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YES, WE CAN[1]

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Abstract

At the end of 2012 at Al Jazeera, Santiago Zabala published a text about Zizek and the role of the philosopher nowadays. This publication motivated a critical response from the Iranian philosopher Hamid Dabashi, followed by Walter Mignolo's intervention. Both responses emphasized the pending task of decolonizing knowledge. Returning to the axes of that exchange, H. Dabashi wrote the recently published book *Can non-Europeans think?* The article presented below is the foreword of the book, written by Walter Mignolo: "Yes, we can".

La Europa que consideró que su destino, el destino de sus hombres, era hacer de su humanismo el arquetipo a alcanzar por todo ente que se le pudiese asemejar; esta Europa, lo mismo la cristiana que la moderna, al trascender los linderos de su geografía y tropezar con otros entes que parecían ser hombres, exigió a éstos que justificasen su supuesta humanidad.

Leopoldo Zea, *La filosofía americana como filosofía sin más* (1969)

روشنفکر قرن نوزدهم اروپا با کارگری طرف است که اولاً سه قرن از قرون وسطی و دو قرن از رنسانس را پشت سر گذاشته، ثانیاً در محیطی زندگی می کند که روح مذهبی، روح حاکم بر کارگر نیست، ثالثاً کارگر به مرحله ی پرولتر صنعتی رسیده، و دیگر اینکه در یک نظام بورژوازی رشدیافته ی صنعتی زندگی می کند که روابط، روابط صنعتی است و خود کارگر به یک مرحله ی بالایی از رشد و خودآگاهی رسیده و از همه مهم تر اینکه، مخاطب او، یعنی پرولتاریای صنعتی، یک طبقه را تشکیل داده، یعنی خودش به صورت یک طبقه ی مشخص و مستقل در جامعه که فرهنگ خاص و امتیازات خاص و شکل خاصی در زیربنای اقتصادی اروپای غربی پیدا کرده، درآمده است. آن وقت من به عنوان روشنفکری که می خواهم حرف های روشنفکر قرن نوزدهم را تقلید کنم، می آیم و این حرف ها را به کسی می زنم که هیچ یک از مشخصات مخاطب روشنفکر ای زندگی می کنم که بورژوازی هنوز در مرحله ی ابتدایی اش است قرن نوزدهم را ندارد. یعنی من در جامعه و فقط در شهرهای بزرگ رشد پیدا کرده است، بورژوازی «کمپرادور» (دلال) است و واسطه است،

[1] Tiré de Dabashi Hamid, *Can Non-Europeans Think?,* London, Zed Books, 2015.

بورژوازی نظام تولیدی نیست. از این گذشته طبقه ای به نام طبقه ی کارگر هنوز تشکیل نشده است و در جامعه ی ما کارگران به صورت گروه های کارگری هستند، که گروه های کارگری غیر از طبقه ی کارگر هستند. گروه های کارگری در منحط ترین جوامع بدوی و قبایل بدوی هم وجود دارند. مثلاً در آفریقا، در عربستان ۲۰۰۰ کارگر صنعتی حتی در سطح بالا سعودی که منابع صنعتی و تولیدی غربی وجود دارد ۱۰۰، ۵۰۰، هستند، اما جامعه زیربنای کارگری ندارد و یک زیربنای قبایلی، یا زراعتی، یا فئودالیته دارد. بنابراین در این جامعه، طبقه ی کارگر تشکیل نشده است و یک کادری از کارگر به وجود آمده. بنابراین، مخاطب من، کارگر نمی تواند باشد که یک گروه خاصی در یک گوشه ی مملکت است، مخاطب من کسانی هستند که هنوز به مرحله ی بورژوازی نرسیده اند.

