Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom

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Abstract
Once upon a time scholars assumed that the knowing subject in the disciplines is transparent, disincorporated from the known and untouched by the geo-political configuration of the world in which people are racially ranked and regions are racially configured. From a detached and neutral point of observation (that Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez describes as the *hubris of the zero point*), the knowing subject maps the world and its problems, classifies people and projects into what is good for them. Today that assumption is no longer tenable, although there are still many believers. At stake is indeed the question of racism and epistemology. And once upon a time scholars assumed that if you 'come' from Latin America you have to 'talk about' Latin America; that in such a case you have to be a token of your culture. Such expectation will not arise if the author 'comes' from Germany, France, England or the US. As we know: the first world has knowledge, the third world has culture; Native Americans have wisdom, Anglo Americans have science. The need for political and epistemic de-linking here comes to the fore, as well as decolonializing and de-colonial knowledges, necessary steps for imagining and building democratic, just, and non-imperial/colonial societies.

Key words
decolonial option/thinking ■ decolonizing methodology ■ epistemic/linguistic racism ■ geo- and body-politics of knowledge ■ zero point epistemology

I

ONCE UPON a time scholars assumed that the knowing subject in the disciplines is transparent, disincorporated from the known and untouched by the geo-political configuration of the world in which people are racially ranked and regions are racially configured. From a detached and neutral point of observation (that Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez (2007) describes as the *hubris of the zero point*), the knowing subject maps the world and its problems, classifies people and projects into what is good for them. Today that assumption is no longer tenable, although there are still many believers. At stake is indeed the question of racism and epistemology (Chukwudi Eze, 1997; Mignolo, forthcoming). And once upon a time scholars assumed that if you 'come' from Latin America you have to 'talk about' Latin America; that in such a case you have to be a token of your culture. Such expectation will not arise if the author 'comes' from Germany, France, England or the US. In such cases it is not assumed that you have to be talking about your culture but can function as a theoretically minded person. As we know: the first world has knowledge, the third world has culture; Native Americans have wisdom, Anglo Americans have science. The need for political and epistemic de-linking here comes to the fore, as well as decolonializing and de-colonial knowledges, necessary steps for imagining and building democratic, just, and non-imperial/colonial societies.

Geo-politics of knowledge goes hand in hand with geo-politics of knowing. Who and when, why and where is knowledge generated (rather than produced, like cars or cell phones)? Asking these questions means to shift the attention from the enunciated to the enunciation. And by so doing, turning Descartes's dictum inside out: rather than assuming that thinking comes before being, one assumes instead that it is a racially marked body in a geo-historical marked space that feels the urge or get the call to speak, to articulate, in whatever semiotic system, the urge that makes of living organisms 'human' beings.

By setting the scenario in terms of geo- and body-politics I am starting and departing from already familiar notions of 'situated knowledges'. Sure, all knowledges are situated and every knowledge is constructed. But that is just the beginning. The question is: who, when, why is constructing knowledges (Mignolo, 1999, 2005 [1995])? Why eurocentered epistemology carefully hidden (in the social sciences, in the humanities, in the natural sciences and professional schools, in think tanks of the financial sector and the G8 or G20), its own geo-historical and bio-graphical locations?

The shift I am indicating is the anchor (constructed of course, located of course, not just anchored by nature or by God) of the argument that follows. It is the beginning of any epistemic de-colonial de-linking with all its historical, political and ethical consequences. Why? Because geo-historical and bio-graphic loci of enunciation have been *located* by and through the making and transformation of the colonial matrix of power: a racial system of social classification that invented Occidentalism (e.g. Indias

Occidentales), that created the conditions for Orientalism; distinguished the South of Europe from its center (Hegel) and, on that long history, remapped the world as first, second and third during the Cold War. Places of non-thought (of myth, non-western religions, folklore, underdevelopment involving regions and people) today have been waking up from the long process of westernization. The *anthropos* inhabiting non-European places discovered that s/he had been invented, as *anthropos*, by a locus of enunciations self-defined as *humanitas*.

Now, there are currently two *kinds or directions* advanced by the *former anthropos* who are no longer claiming *recognition by* or *inclusion in*, the *humanitas*, but engaging in epistemic disobedience and de-linking from the magic of the Western idea of modernity, ideals of humanity and promises of economic growth and financial prosperity (Wall Street dixit). One direction unfolds within the globalization of a type of economy that in both liberal and Marxist vocabulary is defined as 'capitalism.' One of the strongest advocates of this is the Singaporean scholar, intellectual and politician Kishore Mahbubani, to which I will return later. One of his earlier book titles carries the unmistakable and irreverent message: *Can Asians Think?: Understanding the Divide between East and West* (2001). Following Mahbubani's own terminology, this direction could be identified as de-westernization. De-westernization means, within a capitalist economy, that the rules of the game and the shots are no longer called by Western players and institutions. The seventh Doha round is a signal example of de-westernizing options.

The second direction is being advanced by what I describe as the de-colonial option. The de-colonial option is the singular connector of a diversity of de-colonials. The de-colonial path has one thing in common: the colonial wound, the fact that regions and people around the world have been classified as underdeveloped economically and mentally. Racism not only affects people but also regions or, better yet, the conjunction of natural resources needed by *humanitas* in places inhabited by *anthropos*. De-colonial options have one aspect in common with de-westernizing arguments: the definitive rejection of 'being told' from the epistemic privileges of the *zero point* what 'we' are, what our ranking is in relation to the ideal of *humanitas* and what we have to do to be recognized as such. However, de-colonial and de-westernizing options diverge in one crucial and indisputable point: while the latter do not question the 'civilization of death' hidden under the rhetoric of modernization and prosperity, of the improvement of modern institutions (e.g. liberal democracy and an economy propelled by the principle of growth and prosperity), de-colonial options start from the principle that the *regeneration* of life shall prevail over primacy of the *production and reproduction* of goods at the cost of life (life in general and of *humanitas* and *anthropos* alike!). I illustrate this direction, below, commenting on Partha Chatterjee's re-orienting 'eurocentered modernity' toward the future in which 'our modernity' (in India, in Central Asia and the Caucasus, in South America, briefly, in all regions of the world upon which eurocentered modernity was either imposed or 'adopted' by local

actors assimilating to local histories inventing and enacting global designs) becomes the statement of interconnected dispersal in which de-colonial futures are being played out.

