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RECONSTRUCTING DIVERSAL ONTOLOGIES: UNLEARNING AS A
METHODOLOGY OF DECOLONIAL LIVING

Introduction

Ethical responsibility to the Other prohibits the uncritical acceptance of universal norms and judgments.¹

When we think about how we know something and thereby do something, the search for the answer is a simple realization that 'it has always been done that way.' The 'knowing' and 'doing' of something have historically been linked to a certain codification of knowledge permeating regions, borders, language, and culture. The codified knowledge can be said to be the Euro-American model of knowledge that has been clung to across the world as the holy grail of all that we know and all that there is to be known; so much so that in the Global South, the ways of knowing and doing have been established by the practice of simply 'fitting' their own experience within the Western framework of principles and theories. The production of knowledge in these non-West spaces, even today, have only focused on the application of traditional Western theory to the local context with mere linguistic modifications. This form of colonialism does not restrict itself only to textual knowledge formation but can be seen in every aspect of our daily lives, the clothes we wear, the language we speak, the professions and duties we hierarchize, and the customs and norms that we follow like soldiers in an army – unquestioning and almost robotic. So, it is not enough to acknowledge that we are colonized beings, consciously or otherwise, but to deliberate on how to decolonize ourselves – wandering 'aimlessly' beyond normative ways of being. This paper attempts to discuss why and how we can decolonize our mind and body to unlearn the hegemony of the colonial discourse and praxis by referring to diversal knowledge and cultural practices beyond the Euro-American ways of knowing, doing, and being.

Unlearning the Hegemony of Colonialism and its Discomforts

¹ Michael D. Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics: Rationality in Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), x.

The genealogy of our colonized modes of living traces back to ideological constructions and violent confrontations of what was essentially premodern Europe.² What came to be semantically framed as modern Europe had its roots in the ideological construct of Greece-Rome-Europe, which was a unilineal diachrony of the Eurocentric Aryan model and had nothing to do with the originary Greece.³ The internalization of this colonial domination within the Global South intensified with the propagation of the discourse of modernity with Europe as the center of the world system.⁴ Further, the ideals of scientific rationality, modernization, civilization, and progress that the colonizers dangled on the 'savage' native inhabitants were internalized by the natives as the only unilinear model of humankind's evolution. The imposition of such knowledge systems, which originated from the 'modern-day Europe', catered to the expansion of the economy of the West and exploited its forced beneficiaries leading to their inferiorization. The centuries of colonial oppression led to the internalization in their psyche that they were indeed the 'Other', the 'savage', the 'barbaric' and the 'slave.' The ones who could break free or at least appeared to break free from this stereotype were the ones who were the English educated 'babus' (as was referred to in India) who learnt and acculturated themselves in the ways and means of the English and thus came to be 'accepted' (at least on the face of it) by their colonial masters. Hence, English education, along with the ideological practice of modernization and colonial administration in the Global South, led to the production of inherently Western knowledge.

Thus, what we know and practice continues to produce knowledge that is Eurocentric in its foundational epistemology. Hence, even if there exist other modes of making sense of the world around us, the non-dominant modes of living have remained in the margins and, in many cases, wholly obliterated. So the native or local forms of knowledge that still exist or are accessible today are, to a large extent, not as robust or as extensive or detailed as the hegemonic Eurocentric theories. In other cases, even if robust native or non-West theories exist, the attempt to bring it to the mainstream global arena has not been widespread, or these works are not considered essential. Further, there is also the presence of our own uneasiness or unwillingness to accept and bring into discourse the traditional/non-colonial regional thinkers and their ideas. While it is expected to cite mostly 'White' thinkers in any theorizing process for the theories

² Enrique D. Dussel, Javier Krauel, and Virginia C. Tuma, "Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 465-478.

³ Dussel et. al., "Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism," 465-478.

⁴ Ibid.

to be considered legitimate, the mainstream intellectuals, from non-West spaces, who go on to be associated with the Western academic spaces do not take up the task of looking inward (that is within their own geo-historical discourses) as our Eurocentric conditioning has ingrained in us the triviality of non-Western theories – not to be considered academic or intellectual or legitimate enough to be taught at the same level of significance as Eurocentric theories.