Ali Shari'ati, "Mission of a Free Thinker" (1970–71)

I take this opportunity to continue the conversation started in Al Jazeera a while ago, prompted by Santiago Zabala's essays on Slavoj Žižek, followed by Hamid Dabashi's essay titled "Can Non-Europeans Think?", reprinted in this volume. Dabashi picked up in the first paragraph of Zabala's essays on Žižek an unconscious dismissal that has run through the history of the coloniality of power in its epistemic and ontological spheres: the self-assumed Eurocentrism (the world seen, described and mapped from European perspectives and interests).

Dabashi and I are non-European thinkers and intellectuals, perhaps philosophers too, schooled during the hard years of the Cold War. We have been described and classified as being of the Third World. The describers and classifiers hail from the First World. We both left our places of birth to move to Europe and the US, following – I imagine this was also the case for Dabashi – the dreams and the life of the Spirit, only to realize, at some point, that the Spirit was not welcoming of Third World spirits. Our local histories are at variance, however. Persians are indigenous, with their own memories, languages and territoriality, whereas in the diverse countries of South and Central America and some Caribbean islands the population is of European descent, marginal Europeans (to which I belong) displacing the indigenous and Afro-descendants. That is, from the sixteenth century Europeans and their descendants carried with them imperial memories and languages to the colonies and former colonies (e.g. Spanish in Argentina, French in Frantz Fanon's Martinique; English in C. L. R. James's Trinidad and Tobago).

I title my intervention "Yes, We Can" in response to Dabashi's question "Can Non-Europeans Think?" I address the general issue of colonial epistemic difference without any inclination to mediate the conversation. The title is a discursive anagram. Readers will recognize in it an echo of President Barack Obama's memorable dictum, used in both of his presidential campaigns. Readers will perhaps also recognize the echo of a much commented upon book title, although one less familiar, especially in academic circles, written by a Singaporean (a non-European of course) thinker, intellectual and perhaps philosopher too: *Can Asians Think?* by

Kishore Mahbubani[2]. The issue highlighted by Dabashi is not personal, but rather long-standing, important and enduring, although it is not a continental philosophical concern. And indeed it shouldn't be. European philosophers have their own, and for them more pressing, issues.

The question asked by the non-European intellectuals Dabashi and Mahbubani – one based in the US and involved in Middle Eastern politics, the other in Singapore and involved in high diplomacy – should not be taken lightly. It is not trivial because epistemic racism crosses the lines of social and institutional spheres. Both questions indeed unveil epistemic racism hidden beneath the naturalization of certain ways of thinking and producing knowledge that are given the name Eurocentrism. Racism is not a question of one's blood type (the Christian criterion used in sixteenth-century Spain to distinguish Christians from Moors and Jews in Europe) or the color of one's skin (Africans and the New World civilizations).

Racism consists in devaluing the humanity of certain people by dismissing it or playing it down (even when not intentional) at the same time as highlighting and playing up European philosophy, assuming it to be universal. It may be global, because it piggybacks on imperial expansion, but it certainly cannot be universal. Racism is a classification, and classification is an epistemic maneuver rather than an ontological entity that carries with it the essence of the classification. It is a system of classification enacted by actors, institutions and categories of thought that enjoy the privilege of being hegemonic or dominant, and which imposes itself as ontological truth reinforced by "scientific" research. Decolonially, knowledge is not taken as the mirror of nature that Richard Rorty critiqued, nor as the "grasper" of ontological properties of objects, as Nikolai Hartmann believed.

Mahbubani's book was published in 1998. It reprinted three times in the following years, and saw second and third editions up to 2007. Who was reading the book and debating this issue? I did not find the book quoted in academic publications I read and workshops and conferences I attended. Not only that, when I asked friends and colleagues if they knew or had read Mahbubani's book, they responded blankly before saying no. Since Mahbubani is a diplomat and a public figure in the sphere of international diplomacy, I suspect that his readers belong to that world and that of the media anchors who interview him. I also suspect that scholars would be suspicious of an Asian thinker playing with philosophy and the silences of history and asking such an uncomfortable question.