Last but not least, my argument doesn't claim originality ('originality' is one of the basic expectations of modern control of subjectivity) but aims to make a contribution to growing processes of de-coloniality around the world. My humble claim is that geo- and body-politics of knowledge has been hidden from the self-serving interests of Western epistemology and that a task of de-colonial thinking is the unveiling of epistemic silences of Western epistemology and affirming the epistemic rights of the racially devalued, and de-colonial options to allow the silences to build arguments to confront those who take 'originality' as the ultimate criterion for the final judgment.[1]

II

The introduction of geo-historical and bio-graphical configurations in processes of knowing and understanding allows for a radical re-framing (e.g. de-colonization) of the original formal apparatus of enunciation.[2] I have been supporting in the past those who maintain that it is not enough to change the content of the conversation, that it is of the essence to change the *terms* of the conversation. Changing the terms of the conversation implies going beyond disciplinary or interdisciplinary controversies and the conflict of interpretations. As far as controversies and interpretations remain within the same rules of the game (terms of the conversation), the control of knowledge is not called into question. And in order to call into question the modern/colonial foundation of the control of knowledge, it is necessary to focus on the knower rather than on the known. It means to go to the very assumptions that sustain locus enunciations.

In what follows I revisit the formal apparatus of enunciation from the perspective of geo- and bio-graphic politics of knowledge. My revisiting is epistemic rather than linguistic, although focusing on the enunciation is unavoidable if we aim at changing the terms and not only the content of the conversation. The basic assumption is that the knower is always implicated, geo- and body-politically, in the known, although modern epistemology (e.g. the hubris of the zero point) managed to conceal both and created the figure of the detached observer, a neutral seeker of truth and objectivity who at the same time controls the disciplinary rules and puts himself or herself in a privileged position to evaluate and dictate.

The argument is structured as follows. Sections I and II lay out the ground for the politics of knowledge geo-historically and bio-graphically, contesting the hegemony of zero point epistemology. In Section III, I explore three cases in which geo- and body-politics of knowledge comes forcefully to the fore: one from Africa, one from India and the third from New Zealand. These three cases are complemented by a fourth from Latin America: my argument is here. *It is not the report of a detached observer but the intervention of a de-colonial project that 'comes' from South America, the Caribbean*

and Latinidad in the US. Understanding the argument implies that the reader will shift its geography of reasoning and of evaluating arguments. In Section IV, I come back to geo- and body-politics of knowledge and their epistemic, ethical and political consequences. In Section V, I attempt to pull the strings together and weave my argument with the three cases explored, hoping that what I say will not be taken as the report of a detached observed but as the intervention of a de-colonial thinker.

In semiotics, a basic distinction has been made (Emile Benveniste) between the enunciation and the enunciated. The distinction was necessary, for Benveniste, to ground the floating sign central to Ferdinand de Saussure's semiology and its development in French structuralism. Benveniste turned to the enunciation and, by doing so, to the subject producing and manipulating signs, rather than the structure of the sign itself (the enunciated). With this distinction in mind, I would venture to say that the interrelated spheres of the colonial matrix of power (economy, authority, gender and sexuality, and knowledge/subjectivity) operate at the level of the enunciated while patriarchy and racism are grounded in the enunciation. Let's explore it in more detail (Benveniste, 1970; Todorov, 1970).

Benveniste laid out the 'formal apparatus of enunciation' that he described on the bases of the pronominal system of any language (although his examples were mainly European languages), plus the temporal and spatial deitics or markers. The pronominal system is activated in each verbal (that is, oral or written) enunciation. The enunciator is of necessity located in the first person pronoun (I). If the enunciator says 'we', the first person pronoun is presupposed in such a way that 'we' could refer to either the enunciator and the person or persons being addressed, or by 'we' the enunciator could mean he or she and someone else, not including the addressee. The remaining pronouns are activated around the I/we of the enunciation.

The same happens with temporal and spatial markers. The enunciator can only enunciate in the present. The past and the future are meaningful only in relation to the present of the enunciation. And the enunciator can only enunciate 'here', that is, wherever she is located at the moment of enunciation. Thus, 'there', 'behind', 'next to', 'left and right' etc., are meaningful only in reference to the enunciator's 'here'.

Now let's take a second step. The extension of linguistic theory and analysis from the sentence to discourse prompted the introduction of 'discursive frame' or 'conversation frame'. Indeed, engaging in conversation, letter writing, meetings of various kinds, etc., requires more than the formal apparatus of enunciation: it requires a frame, that is, a context familiar to all participants, be it in business meetings, casual conversations, internet messages, etc. While in everyday life frames are not regulated but rather operate through consensual agreements, disciplinary knowledge requires more complex and regulated frames known today as 'scholarly disciplines'. In the European Renaissance, the disciplines were classified into the 'trivium' and the 'cuadrivium', while Christian theology was the ceiling

under which both the trivium and the cuadrivium were housed. 'Beyond' that ceiling was the world of pagans, gentiles and Saracens.

In 18th-century Europe, the movement toward secularization brought with it a radical transformation of the frame of mind and the organization of knowledge, the disciplines and the institutions (e.g. the university). The Kantian-Humboldtian model[3] displaced the goals and the format of the Renaissance university and instead promoted the secularization of the university founded on secular science (from Galileo to Newton) and on secular philosophy, and both declared war against Christian theology (Kant, 1991). During the first quarter of the 19th century, the reorganization of knowledge and the formation of new disciplines (biology, economy, psychology) left 'behind' the trivium and the cuadrivium and marched toward the new organization between human sciences (social sciences and the humanities) and natural sciences.[4] Wilhelm Dilthey (1991) came up with his ground-breaking epistemic distinction between ideographic and nomothetic sciences, the first concerned with meaning and interpretations, the second with laws and explanations.[5] These are still distinctions that hold true today, even if there have been, at the surface, disciplines that have crossed lines in one or other direction and pushed toward interdisciplinarity that more often than not is based on these distinctions, although not addressing them.