Moreover, if theories of Eurocentric spaces do not fit in the South Asian context, they are termed as deviant histories of 'lack,'⁵ but we do not realize that Western theories were never supposed to fit in the local context as our conditions, context, and temporalities are not the same. However, what we see as theory or a form of knowledge depends on how we are trained to see, understand, and explain the world around us. Reflection, myth, oral literature, even fiction can be seen as a theory if one can be flexible enough to look for it beyond Eurocentric intellectual spaces. Considerably, as students or seekers of knowledge within the academic spaces, our intellectual leanings have evolved from the same colonial forms of education and discourses that continue to plague the entire world. It does not, however, mean that these western theories are not applicable beyond the West. They do explain some aspects of our lived realities, but it is also necessary to realize that they do not and can not explain everything about our own contextual world spaces. The tone of assumed universal applicability that has been used by the Western theorists can also be seen in the form of 'Othering' wherein their theories have been superimposed on our cultural-historical realities to the extent that embodied knowledge from the non-West is often hierarchized below Eurocentric theories. For example, theorizations on any class, labor, or inequality issues in South Asia derive their experiential understandings within the Marxist frameworks but do not attempt to study Periyar⁶ or Ambedkar⁷, who have also talked about the same. What we know and how we know it has been through a colonial lens, a singular hegemonic vantage point which ultimately parochializes our horizons of understanding, canonizing one form of historical knowledge above all others. In this context, decolonial discourses emerging from both within and outside of these Euro-American zones have shed light on the anxieties and intricacies of living beyond the hegemonic traditions.

⁵ Prathama Banerjee, Aditya Nigam, and Rakesh Pandey, "The Work of Theory: Thinking across Traditions," *Economic & Political Weekly* 51, no. 37 (2016): 42.

⁶ The context of these thinkers can be found in K. Veeramani, *Collected works of Periyar EVR* (Chennai: The Periyar Self Respect Propaganda Institution, 2005), 503.

⁷ Arundhati Roy, *The Doctor and the Saint: Caste, Race, and Annihilation of Caste: The Debate between BR Ambedkar and MK Gandhi* (Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2017).

Further, modernity, scientific rationalism, universal law, and reason have benefited human life to a great extent, yet we need to decolonize these ideals from their established strongholds of colonial power, because the way in which these ideals have been implemented only visibly shows the majority, which has and continues to benefit at the expense and perpetual exploitation of the indigenous inhabitants of the Euro-American spaces as well as the minority populations within the postcolonial geopolitical territories.

The massive colonization processes historically and the neocolonial processes in contemporary times have, over the years, brought about a cultural discontinuity that has been replaced by the fancy and appealing terms of globalization and cosmopolitanism today. For example, our languages, which were the essence and core of our indigenous cultures, still exist today but have been eroded of their essence and significance – both consciously and unconsciously. Of course, the decolonial processes in the Global South which do actively engage in countering the colonial education, science, popular culture, and art – through the promotion of classical art forms and ayurvedic medicine, in the case of India for example – do so in a way that also neocolonizes or recolonizes the geopolitical space of operation by suppressing or neglecting other forms of knowledge like the myriad tribal or minority communities languages, culture, and ways of living. Hence our modernity is also vastly unexplored, distorted, manipulated, and even at times marginalized and forgotten. Within our own modernities, there exist multiple pluralities of what modernity evokes culturally and linguistically and formally. So a celebration of what we consider our own modernity is also as problematic as the blind devotion to western modernity. In the process of decolonizing epistemologies, one needs to be careful not to become the 'lesser evil' simply because the greater evil is already well established. The point in all this awareness of decolonial forms of living should be to go beyond the aim of authoritarianism and tyrannical control of political power in the 'decolonial' spaces, to make us think about how we got to where we are and where we could have gotten to and still can, imagine going with the accompaniment of the consciousness of not becoming the lesser evil as is the normative rhetoric of non-hegemonic politics.

