

Professor Walter Mignolo

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Webinar Series: Decolonial Research Methods: Resisting Coloniality in Academic Knowledge Production

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Organised by: Dr Leon Moosavi, University of Liverpool, UK

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Transcribed by: Ms Intan Syazwani

So, thank you very much for all the people attending. I'd like to, it's good for me to know, to have an idea that there're from different parts of the world. And that is 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, 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 has, 'Can European read?'. But anyhow, this is a kind of thank you very much. 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 that idea was basically a racial idea that disqualified people around the world epistemically and ontologically. Ontologically, people were inferior and because they were inferior, well they couldn't think rationally and since they cannot think rationally, they are inferior but 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 a definition of method. I mean, well, the word method. What the word method means? You have in the upper part, a kind of general kind of reference, etymological reference. And in this bottom part, is what interest 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 that doesn't depend on any kind of disciplinary regulation. Everybody who wants to do or engage in doing something needs what is being called, a method, a way of doing anything. So, the question that I will address this morning is just to kind of delink from the idea of method attached to the discipline because method attached to the discipline are the way of control. You have to follow the sociological method, philosophical method, anthropological method, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So, my talk is trying to make some point and make you understand what I mean by delinking. And in this case, delinking 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 it in his own way in *Discipline and Punish*, but this is the discipline. So, I will talk about this point. One, two, three, four, five. I hope to address this kind of point in 45 minutes. If not, you have it in front of you and we can continue the conversation on this. So, my 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 stopped thinking about that.

So, the first point is that method depends on an ends and goals as we saw in the etymological definition of method. And in higher education, disciplinary methods regulate disciplinary formation which is what I just said. So, the question is the decolonial thinking for me and for people I work with, is not interdisciplinary, is not transdisciplinary, it's undisciplinary. I mean, when I said 'we', I refer to all the people who are working and starting from Quijano and 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 undisciplinary. 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, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. But we just come together around the concept of coloniality, coloniality of power and colonial matrix of power. So, our way of thinking is undisciplinary 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 been in higher education for probably close to forty years and I have seen many many many students and I have been in many committee, and the question they ask to the student, 'What is your method?', and I never understood that. I really – I always fail – I just got two grants and a very specific grant that they didn't ask for my method. But when somebody ask for my method, I say to them "No, I just think. I got a problem. I got questions. I have been educated in semiotics and that is kind of give me a way to kind of address the questions and the problems I'd like to address". And then I just go. So, what is my method? My method is just thinking around the question or questions and our problem or problems. So, since 19 - probably 92, 1992, 93, the only thing I think is – the problem and question I address is the coloniality of power, the colonial matrix of power. Why? Well, I will tell you later.

So, the question of the undisciplinary, if you understand 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 wanna do? That is in general being asked. Yeah, I wanna study something, I wanna investigate something. But what is less asked is, "Why you wanna do that? What does it mean to you? What does it do for you?". And most of the student are,

when I ask these kind of questions why, kind of look at me and smile and in silence because they didn't think about that. They assume 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 that can be hard. But if you have all those question addressed, the question of the how, the question of the method is just coming by itself. You don't have to have the kind of a preordered number of points, you have to do that first and then that second and then that third et cetera, et cetera.

To make this point more concrete, I will give you two examples, one of Mahatma Gandhi, and the other of Linda Tuhiwai Smith that already many of you have read. Linda was very important in my thinking about these kinds of things 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 were disturbing the way of living of Indian people. You can say well, you know, there was oppression in India and all these kind of thing but India that time, I mean at the time when India was invaded it was a Mughal sultanate, right? So, why? So, when? And some of the specific moments then he 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 call, civil disobedience. But civil disobedience who he picked up from David Thoreau, a US thinker, writer, activist of the beginning of first half of the 19th Century, had a different meaning. And that is very important for the point I want to make. For Thoreau, civil disobedience meant disobedience to the state because he was opposing United States war against Mexico in 1845 – 46 – 48. And also, because of the civil disobedience, he refuses to pay taxes because the government was using taxes to kind of, support that war. 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 because we disobey to the state when we think that the state is doing things that are unjust, that are not fair et cetera. So, the point I wanna 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 he was disobeying. So, the Western cosmology, which I mean is basically Christian theology articulating in the 19th Century with secular science and philosophy, is a cosmology in the sense that all these is based on certain assumptions on the creation of the world, what's called cosmogony, and the creation of the human being that was provided by the Bible at that time, and cosmology is the 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 narrative are the explanation that certain people find to make sense of why we are here, how we came to be here et cetera, et cetera. So, while David Thoreau was within the same cosmology he was disobeying, and in this case let's say political theory that kind of regulate the governance of the state, Gandhi was coming from a total different cosmology. Nothing to do – nothing to do with Western cosmology until of course the British invaded, settled and in the settlement and invasion, they introduced Western way of education. So, that is why McCaulay is so big, so loved and hated in India because he kind of, through education, you impose a cosmology that don'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 has many many languages. So, Hind Swaraj, his first three theses, are kind of the foundation of his thoughts, was written in Gujarati and then translated into English. So, the point here is that Gandhi 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 it in any other things you will read in Gandhi. So, then you have a kind of example. This is not disciplinary. What he wanted to do to get the settlers 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 a kind of, implanting a nation state in India. He was thinking about the reconstitution of the *Ram*, which is a kind of communal organization that come 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 disobedience of Gandhi, he was trained as a lawyer in England so he knew what he was talking about, but it was an epistemic disobedience and what was the end? What was it? The way he found was epistemic disobedience. The way and the goal, the end, was to get the settler out and he did it.