So then we have moved from the formal apparatus of enunciation to frames of conversations, to disciplines and to something that is above the discipline, a super-frame that I would name 'cosmology'. The history of knowledge-making in modern Western history from the Renaissance on will have, then, theology and philosophy-science as the two cosmological frames, competing with each other at one level, but collaborating with each other when the matter is to disqualify forms of knowledge beyond these two frames.

Both frames are institutionally and linguistically anchored in Western Europe. They are anchored in institutions, chiefly the history of European universities and in the six modern (e.g. vernacular) European and imperial languages: Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, dominant from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, and German, French and English, dominant from the Enlightenment onward. Behind the six modern European languages of knowledge lay its foundation: Greek and Latin – not Arabic or Mandarin, Hindi or Urdu, Aymara or Nahuatl. The six mentioned languages based on Greek and Latin provided the 'tool' to create a given conception of knowledge that was then extended to the increasing, through time, European colonies from the Americas to Asia and Africa. In the Americas, notably, we encounter something that is alien to Asian and African regions: the colonial European university, such as the University of Santo Domingo (1538), the University of Mexico (1551), the University of San Marcos, Lima (1551) and Harvard University (1636).

The linguistic, institutional foundation, management and practices that knowledge-making brings allow me to extend Benveniste's formal apparatus of enunciation and to elaborate on enunciation and knowledge-making

focusing on the borders between the Western (in the precise linguistic and institutional sense I defined above) foundation of knowledge and understanding (epistemology and hermeneutics) and its confrontation with knowledge-making in non-European languages and institutions in China,[6] in the Islamic Caliphate, or education in the institutions of the Maya, Aztecs and Incas that the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* has deigned to describe as 'education in primitive and early civilizations'.[7]

Perhaps Frantz Fanon conceptualized better than anyone else what I have in mind for extending Benveniste's formal apparatus of enunciation. In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967 [1952]) Fanon made an epistemic foundational statement about language that no one in the heated atmosphere of structuralism and post-structuralism picked up in the 1960s. And it was still ignored by the most semantic and philological orientation of Emile Benveniste's approaches to language. This is what Fanon said:

> To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization . . . The problem that we confront in this chapter is this: The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionally whiter – that is, he will *come closer to being a real human being* – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language.[8]

Fanon's dictum applies to the disciplines but also to the sphere of knowledge in general: the Negro of the Antilles, the Indian from India and from the Americas or New Zealand and Australia, the Negro from sub-Saharan Africa, the Muslim from the Middle East or Indonesia, etc., 'will come closer to being a real human being in direct ratio to his or her mastery of disciplinary norms'. Obviously, Fanon's point is not to be recognized or accepted in the club of 'real human beings' defined on the basis of white knowledge and white history, but to take away the imperial/colonial idea of what it means to be human. This is a case, precisely, in which the assault to the imperiality of modern/colonial loci of enunciations (disciplines and institutions) is called into question. A case in point was the question asked by many philosophers in Africa and South America during the Cold War, and is being asked today by Latino and Latina philosophers in the United States.

To address this problem I introduced, a while ago (Mignolo, 2002), the concepts of *geo-politics, body-politics of knowledge* and the *colonial epistemic difference*. These concepts will take us to issues announced in the title: *epistemic disobedience* and the *de-colonial option* in epistemology and politics.

III

If to speak a language means to carry the weight of a civilization, then to engage in disciplinary knowledge-making means to master the language of the discipline in two senses. You can of course do sociology in Spanish,

Portuguese, Arabic, Mandarin, Bengali, Akan, etc. But doing it in those languages will put you at a disadvantage in relation to mainstream disciplinary debates. It will be a sort of 'local sociology'. Granted, doing sociology in French, German or English will also be 'local sociology'. The difference is that you have a better chance of being read by scholars in any of the above mentioned languages, but the inverse will not hold. You will have to get your work translated into French, German or English. That today would be considered Western sociology, located in the heart of Europe and the United States. There are many variations and the issues have been addressed many times. I provide three examples.

The first is by two African scholars and philosophers, Paulin J. Hountondji and Kwasi Wiredu. Paulin J. Hountondji addressed head on a question that has been prominent among Third World intellectuals (from 1950 to 1990) all over the world. However, since it did not receive much attention in mainstream intellectual debates and among publishing houses, it remained a pervasive issue literally in the margins. From 1960 onward, mainstream intellectual debates and scholarship in the humanities focused on structuralism and post-structuralism in its various forms (psychoanalysis, deconstruction, archeology of knowledge, communicative action). The social sciences, on the other hand, were enjoying their promotion after the Second World War and gained a status in the domain of scholarship (in England, Germany and France) that they did not have before the war.

The promotion of the social sciences' status was part of a changing leadership in the world order, with the United States taking over the role that Europe (England, France and Germany) had enjoyed until then. Geo-politically and geo-economically, the Three World division was parallel to geo-epistemology or the distribution of scientific labor, as Carl Pletsch mapped 'the three worlds and the division of scientific labor' in the early 1980s (Pletsch, 1981; Agnew, 2007). Yet Pletsch's landmark article was still centrifugal: it mapped what First World scholars thought of the new world order. First World scholars have the privilege of being both in the enunciated (one of the three worlds) and the enunciator (the First World). As a consequence, what scholars in the Second and Third World thought of themselves and how they were responding was not taken into account. They were classified but had no say in the classification other than to react or respond. And the time has come.