How to Unlearn through Diversal Ontologies?

The vast literature on decolonialism has emphasized in detail the various connotations of colonialism, but how do we go beyond the epistemological criticisms of colonialism? How do we go beyond our *apriori* conceptualizations of being structured by the

hegemonic principles of globalization, rampant individualism, consumerism, and neoliberal capitalism? Decolonizing is not just an academic exercise but an ontological practice that involves critically looking at what we think and do as a *habitus* in itself. This is a form of unlearning of dominant modes of knowledge systems which entails sustained and critical engagement from multiple perspectives and multiple ways of being-in-the-world.

One of the primary means to unlearn and disengage from hegemonic modes of thinking is through language. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o states, he heard the voices in his own language of Gikuyu but wrote them down in English sounds. Thus, the original text, which is not written down but exists only in our mind, is lost and only visible in the form of the mask of the English language.⁸ Our socialization and conditioning of thinking and thereby speaking and writing in an imposed language like English take away from our very being the essence of our own language (mother tongue). What do we do when the very form of 'our own' language – the core of one's culture – becomes alien to us? However, in the decolonized epistemological spaces, which may not subscribe to the Western hegemonic languages, there might also be the threat of erasure or inferiorization of alternate or non-majoritarian languages. For example, in a linguistically diverse country like India, where many states have adopted Hindi as the primary language, the many different dialects and scripts of minority groups and marginalized tribes eventually become just an oral form of communication within the community or, in most cases, extinct. Further, when it comes to enriching the body of knowledge in local languages, the ones who write in English mostly do not put the effort to translate their own works into their local language. Hence, there is a certain parochialization when it comes to translating scholarly works into peripheral languages leading to the crucial problem of access to knowledge across barriers of the dominant language. Thus, in the process of linguistic decoloniality and going beyond the Western theories, conserving one's native languages becomes paramount.

Further, unlearning and thereby decolonizing entails going beyond linguistic preservation by also acknowledging one's geopolitical roots of thought to learn from one's experiences and embodied knowledge effectively. Our situated and constructed knowledge – what we think, how we think, why we think – are an outcome of dominant racial (caste/ethnicity/religion), regional, and body politics which have chained us to certain paradigms of imagery (in terms of us vs them, soul vs body, occident vs orient, and core vs periphery). Hence, to define

⁸ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, "Recovering the Original," *World Literature Today* 78, no. 3/4 (2004): 13-15.

ourselves beyond these ingrained images of us (of lack or inferiority of being) and to look at our own cultures without the Western prism is a form of complex unlearning. According to Mignolo, a way of this unlearning is 'epistemic disobedience' – creating knowledge from spaces considered inferior, uncivilized, and places of non-thought.⁹ Here he means that to study our own experiences (and learn from other experiences from the Global South), we need to dissociate from the Western imposed foundation of knowledge itself or change the terms of conversation. Our aim here should not be to annihilate the Western imposed binaries, because that is an impossibility in itself, but to acknowledge the paradoxes and still coexist with it. That is, our ways of knowing and acting, within the limitations of colonially imposed knowledge structures, should strive for traveling across the lines (paradoxes) and not necessarily to destroy the line. This acknowledgement that the line exists, whether we like it or not and cannot be radically destroyed, can bring forth the creation of new ways of learning about us and who we are despite our colonially conditioned selves.

