Decolonizing Writing: A Practical Guide

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Kuala Lumpur Forum of Thought
26 Dec 2020
**About:**

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1. What does it mean to decolonize?

- What is decolonial thinking?
- Who can/should decolonize?
- Can people from the Empire decolonize?
- Why should we start from decolonizing our language?
- What is the colonial matrix of power?
The Colonial Matrix of Power

- Racism, Gender and Sexuality
- Authority
- Economy
- Knowledge and Subjectivity
- Theology/Secular Philosophy and Patriarchy
Walter Mignolo’s “Epistemic Disobedience”

- Assuming that the knowing subject in the disciplines is transparent, dis-incorporated from the known and untouched by the geo-political configuration of the world in which people are racially ranked and regions are racially configured.

- Scholars assume that if you ‘come’ from Latin America you must ‘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.
• The first world has knowledge, the third world has culture; Native Americans have wisdom, Anglo Americans have science.

• 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.
Decolonizing language

- Language as a living being
- Who can theorize?
- Is your local language enough?
- What kind of language we use to describe our lives?
- How do we classify ourselves and others? (e.g., communist, capitalist, Islamist, leftist, etc.)
- How to dismantle the mainstream language?
- The politics of translation
3 Decolonizing Academia

- **Research topics and methods** (ways of sensing, seeing, and doing)
- **The politics of funding** (what gets funded and what gets buried)
- **Citation** (who gets cited and why? How the politics of citing legitimizes some and delegitimizes / marginalizes others)
- **Mainstream intellectuals**
- **Intellectual boycotting**
- **The politics of academic writing/publications**
Decolonizing Reading & Writing

- Decolonize what you read (books or any form of media)
- Any piece of writing is a soul looking for a body to inhabit.
- Decolonize your writing style, metaphors, points of reference.
- Change your approach in tracing the genealogy of ideas (e.g., Sartre's metaphor; Orwell’s 1984 vs. Yevgeny Zamyatin’s novel, We).
- Look for silences and blind posts.
Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s Silencing of the Past

- Exploring the history of Haiti, Trouillot insists that the historical narrative is distinct from fiction. We are not prisoners of history, but it is not whatever we make of it either. **History is the fruit of power**, but power is never transparent; the challenge is to expose its roots. We have to ask, he suggests, not who has power but how does power work.

- The production of history is full of silences. Silences happen in the creation of facts (documents), in the assembly of facts (archives), in retrieving facts (narratives), and in determining retrospective significance.
Decolonizing Relationships, Social & Professional Connections

- Dismantling the definitions of what is beautiful, sexy, or attractive.
- Taste is a colonial construct.
- Dismantling the notion that expertise only comes from the Empire; expertise don’t only have white skin and blue eyes.
- Finding ways to measure the measurer.
- Distinguishing between knowledge/expertise & privilege.
- Understanding the harm of following or being followed. Choosing the “hand in hand” approach.
- Engaging connections from new places, spaces, and areas outside of the Empire.
Decolonizing Hobbies, Activities & Travel Destinations

- The **three** elements above may not only be colonial, but destructive also.
- Do we need to engage in destructive hobbies (e.g., watching TV/movies) to fit in?
- Why our dream destination is **Paris** not **Lima** or **Dushanbe**?
- Dangerous **vs** safe destinations.
- Why call **Lebanon** the **Switzerland** of the Middle East?
- Decolonize your spending/expenditures!
Final Reflections

• The open-endedness of the decolonial approach
• There is no point reasoning with the Empire
• Are there any “free” writers really?
• Language marches in step with the oppressors, therefore we need a new language.
• Let’s keep searching for marginalized/silences voices.
Thanks!

Do you have any questions?

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Prepared by: Kuala Lumpur forum of Thoughts
“In many ways, the language, the sect, and the ethnicity are the IDs in post-U.S. occupation Iraq—the 'new Iraq' ”.

- Louis Yako, Bullets in Envelopes: Iraqi Academics in Exile.”
“I thought about how in every ‘Third World’ country that gets ‘liberated’ from its dictators, the first things that go up are luxury hotels and residential areas for Western expats and gated communities from which to administer the newly formed governments in places like Baghdad’s Green Zone.”