Geo-politics of knowledge and of knowing was one of the responses *from* the Third World *to* the First World. What geo-politics of knowledge unveiled is the *epistemic privilege of the First World*. In the three worlds of distribution of scientific labor, the First World had indeed the *privilege of inventing the classification and being part of it*. As a consequence, the impression that knowledge-making has no geo-political location and that its location is in an ethereal place that Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez (2007) has described as 'the hubris of the zero point' has been successfully naturalized. Thus states Hountondji:

> . . . it seems urgent to me that the scientists in Africa, and perhaps more generally in the Third World, question themselves on the meaning of their practices as scientists, its real function in the economy of the entirety of scholarship, its place in the process of production of knowledge on a world-wide basis. (1992: 238)

Hountondji touches upon several dimensions of 'scientific and scholarly dependency' of African and other Third World countries. While recognizing the 'improvements' in material conditions in some countries, such as laboratories, libraries, buildings, etc., he strongly argues that Third World countries are, economically, providing natural resources to industrial countries and, scientifically, providing data to be processed in the laboratories (literal laboratories in the natural sciences, metaphorical laboratories in the social sciences) of the First World. The bottom line for Hountondji is that in spite of the 'material progress' mentioned above, in Third World countries 'scientific designs' are not created by Africans but by Western Europeans or US Americans. Consequently, 'scientific designs' do not respond to African needs and visions but to needs and visions of Western Europeans (mainly those from England, France and Germany, but also second order developed countries like Sweden, Belgium and Holland). African scholars, furthermore, also depend on the professional magazines and publications created, printed and distributed in the First World. The situation is not new; it is engrained in the very structure of modernity/coloniality that Hountondji renders in the language of 'trade and colonization':

> Thus, it was natural that the annexation of the Third World, its integration in the worldwide capitalist system through trade and colonization, also comprise a 'scientific' window, that the draining of material riches goes hand in hand with intellectual and scientific exploitation, the extortion of secrets and other useful information, as it was natural, on a different level, that they go hand in hand with the extortion of works of art meant to fill the museums of metropolitan areas. (1992: 242)

A counterargument could be that, although it may have been true during the Cold War, with the global reach of 'globalization' since the fall of the Soviet Union the splendid borderless world that has appeared is in the process of erasing such differences. And in fact, *Harvard International Review* dedicated an issue to 'Global Health' which maintained:

> Ideally, training will be linked to the development of research institutions in developing countries by pairing them with institutions in the developed world. These activities must be adequately funded and researchers from the West must be given time and credit to participate in institution-building. A number of first-rate training and research institutions in the developing world, including the International Center for Diarrheal Disease Research in Dhaka, Bangladesh, have come about through years of collaboration. (Cash, 2005)

Kwasi Wiredu made a similar call, in his 'Formulating Modern Thought in African Languages: Some Theoretical Considerations'. His call has been lost, forgotten or ignored by the growing noise of technology, money, labs and 'global designs in the developed word *for* the underdeveloped world', as the article by Cash on global health suggests. Wiredu's call has little chance of making the 'front page' when, for example, Harvard University publications will profile 'experts' on developing the South. In the same article just mentioned, we find the following prognosis:

> What, then, should be the strategic approaches to promoting health research capacity in developing countries? There are many strategies and goals to be pursued, none of which are sufficient alone. The global health research agenda must be developed by scientists from both the North and the South. Too often, the research agenda of developing countries is set by others outside the country. The golden rule of development – 'He who has the gold makes the rules' – usually applies. This is particularly true of health services research wherein local scientists may wish to address questions that seem unimportant to outside donors. These scientists may want to conduct a study similar to one already done elsewhere, a study that is nonetheless essential because it will convince their own medical establishment of the importance of the work. Many countries carried out studies on ORT that added little to the international literature but helped to convince their own pediatricians of the importance of this intervention to treat diarrhea.[9]

The call made by Wiredu (1992) was the following:

> Conceptually speaking, then, the maxim of the moment should be: 'African, know thyself'.

If you do not have the time to read Wiredu's argument in its entirety, please do not jump to unwarranted conclusions and think that Wiredu is proposing to do science in Akan or Luo. Maintain your postmodern smile and your sense that traditionalist, essentialist and out-of-fashion and out-of-time African philosophers are dreaming and wanting a world forever gone. Let's pause and pay attention to what Wiredu is saying: it is not a return to anything, in the same way that Evo Morales is not proposing a 'return to the Ayllu' before the Spanish arrived and brought with them the seeds of modernity that two centuries earlier England and France, and later on the United States, harvested.

You see, China and India, today, are not 'going back in time'. Neither are they waiting for orders from the IMF or the White House or the European Union to know what they have to do to be 'properly modern' so as not to fail or miss the train of 'modernity'. Much has been written and said after the Wall Street financial crisis that the US 'model' has collapsed and that history is globally moving toward a polycentric world. Wiredu was calling for an 'epistemic awakening' of Africans and Third World scholars and intellectuals that had already been happening and continues to grow around the world.

These considerations take me to the second example, this time from an Indian political theorist, Partha Chatterjee. In a landmark article where geo- and body-politics of knowledge come clearly to the fore, Chatterjee brings into being – indirectly – the missing chapter in Pletsch's work. Furthermore, he offers his own view of the problem from the history of India, parallel to the experience of Wiredu and Houtondji. Partha Chatterjee addresses the problem of 'modernity in two languages'. The article, collected in his book *A Possible India* (1998), is the English version of a lecture he delivered in Bengali in Calcutta. The English version is not just a translation but a theoretical reflection on geo-politics of knowledge and epistemic and political de-linking.

Unapologetically and forcefully, Chatterjee structured his talk on the distinction between 'our modernity' and 'their modernity'. Rather than a single modernity defended by post-modern intellectuals in the First World (in Pletsch's distinction), or the most dependent take on 'peripheral', 'subaltern', 'marginal', etc., modernities, Chatterjee plants a solid pillar to build the future of 'our' modernity – not independent from 'their modernity' (because Western expansion is a fact), but unrepentantly, unashamedly, impenitently 'ours'.

This is one of the strengths of Chatterjee's argument. But remember, first, that the British entered into India, commercially, toward the end of the 18th century and, politically, during the first half of the 19th century when England and France, after Napoleon, extended their tentacles into Asia and Africa. So for Chatterjee, in contradistinction with South American and Caribbean intellectuals, 'modernity' means Enlightenment and not Renaissance. Not surprisingly Chatterjee takes Immanuel Kant's 'What Is Enlightenment' as a pillar of modernity. Enlightenment meant – for Kant – that Man (in the sense of human being) was coming of age, abandoning his immaturity, reaching his freedom. Chatterjee points out Kant's silence (intentionally or not) and Michel Foucault's short-sightedness when reading Kant's essays. Missing in Kant's celebration of freedom and maturity and in Foucault's celebration was the fact that Kant's concept of Man and humanity was based on the European concept of Man from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment and not on the 'lesser humans' that populated the world beyond the heart of Europe. So, 'enlightenment' was not for everybody. Thus, if you do not embody Kant's and Foucault's local history, memory, language and 'embodied' experience, what shall you do? Buy a pair of Kant's and Foucault's shoes?