The awareness of our colonial self extends to the awareness of the intricate means through which categories of race, caste, gender, and identity have perpetuated the neocolonial, Eurocentric, neoliberal domination. Hence, a social redistribution of power can counter the coloniality of power.¹⁰ For this redistribution, our thought processes need to be 'diversalized' in the form of 'South-South Dialogue,' in which philosophies from the 'Global South' address each other directly without deferring to the authority of dominant Euro-American philosophy.¹¹ Thus, one needs to consciously commit to non-West 'pluriversality'¹² to contest the hegemony of zero-point epistemology (the zero point epistemology refers to Europe or specifically Western Europe, in the traditional intellectual sense, as the point of origin of all that we know) and reconstruct what we mean by modern beyond Eurocentric modernity, and thereby unlearn and liberate our thought processes. It is not just dominant discourses that are an outcome of colonial or neocolonial forms of living that are entrenched now in neoliberal and nationalistic practices, but these forms of oppressive and exploitative processes also inherently possess a form of phobia that seeps into the colonized

⁹ Walter Mignolo, "Decolonizing Western Epistemology/Building Decolonial Epistemologies," in *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latino Theology and Philosophy* Ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta, (Fordham University Press, 2012), 36.

¹⁰ Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America" *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 215-232.

¹¹ Enrique Dussel, "Agenda for a South-South Philosophical Dialogue." *Human Architecture* 11, no. 1 (2013): 3-18.

¹² Walter Mignolo, "On Pluriversality and Multipolar World Order: Decoloniality after Decolonization; Dewesternization after the Cold War," in *Constructing the Pluriverse* ed. Bernd Reiter, (Duke University Press, 2018), 90-110.

psyche. To overcome this colonially induced phobia of owning our own traditions and cultures, one needs to decolonize the mind and the self. Decoloniality of the mind is about being aware of the values of Western culture and how we are influenced by it, being aware of the native culture and how we can inculcate our cultural identities that we now associate with shame or embarrassment. In this process of conscious awareness and bringing about new forms of global/collective being, it is not just about textual learnings; it is also about self-change or looking within and questioning our everyday living, beliefs, and values that drive our personal actions and agency. It is about the ability to self-critique (as only then can men write about men without the accompanying threat of bias, for example) and face the hypocrisy within to bring about any scope of transformative action. Knowledge, here, needs to be seen not in writing but in the act of thinking, feeling, intentionality, and an internalization of what is happening around us. To be able to think authentically, one needs to address the issues or challenges of hypocrisy and bias within intellectual spaces and within our own selves.

Thinking authentically entails asking ourselves why are we doing this? Is it for knowing our own self, or merely for appreciation and citations in the intellectual spaces of elitist knowledge? Are we using intellectual jargon to pathologize and legitimize in the eyes of the 'White?' Or does knowledge and ontology have any life in it; can we feel the essence of it? Is it alleviating the oppression of the masses in any way? Or is it merely attempting to spice up the otherwise drab and bland taste of traditional theory by talking about non-mainstream and non-hegemonic discourses? Our very endeavors to write, publish, and talk in English within modern institutions, originating from the Enlightenment, are exercises in a specific form of modernity that can never be 'our own.' If we are to study our own knowledge system and authentically and empathically theorize, we should first acknowledge who we are doing it for and for whose validation. One of the significant forms of authentic and empathetic thought process is through ethical hermeneutics¹³ as a methodology of unlearning. It involves a sacred fear, respect before the Other as other. It is neither sympathy, which remains bound to the eros of the Same, nor the love of friendship, which demands mutuality, but rather the habit of creatively putting oneself forward without seeking reciprocity, gratitude, or gratification. It consists of confidence in the Other, faith in the Other's future and liberty, accrediting the truth of the Other's word, and also denying any possibility that one can have total comprehension of the Other. In this attitude, one affirms the

¹³ Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics: Rationality in Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation*, 71.

existence of another culture in the supposedly 'uncultured' or 'illiterate.'

Dussel talks about locating the self in the 'hermeneutic position' of the oppressed and taking on their interests, thereby discovering previously unnoticed values and opening the horizon of the possible constitution of objects of knowledge often invisible to those lodged within the hegemonic totality. A whole new critical perspective, a new criterion of philosophical and historical interpretation, a new fundamental hermeneutics typical of the Gramsci-type 'organic intellectual,' can now be perceived. Dussel comments on this perspectival approach to hermeneutics in one of his theological writings:

A beggar, for example, sees the color on the outside of the rich man's house from the outside, something the rich man on the inside doesn't see. We have a better view of the house in the center because we live on the outside. We are not stronger, but weaker. But in this case weakness is an asset. Our theology engages in criticism of the theology of the center precisely because ours is a theology of the periphery. Therefore, it is a theology that will propose critical points of support for Latin America but also for the Arab world, for Africa, India, China, and for the blacks and Chicanos of the United States by far the greater part of humanity.¹⁴

Dussel, in fact, defines the philosophy of liberation as being not a theoretical option, but rather a practical-political option for the poor: a moral commitment to the Other, open to a plurality of theoretical categorizations (for example, Frankfurt School, philosophy of language, Levinasian metaphysics, or Marxism) and even political options. There is thus an increased understanding of Others resulting from a commitment to them. Dussel even suggests that this process of understanding the Other and their divergent cultures can be achieved by a 'deculturation' of oneself through the secondary socialization of the self at the hands of the Other.

But deculturation is not just about distancing the self from the hegemonic Western theories; it can also be perceived through a critical analysis of the dominant intellectual discourse in the non-West. In South Asia, especially India, the dominant elite historiography has historically excluded the politics of the people.¹⁵ The historical movements against British colonization in India have many different versions which differ in their

¹⁴ Barber, *Ethical Hermeneutics: Rationality in Enrique Dussel's Philosophy of Liberation*, 69-70.

¹⁵ Ranajit Guha, *On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 40.

emphasis of the role of individual leaders or elite organizations in emancipating the masses from colonial oppression as if the people were mere followers of popular specific leaders. The elitist theorizations (the south Asian intellectuals educated in the West) do not give adequate emphasis about the struggles and mobilization of masses that happened across the colonized spaces of South Asia during the fight for independence from the British, and hence, one needs to question who speaks and who listens. As historian Guha states, the Indian bourgeoisie did not speak for the nation, that is the native non-elites. They did not speak about the experiences of exploitation of the subaltern, and ultimately it led to a failure of the nation to come to its own.¹⁶ We can see this even today: though India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are no longer colonized, the same colonial processes of political rule, administration, and economic development are still imbibed today in South Asia. But the discourse has only recently tried to shift towards the role of the masses in the postcolonial context leading to the formation of subaltern studies as an intellectual project of its own. Hence, the emphasis on the experience of the subaltern and theories emanating from what they see, feel, and experience forms the core of subaltern thought. Thus, a holistic understanding of the non-West is incomplete without the subaltern who embodies a counter-hegemonic way of being in the world.

In India, there has historically been a domination of the Brahmanical form of Hinduism in which a particular group of people known as Brahmins have historically oppressed the other, lower castes and indigenous tribes, the effects of which are still seen today. If religion in the form of Brahmanical Hinduism was oppressive in the past, today a new religion of capitalism and nationalism has emerged that is dominated by the bourgeoisie through ideologies of modernity, civilization, and development. In India we see Brahmanical Hinduism has merged with capitalism to further alienate the Subalterns or the Other – the dalits and tribal population. Dalit scholars and activists like Ambedkar, Periyar, and Phule, to name a few, have talked about the mass debilitating effects of blind belief of religion and caste and its ritualistic practices on the lower castes and tribes in India. It is similar to the marginalization and suppression of indigenous inhabitants in the West. In this context, the social reformer Phule started primary and higher education of the oppressed, including women (which in the 19th century was a radical action), and campaigned for the equal rights of the lower castes and women. For him, collective transformation of the social structure could eliminate caste discrimination, superstition in the name of

¹⁶ Guha, *On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India*, 40.