So, in the case of Linda Tuhiwai Smith, the conditions are different. So, Linda is operating between the academia. I thought she was an anthropologist because the way that *Decolonizing Methodologies* was written with a lot of kind of reference to anthropology and also the – she made a lot of anthropologists uncomfortable a lot about the book. And at the same time, she kind of is active among Maori, what she call, social movement or indigenous social movement, and also active among Maori thinkers and intellectuals. So, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, what Linda was trying to do is that, well, when Maori kind of, hear, listen, the word 'research' they know they are confronting a weapon to control them. So, *Decolonizing Methodologies* is a sustained argument of – for the Maori to find the way, to do their own research, and what kind of knowledge the Maori need, why they need it, when they need it,

where they need it, and what for? What for? For the kind of, for liberation or delinking 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 books about Indigenous way of thinking in term of method. And, that way of thinking of method is not coming from the cosmology, Western cosmology, the kind of derivation that maybe Plato and Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas et cetera, but it's coming from Maori cosmology, and that is what we see all around today. I mean people who are delinking from Western epistemology began the reconstitution of their own cosmology, the way of thinking of their ancestors in their languages that has been destitute by and during the invasion and settlements which was not just political and economic, but was basically through education. So, Fanon has this very clear, when he said that the colonizer is not just satisfied with kind of, invading and settling the land, the colonizer, kind of, gets, said Fanon, into the soul of the colonized people and try to destroy their memories and their languages.

So, what we are seeing today, in this sphere of thinking is the reconstitution of many different cosmologies around the world and that is why I emphasized at the beginning that the speakers in this series come from different parts of the world. So, what we, around the world, the kind of thinking about the question of method and research and decoloniality, that is what I was trying to do in our local histories, in our personal histories, there is no universal model for that. The only universal model was the universal model 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's not being destroyed by nuclear war, or climate change or pandemic, if there is a future of the world, then the future of the world will no longer be regulated by one model, and that is, that's what we call pluriversality, no longer universality. And, well let's put it that way. Western, what is today considered Western universality will become part of the pluriversal way of thinking which means that if North Atlantic, if North Atlantic scholars or persons want to believe in what a Haitian anthropologist, Rolph Trouillot, called Abstract North Atlantic, Abstract Universal, of course they have the right to think about their way of thinking is universal. I don't have any objection about that. I have objection about the aberration. 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're thinking about pluriversal.

So, you see the question of what Gandhi are looking for and what Linda Smith is looking for, are different but at the same time, have the same kind of common horizon to get rid, delink, from the imposition of Western invasion. Now, here is what border thinking, border 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 principle and the canon of Western civilization of a sum of the discipline. And why? Because since the 16th Century, that happened first in the Americas, the institution called university was a fundamental weapon of education, of colonization, of the colonization of the mind as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o stated 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, the Western model university began to be propagated and expanded in Africa and Asia. Each region, each country, have their own history but since you're from different parts of the world, I invite you to think if you didn't already think about when 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 Aztecs had education, it's complex system of education. The Incas have complex systems of education. The Mayan have very complex system of education. But came the university, and destitute, dismantle, or as Fanon said, destroy, they were trying 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 Indians – the British could never colonize was Indian memories. And I can say what the Spanish and the Portuguese could never colonize, was the memory of Indigenous, of the First Nations in this part of the world, and neither the memories of the African, the enslaved Africans, and the descendants of Africans slave trade and slavery today. So, there is also in South American now, and very important, energy and push in the reconstitution of African memory. Not the memory of Africa, but the memory of how the Africans constituted themselves in this part of the world. Kaifi is a good case but it's a long history to talk about that but just to keep in mind what is going on now.