One point in Chatterjee's insightful interpretation of Kant–Foucault is relevant for the argument I am developing here. Paraphrasing Kant, Chatterjee points out that in the 'universal domain of the pursuit of knowledge' that Kant locates in the 'public' (not the 'private') sphere, where 'freedom of thought' has its function, he (Kant) is presupposing and claiming 'the right of free speech' advocated only for those who have the requisite qualifications for engaging in the exercise of reason and the pursuit of knowledge, and those who can use that freedom in a responsible manner'

(Mignolo, forthcoming). Chatterjee notices that Foucault did not raise this issue, although he could have, given the interest of his own research. I would surmise, following Chatterjee's argument, that what Foucault did not have was the colonial experience and political interest propelled by the colonial wound that allowed Chatterjee to 'feel' and 'see' beyond both Kant and Foucault. Thus, Chatterjee concludes this argument by stating that vis-à-vis both Kant and Foucault:

> It is the specialists, a phenomenon which appears alongside the general social acceptance of the principle of unrestricted entry into education and learning . . . In other words, just as we have meant by enlightenment an unrestricted and universal field for the exercise of reason, so have we built up an intricately differentiated structure of authorities which specifies who has the right to say what on which subjects. (1998: 273–4)

Chatterjee acknowledges, like Hountondji and Wiredu in Africa (although independent of each other, since 'influence' goes from Europe to the US to Africa and India, but not yet in conversations between Africa and India), that the Third World (in Pletsch's terms) has been mainly the 'consumer' of First World scholarship; and, like his African colleagues, Chatterjee bases his argument 'in the way the history of our modernity has been intertwined with the history of colonialism. For that reason, "we" have never quite been able to believe that there exists a universal domain of free discourse, unfettered by differences of race or nationality.' Chatterjee closes his argument:

> Somehow, from the very beginning, we had made a shrewd guess that given the close complicity between modern knowledge and modern regimes of power, we would for ever remain consumers of universal modernity; never would we be taken as serious producers. It is for this reason that we have tried, for over a hundred years, to take our eyes away from this chimera of universal modernity and clear up a space where we might become the creators of our own modernity. (1998: 275)

I imagine you are getting the point. The argument is similar to arguments advanced by Guaman Poma de Ayala and Ottobah Cugoano, in the early 17th century and in the second half of the 18th century, when they took Christianity into their own hands. Instead of submitting with the humility of the humiliated, they appropriated Christianity to slap in the face of European Christians the arguments of an Indian of Tawantinsuyu and an ex-enslaved African in the Caribbean who reached London and unveiled the in-humanity of European ideals, visions and self-fulfilling prophecies (Mignolo, 2008).

Yes, indeed, Chatterjee is aware that nationalists in the 19th century and Hindu nationalists made similar claims. From the recognition of the shortcoming of the ways in which nationalists deal with 'our' modernity, it doesn't follow that the solution is to fall into the arms of 'their' modernity. The point is this: thanks, Immanuel Kant. Now, let us figure out how to

pursue 'our modernity' once we reached maturity by gaining India's independence in 1947 and expelling British colonists, their institutions and their ideals of progress, development and civilization. We have, so to speak, 'our own' ways of being. In fact, I would translate Chatterjee into my own vocabulary: 'we know that we have to decolonize being, and to do so we have to start by decolonizing knowledge'. Which are the points made by Hountondji and Wiredu.

And this takes me to the third example.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith is an anthropologist in New Zealand, and she is a Maori national. That is, Maori nationals are people who co-existed in the land since the British began their management of New Zealand. James Busby was named as 'Official British Resident' in May 1833 and was instructed to organize the Maori chiefs in a united body to deal with the increasing instability provoked by the greediness manifested by the French, the Americans and the British themselves. As it is well known, Maoris did not care about 'private property' but Europeans did. Beginning in the 16th century, the 'New World' increased their appetite to transform land into private property.

In Pletsch's article, anthropology (that is, the Western discipline thus named) was assigned the Third World in the scientific distribution of labor that reorganized the politics of knowledge during the Cold War. Now, it is not a secret that quantitatively the majority of anthropologists, men and women, were white and Euro-Americans. However, anthropology as a discipline also found its niche in the Third World. What, then, would a Third World anthropologist do when he or she is part of the 'object of study' of a First World anthropologist? This is an uncomfortable situation that has been addressed in Hountondji's articles cited above. One answer to the question is that a Third World anthropologist would do the same job and ask similar questions as a First World anthropologist, and the difference will be that he or she will be 'studying' people living in his or her own country. There will be variations depending on whether in a given country the nationals are 'natives' or 'of European descent'. It was more commonly accepted that anthropologists in the Third World would be of European descent – for example, in South America, South Africa or Australia. The end result is that, in general, anthropological research in ex-colonial regions would be dependent and secondary to anthropology as taught and practiced in the First World – nothing new or remarkable here.