religion, and caste inequality in society.¹⁷ Similarly, Periyar, an Indian political activist, started the self-respect movement in the 20th century to put a stop to caste discrimination. True freedom, he believed, lies in self-freedom. The political freedom that India was vying for neither allowed an individual to marry a person of their choice without consequences, nor did it allow widows to be remarried. Periyar protested against the unjust laws of the time with the goal of inalienable equality for all people. The movement saw the backward castes and women on the streets demanding their social rights for the first time and in the process enabled social mobility of the marginalized. Periyar conceptualized dignity as an embodied praxis.¹⁸ He denounced all social, cultural, and religious practices that negated a person's self worth and dignity. Similarly, Ambedkar, another prominent social reformist and political activist, also argued for political reform as a means to equality and self-determination of the lower castes and emphasized social and ideological reform. The consciousness of caste has "prevented the Hindus from becoming a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being."¹⁹ The tradition of caste continues to dictate present day social conditions in the Hindu society, hegemonizing the hierarchy of the majoritarian communities constantly struggling with the mythical Other – the subalterns. Hence, going back to the tradition is essential, but it is also essential to realize that some traditions can be equally oppressive, exploitative, and dehumanizing as colonial capitalism. Critically looking at the past and the present has never been more urgent.

Thus, decolonial thinking is essential not just to create a body of epistemologies and a realm of meanings that cater to the so-far unseen and unheard, but also to diminish or prevent further intergenerational trauma, sexism, homo/transphobia, and even systemic or domestic violence that occurs because of the dominance of the hegemonically heteronormative superiors and their accustomed ways of living. As Taiaiake Alfred²⁰ points out, the historical injustice meted out to indigenous inhabitants has its remedy in the principle of self-determination. This principle is rooted in the collective rights of the indigenous inhabitants with respect to their land, resources, and sovereignty.

¹⁷ Jotiba Phule, "Memorial Addressed to the Education Commission," *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy* 28, no. 3-4 (2016): 637-643.

¹⁸ Ramaswamy Mahalingham, "Social Marginality, Precarity, and Dignity: Rethinking Periyar," *The Periyar Project* (2020). <https://theperiyarproject.com/tag/self-respect/>.

It is further elaborated in the blog post by Mahalingam which can be accessed at <https://theperiyarproject.com/tag/self-respect/>.

¹⁹ Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition* (London: Verso Books, 2014), 7.

²⁰ Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* (Oxford University Press, 1999), 99.

Alfred says sovereignty is a state of mind – to think like a nation, like a sovereign people, or a sovereign person. This exercise of the rights of the indigenous or the marginalized or the oppressed is a challenge for the oppressed in every society all over the world. The challenge is not just about the limited external resources through which they can fight, but also the challenge that resides within the mind. How far can we get over our fears – the colonial phobia of the colonized that is manifested in the Westoxicated or occidentized actions of the self. The cure to this phobia, of getting out of the modern, colonial capitalist comfort lies in engaging with the values of the traditional knowledge systems. We need to renew our relationship with our own communities, renew activism, and renew a leadership ethos to bring an end to a harmful way of life imposed on us by history and to restore balance, respect, and harmony to our lives.²¹

All actions in this effort, not just our own but those of everyone, must be inspired and guided by four principles:

First, undermine the intellectual premises of colonialism. Second, act on the moral imperative for change. Third, do not cooperate with colonialism. Fourth and last, resist further injustice. Decolonization will be achieved by work and sacrifice based on these principles, in concert with the restoration of indigenous political culture within our communities.²²

Thus, the process of unlearning through conscious engagement with indigenous cultures is intrinsic to this overall process of decolonial living. As Taiaiake Alfred says, the youth of today (indigenous as well as Global South) have the potential to undertake the perpetuation of an indigenous intelligentsia: “This includes re-establishment of respect for knowledge in all its forms, beyond the Western-modern-rational knowledge. One of the major consequences of colonialism was the loss of our ability to think for ourselves; thus many of our leaders and communities rely on others to think for them (for a price).”²³ It leads to the misrepresentation or misappropriation of indigenous knowledge and perspectives, along with the exorbitant fees paid to mercenary consultants. In an informed and critical polity, people who can shape ideas, translate, and create language are essential to the process of decolonization. Hence, structural and psychological decolonization is an intellectual process as well as a political, social, and spiritual one.²⁴ It is a holistic journey of being that implies changing our entire way of life itself.

²¹ Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, 42.

²² Alfred, 145.

²³ Alfred, 142.

²⁴ Ibid.