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[2] Mahbubani Kishore, *Can Asians Think? Understanding the Divide between East and West*, Hanover NH, Steerforth Press, 2001 [1998].

The question Dabashi and Mahbubani raise is not whether non-Europeans can *do philosophy*, but whether they/we can *think*. Philosophy is a regional and historical endeavor. Whether we can engage in philosophy or not is irrelevant. Now, if we cannot think, that would be serious! Thinking is a common feature of living organisms endowed with nervous systems. That includes humans (and certainly Europeans). What all human beings do is not philosophy, which is not a necessity, but thinking, which is unavoidable. Greek thinkers named their singular way of thinking philosophy, and by so doing were appointed as philosophers – those who do philosophy. This is of course understandable; but it is an aberration to project a regional definition of a regional way of thinking as a universal standard by which to judge and classify.

In consequence, what Dabashi, Mahbubani and I (among others) are doing is delinking from the "disciplinarity" of philosophy, and from disciplinary racial and gender normativity. It is common to be informed that such and such a person was denied tenure because of hidden ethnic or gender reasons. Disciplinary normativity operates on an assumed geopolitics of knowledge. In the 1970s, it was common among Africans and Latin American scholars trained in philosophy to ask whether one could properly talk about philosophy in Africa or in Latin America. A similar problem was faced by Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset at the beginning of the twentieth century. He returned to Spain after studying philology and philosophy in Germany and defined himself as "philosopher *in partibus infidelium*". He must have had an instinctive understanding of what Hegel meant when he referred to "the heart of Europe". Ortega y Gasset could have joined us in this conversation today, by asking "Can the Spanish think?". His writings are "indisciplinary" in the strict sense that philology and philosophy require. But I would venture that they are "undisciplinary" as well. For he was a thinker engaged in epistemic disobedience, a practice that is growing around the world, including in Western Europe and the US[3].

The question asked in the 1970s – whether philosophy was a legitimate endeavor in Africa and in Latin America – was left behind. The following generation trained in philosophy took a different attitude. Nigerian philosopher Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze published a groundbreaking article in 1997 titled "The Color of Reason: The Idea of "Race" in Kant's Anthropology"[4]. Eze inverted canonical approaches to Kant's *oeuvre*. Instead of starting from Kant's major works and

[3] "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom", *Theory, Culture & Society* (Singapore), vol. 26, no. 7–8, pp. 1–23.

[4] Eze Emmanuel Chukwudi, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology", *in* Eze, E. C. (ed.), *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader.* Oxford, Blackwell, 1997, pp. 103–31.

leaving aside his minor texts (*Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* and *Geography*), Eze saw in Kant's minor works the racial prejudices embedded in his monumental philosophy. Philosophy turned out to be not only a discipline for theoretical thought and argument (and love of wisdom) but also a tool to *dis-qualify* (that is, to disavow in the act of classifying those people who do not conform to Western conceptions of philosophy and its rational expectations).

Racial classification is an epistemic fiction rather than a scientific description of the correlation between "race" and "intelligence". It is not the color of one's skin that matters, but one's deviation from rationality and from the right belief system. This is why we are now asking whether Asians or non-Europeans can think. At its inception, the modern/colonial racial system of classification (in the sixteenth century) was theological and grounded in the belief of purity of blood. Christians on the Iberian Peninsula had the epistemic upper hand over Muslims and Jews. This meant that Christians found themselves enjoying the epistemic privilege of classifying without being classified. It was the privilege of managing zero-point epistemology, as Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez has convincingly argued[5]. Theological epistemic privilege extended to indigenous Aztec *tlamatinime* and Inca *amautas* (wise men, thinking individuals, in Anahuac and Tawantinsuyu respectively, areas known today as Mesoamerica and the Andes). In the racial hierarchy of knowledge founded in the sixteenth century, colonial epistemic and ontological differences were historically founded. They were remapped in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when theology was displaced by secular philosophy (Kant) and the sciences (Darwin)[6].