The remarkable novelty comes when a Maori becomes an anthropologist and she practices anthropology as a Maori rather than studying the Maori as an anthropologist. Let me explain, starting with a quotation from Linda T. Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999). One section of the first chapter is titled 'On Being Human':

> One of the supposed characteristics of primitive peoples was that we could not use our minds or intellects. We could not invent things, we could not create institutions or history, we could not imagine, we could not produce

anything of value, we did not know how to use land and other resources from the natural world, we did not practice the 'arts' of civilization. By lacking such values we disqualified ourselves, not just from civilization but from humanity itself. In other words, we were not 'fully human'; some of us were not even considered partially human. *Ideas about what counted as human in association with the power to define people as human or not human were already encoded in imperial and colonial discourses prior to the period of imperialism covered here*. (1999: 25)

No, she is not still practicing Western anthropology: she is precisely shifting the geography of reasoning and subsuming anthropological tools into Maori (instead of Western) cosmology and ideology. China is a capitalist country, but I wouldn't say that China is 'practicing Western capitalism'. Certainly, there is a self-serving interest in Smith's move as much as there is a self-serving interest among European anthropologists observing the Maori. The only difference is that the self-interest not always coincides, and Maoris are no longer amenable to being the object observed by a European anthropologist. Well, you get the idea of the interrelations between the politics of identity and epistemology. You could certainly be a Maori and an anthropologist and by being an anthropologist suppress the fact that you are Maori or Black Caribbean or Aymara. Or you can choose the de-colonial option: engage in knowledge-making to 'advance' the Maori cause rather that to 'advance' the discipline (e.g. anthropology). Why would someone be interested in advancing the discipline if not for either alienation or self-interest?

If you engage in the de-colonial option and put anthropology 'at your service' like Smith does, then you engage in shifting the geography of reason – in unveiling and enacting geopolitics and body-politics of knowledge. You can also say that there are non-Maori anthropologists of Euro-American descent who are really for and concerned with the mistreatment of Maoris and that they are really working to remedy the situation. In that case, the anthropologists could follow two different paths. One would be in line with Father Bartolome de las Casas and with Marxism (Marxism being a European invention responding to European problems). When Marxism encounters 'people of color', men or women, the situation becomes parallel to anthropology: being Maori (or Aymara, or Afro-Caribbean, like Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon) is not necessarily a smooth relation because Marxism privileged class relations over racial hierarchies and patriarchal and heterosexual normativity. The other would be to 'submit' to the guidance of Maori or Aymara anthropologists and engage with them in the de-colonial option. A politics of identity is different from identity politics – the former is open to whoever wants to join, while the latter tends to be bounded by the definition of a given identity.

I am not saying that a Maori anthropologist has epistemic privileges over a New Zealand anthropologist of Anglo-descent (or a British or US anthropologist). I am saying that a New Zealand anthropologist of Anglo descent *has no right* to guide the 'locals' in what is good or bad for the Maori population. That is precisely the *problem* that appears in the report of the

Harvard International Review, where a group of US experts believe they can really decide what is good and what is bad for 'developing countries'. Granted, there are many locals in developing countries who, because of imperial and capitalist cosmology, were led to believe (or pretended they believed) that what is good for developed countries is good for underdeveloped as well because the former know 'how to get there' and can lead the way for underdeveloped countries to reach the same level. I am just saying, following Wiredu's dictum ('African, know thyself'), that there is a good chance that Maoris would know what is good or bad for them better than an expert from Harvard or a white anthropologist from New Zealand. And there is also a good chance that an expert from Harvard may 'know' what is good for him or her and his or her people, even when he or she thinks that they are stating what is good for 'them', the underdeveloped countries and people.

Returning to the quotation by Smith, it would also be possible to object to the paragraph quoted above, that 'we' denounces an essentialist conception of being Maori or that 'we' indeed is not a tenable stance at the time when post-modernist theories really ended with the idea of a coherent and homogeneous subject, be it individual or collective. But . . . remember Chatterjee. It would be fine and comfortable for modern Western subjects (that is, embodying the languages, memories and cosmology of Western modernity, 'their' modernity). It would not be convenient for a Maori, Aymara or Ghanian philosopher or an Indian from Calcutta who are modern/colonial subjects and would rather have 'our modernity' than to listen to vanguard post-modern critics or Western experts on developing underdeveloped countries. Thus, geo-politics of knowledge comes to the fore. There are many kinds of 'our modernity' around the globe – Ghanian, Indian, Maori, Afro Caribbean, North African, Islamic in their extended diversity – while there is one 'their' modernity within the 'heterogeneity' of France, England, Germany and the United States.

If you are getting the idea of what shifting the geography of reason and enacting geo-politics of knowledge means, you will also be understanding what the de-colonial option in general (or de-colonial options in each particular and local history) means. It means, in the first place, to engage in *epistemic disobedience*, as is clear in the three examples I offered. Epistemic disobedience is necessary to take on *civil disobedience* (Gandhi, Martin Luther King) to its point of non-return. Civil disobedience, within modern Western epistemology (and remember: Greek and Latin, and six vernacular European modern and imperial languages), could only lead to reforms, not to transformations. For this simple reason, the task of de-colonial thinking and the enactment of the de-colonial option in the 21st century starts from epistemic de-linking: from acts of epistemic disobedience.

IV

In all three cases (and my own argument as the fourth case) I have underlined the geo-politics of knowledge, which is what comes across more forcefully, although the body-politics of knowledge is obvious in all of them. What

do I mean by the body-politics of knowledge? Frantz Fanon is again useful to set the stage, and I do so not through Homi Bhabha but through Lewis Gordon's and Sylvia Wynter's reading of Fanon.

Before, a disclaimer is necessary. Much has been said and written about Michel Foucault's concept of bio-politics. Bio-politics refers to emerging state technologies (strategies, in a more traditional vocabulary) of population control that went hand in hand with the emergence of the modern nation-state. Foucault devoted his attention mainly to Europe, but such technologies were applied to the colonies as well. In Argentina (and South America in general), for example, the push for eugenics toward the end of the 19th century has been studied in detail lately. The differences between bio-politics in Europe and bio-politics in the colonies lie in the racial distinction between the European population (even when bio-politically managed by the state) and the population of the colonies: less human, sub-humans, as Smith pointed out. But it is also important to remember that bio-political techniques enacted on colonial populations returned as a boomerang to Europe in the Holocaust. Many have already underlined the uses of colonial techniques applied to non-European populations to control and exterminate the Jewish population. This consideration shifts the geography of reason and illuminates the fact that the colonies were not a secondary and marginal event in the history of Europe but, on the contrary, *colonial* history is the non-acknowledged center in the making of *modern* Europe.