Another intellectual process that can enable the unlearning of hegemonized knowledge across the Global South can be seen through the Kaupapa Maori approach to knowing that focuses on expanding the research on Maori culture (an indigenous tribe in New Zealand) by motivating indigenous inhabitants to research their own culture, thereby increasing their consciousness about their indigenous roots and responsibilities. Linda Tuhiwai Smith talks about how the production of Western knowledge, in the nature of academic work, has dehumanized Maori and continued to privilege Western ways of knowing while denying the validity for Maori of Maori knowledge, language, and culture. Kaupapa Maori research is an attempt to retrieve the space which had been taken up and owned by 'White' researchers in creating the discourse of the natives and to sustain Maori culture and traditional value systems. A good example of this is in the development of Maori women's theories about Maori society which question the accounts of Maori society provided by men, including Maori men, but which still hold to a position that argues that the issues of gender for Maori do not make us the same as white women. The Kaupapa Maori methodology of research therefore applies to Maori ways of thinking and to Maori ways of doing things, giving legitimacy to Maori forms of knowledge within the wider framework of Maori values and attitudes, Maori language, and Maori ways of living in the world.²⁵ When the marginalized and the colonized seek to think and write about their 'own' selves on their own terms without the discourse of the colonizer, they can question the canonized truths about themselves that had been normalized and reified in their everyday lives, thereby creating new forms of non-Eurocentric discourses. Thus, the Kaupapa Maori research is another form of re-establishment of indigenous knowledge beyond the Western intellectual status-quo that seeks to counter the colonialism in its epistemological and ontological paradigms by going beyond talking about native cultures and actively engaging with non-dominant forms of knowing and being.

Thus, the decolonization of the thought process can be done in a consciously critical approach by negotiating with and countering the ideological and epistemological boundaries of Western notions of universalism and modernity to connote more than one way of comprehending our lived realities. It accompanies with it an understanding of the historical trajectory of geopolitics from the epistemological construction of what we know today as 'modern Europe' and modernity originating all the way back in the Renaissance. Once we are explicitly aware of

²⁵ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1999), 183-188.

the fiction that frames Europe as the center of the world system,²⁶ we can then go about imagining the contours of an alternate planetary consciousness that is 'diversal,' 'globalectical,' and 'transmodern.' This consciousness can also be realized in the form of a good living or 'buen vivir'²⁷ wherein we create our ways and means of knowing through the people. It is an attempt at reclaiming the 'mana' (our standing in our own eyes) that centuries of colonization had annihilated.²⁸ This form of living is about going beyond imperially subservient ways of understanding and consciously staying with the discomfort of unlearning status quo-ist ontologies.

Conclusion: Towards a Transformative Praxis

Our everyday living needs to situate collective empathy, instinctual humanism, and the philosophy of emancipation at its core. The critical intellectual activity that is authentic and appeals to life itself can only emerge when we attempt to consciously unlearn and live beyond the colonial habituated patterns of being. To come out of this intellectual confinement, a form of epistemic violence is needed that can be employed in our thought processes to mold our decolonial self. This epistemic violence is in the form of an awareness of the process of knowledge formation that unveils the geopolitics, body, and racial politics immersed in constructing the knowing decolonized subject. This knowing (epistemologically disobedient) subject is geopolitically, racially, and regionally situated distinctly from prior hegemonic, racial, and political genealogies.²⁹ This distinction in thought and epistemology is located in the specializations of what is known as the non-thought which can be seen in the form of myth, folklore, stories, reflections, musings, non-Western religions, and cultures. Mignolo's 'epistemic disobedience' assumes a de-linkage from the imposed Westoxication in the production of knowledge. Hence, this knowledge needs to be delinked from the Eurocentric ideas of modernity, humanity, rationalism, and so on. But in doing so, if we don't encounter our presupposed ideas then the 'epistemic violence' masquerades as 'epistemic obedience.' Our thoughts remain in chains because of colonial epistemologies, though we might enjoy the narcissistic feeling of decolonization.

