, what we call them with any coloniality think tank or group or collective is based on Quijano, who introduced the concept of coloniality, coloniality of power, colonial metric of power and that changes everything. And Naomi Klein will say in a different context. And Maria Lugones who kind of added to that, the colonial gender system. And after that we collectively have been created a lot of other concepts, like geo-body politic of knowledge. I mean, the geo-body politic of knowing and knowledge and knowing, as we said at the beginning. I mean, European thinking is great. I mean, they did fantastic things. That what they had to do. But they did it in Europe, and they responded to your question, and they hide the enunciation. And this because they hide the enunciation, because they didn't say, we are thinking this because our bodies are kind of male bodies, Christian bodies, white bodies, that kind of... in this local history. Now, they thought that.. Whatever they thought has universal values. So the geopolitics of knowing and knowledge is this kind of dissent of that, the opening up the pluraverse. And the body politic is not biopolitics, because Foucault what he did biopolitics was fantastic, to study the strategy of the state to control the body. But body politics is the body who realises what is going on, and the one who does not want to be controlled. So the last sentence of Fanon in *Black Skin, White Mask* if you read it and you remember, is this. "All my body. Ask me always. Someone who ask or who question." He said, "My body, nor my mind". He, where he was very aware of what does it mean, being a black body from the Caribbean, in France, and then you have the the geo-body politics in action and putting the colonial thinking in motion. Well, and there is another set of concepts that, if you're interested, you can Google and you can find them. In order to get away from epistemology, I mean, respect the epistemology but at the same time, reduce epistemology to its own size, not as universal but epistemology as it became as the kind of the foundation of the thinking the scientific and philosophical thinking or theological thinking. But we need a larger concept of gnoseology, that refers to all kinds of knowing and understanding and is based on the biology of cognition. It's the kind of the organism, the living organism, capacity, capability, ability to think. If, I mean, if the birds were not thinking, they will just be hitting trees all the time, and they will never find the branch where to where to settle and will never be able to build nests and regenerate their own species. So, an aesthesis, an aesthesis is to delink from aesthetic, because aesthetic colonises control as thesis and reduces it to the principle of the beautiful. But the beautiful for whom? And the sublime. And also produce it through the work of the genius, while every human, every human being is capable of doing things.

Well, there are more concepts and more people and you have it there in the last paragraph in point 5, well it should be 5b. And there is a one more here, actually. But I don't have... Oh, the last point, the last point is beyond the concept. Another decolonial task is to build our own genealogy of thought.

Where the Western way of thinking did very well is to create their own genealogy in every discipline. And the genealogy of a general genealogy of thought based on Greek thinking and Roman thinking. And that is, that is great and I don't have any quarrel about that. Again, my problem is with aberration, the expectations that this canon should be valid for everybody. So what we have to do is to build our own genealogy of decolonial thinking. I give you here some names, some references that are important to me. But I am not pretending that this should be important to everybody. I think that each of us, in every part of the world, in every region of the world, in every language of the world that we have been born and educated, etcetera, has to build our own genealogy, your thought. And then, in a kind of... Connecting all these kind of different genealogy of thought. And if there's different genealogy of thought that creates the pluraverse, the pluraversality of knowing, thinking and believing. So thank you very much. I went a little bit over, five minutes over, maybe on time but just kind of stop here. Thank you.