Thus, body-politics is the darker side and the missing half of bio-politics: body-politics describes de-colonial technologies enacted by bodies who realized that they were considered less human at the moment they realized that the very act of describing them as less human was a radical un-human consideration. Thus, the lack of humanity is placed in imperial actors, institutions and knowledges that had the arrogance of deciding that certain people they did not like were less human. Body-politics is a fundamental component of de-colonial thinking, de-colonial doing and the de-colonial option.

Historically, geo-politics of knowledge emerged in the 'Third World' contesting the imperial distribution of scientific labor that Pletsch mapped out. Body-politics of knowledge has had its more pronounced manifestations in the United States, as a consequence of the Civil Rights movement. Who were the main actors of the body-politics of knowledge? Women – first white women, soon joined by women of color (and linking with geo-politics, so-called 'third world women'); Latino and Latina scholars and activists; Afro-Americans and Native-Americans, mainly.

Conceptually, the body-politics of knowledge emerged viscerally in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*:

> Reacting against the constitutionalist tendency of the late nineteenth century, Freud insisted that the individual factor be taken into account through psychoanalysis. He substituted for a phylogenetic theory the ontogenetic perspective. It will be seen that the black man's alienation is not an individ-

ual question. Beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeney. In one sense, conforming to the view of Leconte and Damey, let us say this is a question of sociodiagnostic.[10] (1967 [1952]: 11)

Fanon's sociogenesis put a halt to scientific assumptions and findings that relate to the 'nature' of human beings and establish the limits of scientific theories from evolution to neurosciences in their capacity to decide on question of 'human nature'. That is not to say that scientific theories from evolution to neuroscience have nothing to say about the materiality of living organisms propelled by nervous systems, but there are many thousands of miles from there to reach a conclusion about 'human natures'. Furthermore, sociogenesis locates its origins not in the creation of the world by God or the Big Bang, but in the formation of the modern/colonial world that placed Negros on the lower scale of the Renaissance idea of Man and of Human Beings. For, that is what sociogenesis is: there is no phylogenetic or ontogenetic knowledge that can account for the moment when, in Paris, Fanon heard that child telling her mother, with surprise and astonishment, 'Look, Mom, a Negro!' He devoted an entire chapter to this moment.

The chapter in question was interestingly translated into English as 'The Fact of Blackness'. A very positivistic, very ontic oriented translation that points the reader toward the surface: look at the 'fact', do not ask ontological questions. The chapter's title in French reads: '*L'experience vécue du Noir*'. The original title brings *experience*, not *fact*, to the foreground. But not 'experience in general', which will be based on a concept of 'human being' conceived within European hegemonic knowledge and modern and post-modern ideas that molded the universal concept of humanity (as in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights). All that is fine but is quite irrelevant for the point Fanon is making: 'the lived experience of the Negro' has been formed in the racial matrix of the modern/colonial world, from the place Christianity attributed to the blacks (sons of Ham) and the fact that Christianity came to be the leading epistemic force in the classification of people and places in the 16th century when slavery became indistinguishable from blackness. From then on, it was a particular framing of social and psychological dimensions where 'the lived experience' of the Negro would always be formed by the gaze of the white. Sylvia Wynter encapsulates this conceptual and experiential anchor when she said that 'Fanon's explanatory concept of *sociogeny* put forward as a third person response to his own first person questioning' set the question: 'What does it mean to be a Negro?' From that point on the question is no longer to *study the Negro* using the arsenal of neuroscience, social sciences, and the like, but it is the *Negro body* that engages in knowledge-making to de-colonize the knowledge that was responsible for the coloniality of his being. Fanon's move is at once epistemic de-linking and epistemic disobedience. The de-colonial option in epistemology and politics began to fly.

V

We are now in a position to extend Benveniste's formal apparatus of enunciation to account for knowledge-making and the global power differential in knowledge-making described in the previous sections.

Knowledge-making in the modern/colonial world is at once knowledge in which the very concept of 'modernity' rests and the judge and warrantor of legitimate and sustainable knowledge. Vandana Shiva (1993) suggested 'monocultures of the mind' to describe Western imperial knowledge, its totalitarian and epistemically non-democratic implementation.[11]

Knowledge-making presupposes a semiotic code (languages, images, sounds, colors, etc.) shared between users in semiotic exchanges. It is a common human endeavor (I would say of any living organism, since without 'knowing' life cannot be sustained). Taking a short cut from general conditions of knowledge-making among human beings *sensu largo* (that is, without racist and gender/sexual normativity) to knowledge-making in the organization of society, institutions are created that accomplish two functions: training of new (epistemic obedient) members and control of who enters and what knowledge-making is allowed, disavowed, devalued or celebrated.

Knowledge-making entrenched with imperial/colonial purposes, from the European Renaissance to the US neoliberalism (that is, political economy as advanced by F.A. Hayek and Milton Friedman) that guided the last stage of globalization (from Ronald Reagan to the Wall Street collapse), was grounded – as mentioned before – in specific languages, institutions and geo-historical locations. The languages of Western imperial/knowledge-making (and the self-definition of the West – the West of Jerusalem – by social actors that saw themselves as Western Christians) were practiced (speaking and writing) by social actors (human beings) dwelling in a specific geo-historical space, with specific memories that said actors constructed and reconstructed in the process of creating their own Christian, Western and European identity.

Briefly, the formal apparatus of enunciation is the basic apparatus for engaging in institutional and purposive knowledge-making geo-politically oriented. Originally theology was the overarching conceptual and cosmological frame of knowledge-making in which social actors engaged and institutions (monasteries, churches, universities, states, etc.) were created. Secularization, in the 18th century, displaced Christian theology and secular philosophy and science took its place. Both frames, theological and secular, bracketed their geo-historical foundation and, instead, made of theology and philosophy/science a frame of knowledge beyond geo-historical and body location. The subject of theological knowledge depended on the dictates of God while the subject of secular philosophy/science depended on Reason, on the Cartesian ego/mind and Kant's transcendental reason. Thus, Western imperial knowledge was cast in Western imperial languages and was theo-politically and ego-politically founded. Such foundation legitimizes the assumptions and claims that knowledge was beyond bodies and places and that Christian theology and secular philosophy and science were the limits

of knowledge-making beyond and besides which all knowledge was lacking: folklore, myth, traditional knowledge, were invented to legitimize imperial epistemology.