²⁶ Enrique Dussel, "Agenda for a South-South Philosophical Dialogue," 3-18.

²⁷ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

²⁸ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 173.

²⁹ Walter Mignolo, "Decolonizing Western Epistemology/Building Decolonial Epistemologies," in *Decolonizing Epistemologies: Latina/o Theology and Philosophy* Ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Eduardo Mendieta, (Fordham University Press, 2012), 19-43.

For a moment, consider wild animals who are outside of the modern civilizations and inherently have 'epistemic disobedience.' They were never linked, but we have safari parks where they feel that they are free. In reality, they are the victims of modern man's narcissistic, vulgar pleasure. Likewise, in the name of de-linking, we tend to link the subjects who were never linked in the first place, and thus an academic safari park is in the making.

We must be aware of the fact that decolonization theory might become a mere commodity that only the privileged academic elites can consume. All social life is theoretical, so if all theory is a real social practice and, in some sense, theoretical, then it follows that everything around us is theoretical.³⁰ What is considered intellectual decolonization and what is not is not an intellectual question but a political one. Hence, it is crucial that to genuinely theorize the discourse of decolonization, we need to unlearn the Eurocentric canon of theorizing, and there should be political commitment against the nature of today's utilitarian rationality within the act of theorization. To initiate this, we need to inculcate alternative learning processes that are critically self-reflexive and oriented towards annihilating all forms of oppression. We need to scrutinize the practices of theorization on decolonization and how it can be altered or evolved to cater not only to the question of the subject, but also for the transformation of it. The promise of decolonization demands a decolonial imaginary which replaces the colonial lens and illuminates a transformative praxis. As per Escobar, it's not just about the inclusion of the 'other' as a new object of study, but we need to think about it through the political praxis of subaltern groups.³¹ Presenting an exoticized version of indigenous knowledge systems within the Western academic space and getting claps from the masters, as well as pursuing career objectives, makes little sense. The true spirit of decolonization is to empower the indigenous knowledge system. It's not about saving them from the threat of extinction but to restore our lost self. This consciousness can also be realized in the form of a good living or 'buen vivir'³² wherein we create our ways and means of knowing through the people and not through the hegemonic Eurocentric canon of knowing things. It is like fighting an aircraft carrier idea with a kite idea. It may not have the grandeur that is associated with a large aircraft but it has the possibilities of imagining the world and living in it differently. In other words, our collective

³⁰ Terry Eagleton, *The Significance of Theory* (Wiley, 1990), 24-38.

³¹ Catherine Walsh, "Shifting the Geopolitics of Critical Knowledge: Decolonial Thought and Cultural Studies 'others' in the Andes," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2-3 (2007): 234.

³² Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

action within the intellectual space of colonial difference can unchain us from the shackles of the colonial matrix of power that operates through prolonged domination and exploitation of our body and mind. The collective counteraction against this coloniality of our very being can be through conscious engagement with our indigenous and local knowledge system, and our idea of living that can be derived from it. But to relocate knowledge within the domains of the people and not institutionalized spaces, one needs to go beyond academic engagement and engage with it in the economic sphere as well. Developing alternate economic organizational systems along with the realization that capitalist forces of expansion and the Eurocentric imagination are the real enemy can bring about the counter of the hegemonic unilinear trajectory of knowledge production. As per Garaudy, it's not possible to dream about a new economic system without a new cultural system.³³ Therefore, the primary concern of relocating knowledge is to create the philosophical base of a planetary planning for a human project and strengthen the project to overthrow the Eurocentric oppressive hegemony. When we are trying to unsettle the standardization of knowledge, we need to look at knowledge not just within its textual paradigm of influence, but also as a form of practice and as a synthesis between knowing and doing. Due to the colonial influence in our thinking, we do not recognize the alternative imagination of knowledge-space beyond the Eurocentric imagination. Before doing so, the discourse of 'decolonial living' is just a metaphor.

³³ Ashis Nandy, *Traditions, Tyranny, and Utopias: Essays in the Politics of Awareness* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), xii.