What we want to do decolonially is 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 question of decolonial research that I talk. Instead my latest book is *Decolonial Investigation*. I wanna just stay away from the concept of research because research is the keyword of the kind of the university system on all the kind of statement of foundation that offer grant and fellowships to students and faculty. And also, investigation goes beyond the university, everybody, I mean the police does a lot of investigation. Those of you in this country, or that country that watch *The Wire*, very interesting TV series, well, they have a whole kind of department of investigation of homicide. But Sherlock Holmes is a good model for me. He was

a tremendous investigator. So, the question was what to investigate. A crime. Why? Well because he wanted just implement justice. When, where et cetera, et cetera. 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 have to be identified and punished.

Okay, so I thought that my example of Gandhi and Linda Smith 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 or has been asking that. So, the question of “*Can Non-European 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, 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 or what sphere of society you are, that if you are not European, you cannot think. So, Rodolfo Kusch 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, 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 said, he just turned around and began to think from the thought of Indigenous people and peasant, the popular thinking. And one of the crucial book was *Popular and Indigenous Thinking in America*. So, he shifted the geopolitics of knowing and knowledge. So, instead of using Heidegger or Hegel or Lévi-Strauss, that at his time was a kind of big name in South America, instead of using Lévi-Strauss to study the Indian and the popular culture as if they were insects, he grounded himself in popular thinking and Indigenous thinking to think Lévi-Strauss, 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 had and that we can no longer think our problem as questions starting from the canon of European philosophy. We have to kind of come to our own, think of 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 reference I have in my thinking. I don't have much time to talk about but

those of you who are interested can do some kind of research. So, Lloyd Best was a Trinidadian thinker, columnist, 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 *Caribbean Thought. No. Independent Thought and Caribbean Freedom*, something like that. And that was an article published in 1972. So, Sylvia Wynter is a Jamaican writer, thinker, et cetera, 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, the Western concept of a human is not universal, it's a Western way of thinking about animal species that walk into extremities, used the upper hand to hand and to create agriculture, and to create computer, and create systems of thought that disqualifies other people. But also, a system of thought that not only disqualify other people, disqualify 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 extracted wealth and that is what we are talking about 'natural resources' and that's why we have a problem with extractivism, that is why we have a problem with climate change et cetera, et cetera.

So, my own research and this is my last point, is that you have in point five. So what I did so far, I gave you context of the problem of the method and epistemic disobedience. My own research is going that direction and is based on the belief that there needs to create concepts because the concepts that exists, we cannot ignore it, but the concept that are, kind of, available in any of the discipline were created to respond to questions that are not my question, to places that and history that are not my history. The reason, the why, that is not why I'm doing research. So, that is fundamentally the creation of concepts that we need in order to articulate our experience. Not to transform the discipline is to kind of affirm ourselves as thinkers and doers in the world. So, what we call modernity/coloniality think tank or group or collective is based on Quijano who introduced the concept of coloniality, coloniality of power, colonial matrix of power, and that changes everything and Naomi Klein will say in a different context, and Maria Lugones who kind of added to that decolonial gender systems. And after that, we collectively have been creating a lot of other concepts like geobody politic of knowledge. I mean the geobody politic of knowing and knowledge of knowing, as we said at the beginning, I mean, European thinking is great, I mean they did fantastic things, they did what they have to do. But they did it in Europe, and they responded to Europe questions. And they hide the enunciation and it's 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, this local history'. No, they thought that whatever they thought have universal values.

So, the geopolitic of knowing and knowledge is kind of dissent of that, the opening up of the pluriversal. And the body politic is not the biopolitics because Foucault what he did biopolitics was to, fantastic, to study how the strategy of the state to control the bodies. But body politics is the body who relies what is going on and does not want to be controlled. So, the last sentence of Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, if you read it and you remember, is this, "Oh my body, ask me always. Someone who ask or who question." He said, my body not my mind. He was very aware of what does it mean being a black body from the Caribbean in France and then you have the geobody politics in action and put in 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 epistemology but at the same time, reduce epistemology to its own size, not as universal but epistemology as it became 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 settle and will never be able to build nests and regenerate their own species. So, an aesthesis, an aesthetic is to delink from aesthetic because aesthetic colonize control as thesis, and reduce it to the principle of the beautiful. But the beautiful for whom? And the sublime and also reduce it to the work of the genius. Well, every human being is capable of doing things. Well, there are more concepts and more people and you have there in the last paragraph in point five. Well, it should be 5b. And there is one more here actually. But I don't have – oh the last point, the last point is beyond the concept, another decolonial tasks is to build our own genealogy of thought. What Western way of thinking did very well is to create their own genealogy in every discipline, and a general genealogy of thought based on Greek thinking and Roman thinking and that is great, and that I don't have any quarrel about that. Again, my problem is with aberration, the expectation 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 reference that 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 in et cetera, have to build our own genealogy of thought and then, in a kind of, connecting all this kind of different genealogy of thought and if they're different genealogy of thought that creates the pluriverse, the pluriversity 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.