Theo- and ego-politics of knowledge also bracketed the body in knowledge-making (Mignolo, 2007a). By locating knowledge in the mind only, and bracketing 'secondary qualities' (affects, emotions, desires, anger, humiliation, etc.), social actors who happened to be white, inhabiting Europe/Western Christendom and speaking specific languages assumed that what was right for them in that place and which fulfilled their affects, emotions, fears and angers was indeed valid for the rest of the planet and, consequently, that they were the depositor, warrantor, creator and distributor of universal knowledge.

In the process of globally enacting the European system of belief and structure of knowledge, human beings who were not Christian did not inhabit the memories of Europe, from Greece through Rome, were not familiar with the six modern imperial European languages and, frankly, did not care much about all of that until they realized that they were expected and requested to submit to the European (and in the 20th century to the United States also), knowledge, belief, life style and world view.

Responses to the contrary came, since the 16th century, from all over the globe, but imperial theo- and ego-politics of knowledge managed to prevail through economically sustained institutions (universities, museums, delegations, state officers, armies, etc.). Now, the type of responses I am referring to were responses provoked by the making and remaking of the colonial matrix of power: a complex conceptual structure that guided actions in the domain of economy (exploitation of labor and appropriation of land/natural resources), authority (government, military forces), gender/sexuality and knowledge/subjectivity. Since the responses I am referring to were responses to the colonial matrix of power, I would describe such responses as de-colonial (Mignolo, 2007b). The cases/examples I offered in Section III also show that in such responses de-colonial geo-politics of knowledge confronted imperial theo- and ego-politically based assumptions on the universality of Western knowledge-making and institutional grounding.

But there is still another dimension in de-colonial politics of knowledge relevant for my argument: the claim that knowledge-making for well being rather than for controlling and managing populations for imperial interest shall come from local experiences and needs, rather than from local imperial experiences and needs projected to the globe, invokes also the body-politics of knowledge. Why? Because not only regions and locales in which imperial languages were not ancestrally spoken and that were alien to the history of Greek and Latin were disqualified and the disqualification filled with knowledge-product and knowledge-making in bodies and institutions where the conceptual warranty of Greek and Latin legitimized the belief of their dwelling in the universal, but bodies too. Racism, as we sense it today, was the result of two conceptual inventions of imperial knowledge: that certain bodies were inferior to others, and that inferior bodies carried

inferior intelligence. The emergence of a body-politics of knowledge is a second strand of de-colonial thinking and the de-colonial option.

You can still argue that there are 'bodies' and 'regions' in need of guidance from developed 'bodies' and 'regions' that got there first and know how to do it. As an honest liberal, you would recognize that you do not want to 'impose' your knowledge and experience but to 'work with the locals'. The problem is, what agenda will be implemented, yours or theirs? Back then to Chatterjee and Smith.

De-colonial thinking presupposes de-linking (epistemically and politically) from the web of imperial knowledge (theo- and ego-politically grounded) from disciplinary management. A common topic of conversation today, after the financial crisis on Wall Street, is 'how to save capitalism'. A de-colonial question would be: 'Why would you want to save capitalism and not save human beings? Why save an abstract entity and not the human lives that capitalism is constantly destroying?' In the same vein, geo- and body-politics of knowledge, de-colonial thinking and the de-colonial option place human lives and life in general first rather than making claims for the 'transformation of the disciplines'. But, still, claiming life and human lives first, de-colonial thinking is not joining forces with 'the politics of life in itself' as Nicholas Rose (2007) has it. Rose's 'politics of life in itself' is the last development in the 'mercantilization of life' and of 'bio-power' (as Foucault has it). In the 'politics of life in itself' political and economic strategies for controlling life at the same time as creating more consumers join forces. Bio-politics, in Foucault's conception, was one of the practical consequences of an ego-politics of knowledge implemented in the sphere of the state. Politics of life in itself extends it to the market. Thus, politics of life in itself describes the enormous potential of bio-technology to generate consumers who invest their earnings in buying health-promoting products in order to maintain the reproduction of technology that will 'improve' the control of human beings at the same time as creating more wealth through the money invested by consumers who buy health-promoting technology.

This is the point where de-colonial options, grounded in geo- and body-politics of knowledge, engage in both decolonizing knowledge and de-colonial knowledge-making, delinking from the web of imperial/modern knowledge and from the colonial matrix of power.

Notes

1. This claim by now is widespread and is one of the basic points of projects of de-westernization in East and South East Asia. See the provocative arguments advanced by Kishore Mahbubani (2001).

2. To avoid misunderstanding, I am going back here to my semiotic training in France and to earlier publications on the topic (see Castro-Gómez, 2007, and also Mignolo, 1993).

3. Cf. the classical argument advanced by Bill Readings (1996). Readings looks mainly at the history of Euro-American universities. Starting from Readings, I explored the consequences of the *colonial university* (Santo Domingo, Mexico, Lima,

Cordoba, all founded during the 16th century) and Harvard University (founded in 1636, when Descartes was publishing *Discours de la méthode*). See Mignolo (2003).

4. For a historical account, see Heilbron (1995); Foucault (1966); Wallerstein et al. (1995). And if there is any doubt that 'les sciences humaines' (social sciences and the humanities in the US) are one and the same with 'la pensé occidentale', see Gusdorf (1967).

5. Secondary bibliography abounds. I have dealt with a specific aspect of the distinction between nomothetic and ideographic sciences, and between epistemology and explanation (the former) and hermeneutics and interpretation (the latter). See Mignolo (1989)

6. See: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/179408/education/47455/Ancient-China

7. See: http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/179408/education/47445/The-New-World-civilizations-of-the-Maya-Aztec-and-Inca;

8. See also in this respect the ground-breaking study by Lewis Gordon (1995).

9. See: http://www.harvardir.org/articles/1324/

10. The issue was taken up by Sylvia Wynter (2001) and also by Lewis Gordon (2006). An insightful summary and update can be found in Karen M. Cagne (2007).

11. An interview on the topic can be found at http://www.indiatogether.org/2003/apr/ivw-vandana.htm

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