Christian theology and secular philosophy and sciences constructed a system of classification of people and regions of the world that still govern us and shape all debate on the issue. It also informs the presuppositions that underline all systems of knowledge[7]. The reasons for the emergence of new disciplinary formations in the US in the 1970s are to be found in the liberation from the epistemic racial and sexual classifications of over 500 years of Western epistemic hegemony. People of color and of non-heteronormative sexual preferences were able to think for themselves and

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5 Castro-Gómez Santiago, "The Missing Chapter of Empire", *Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2–3, 2007, pp. 428–48.

6 Greer Margaret R., Mignolo, Walt D. and Quilligan Maureen (eds.), *Rereading the Black Legend: The Discourses of Religious and Racial Difference in the Renaissance Empire*s, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp. 312–24.

7 Quijano Anibal, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification", *in* Mabel Moraña, Enrique D. Dussel and Carlos A. Jáuregui (eds.), *Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, Durham NC, Duke University Press, 2008 (Spanish ed. 2000).

were no longer simply the object of study by white heterosexuals. They could also reflect on the fact that they were considered as people to be studied.

Classification is a pernicious tool for it carries the seeds of ranking. Carl Linnaeus (1707–1778) in science and Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) in philosophy were the two architects of the mutation from theological to secular classification. Secular philosophy and science displaced Christian theology as the epistemic normativity. English, French and German thinkers, philosophers and scientists became the gatekeepers (willingly or not) and regulators of thought. It suffices to read chapter 4 of Immanuel Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (1764) to experience a trailer for the point I am making. That was the moment in which Asians entered the picture in earnest. And here I mean East Asia, South Asia and West Asia (today's Middle East). *Orientalism* was nothing but that: knowers and thinkers (philosophers) walking hand in hand with philologists "studying" the Orient. The arrogance of epistemic power mutated from Renaissance Christian men of letters and missionaries to secular philologists and philosophers.

Notice how epistemic racism works. It is built on classifications and hierarchies carried out by actors installed in institutions they have themselves created or inherited the right to classify and rank. That is, actors and institutions that legitimize the zero-point of epistemology as the word of God (Christian theology) or the word of Reason (secular philosophy and science). He who does the classifying classifies himself among the classified (the enunciated), but he is the only one who classifies among all those being classified. This is a powerful trick that, like any magic trick, the audience does not see as such but as something that just happens. Those who are classified as less human do not have much say in the classification (except to dissent), while those who classify always place themselves at the top of the classification. Darwin was right to observe that skin color is irrelevant in the *classification* of races. In spite of that, it is a dominant factor in the public sphere. It comes perhaps from Kant's ethno-racial tetragon. Following Linnaeus' classification, which was basically descriptive, Kant added a ranking among them and connected racism with geopolitics: Yellows are in Asia, Blacks in Africa, Reds in America and Whites in Europe[8]. The trick is that the classification is enacted on the basis of the exclusive privilege of the White race, whose actors and institutions were located in Europe, their language and categories of thought derived from Greek and Latin, inscribed in the formation of the six modern/colonial European

[8] See Eze E., "The Color of Reason", *op.cit.*

languages: Italian, Spanish, Portuguese (dominant during the Renaissance), German, English and French (dominant since the Enlightenment).

I feel that Hamid Dabashi reacted not to Zabala's first paragraph in itself but to the many disavowals that the paragraph elicited. My sense is that if the paragraph had been slightly different, Dabashi would not have engaged in the debate, and neither would I. Had Zabala written something like "Žižek is the most important philosopher in Continental Philosophy", Dabashi may not have paid any attention to it. However, *the problem would have persisted.* Because the problem was not the paragraph per se but what it elicited, which of course long preceded and goes far beyond the paragraph. Žižek's reaction to my intervention, "Fuck you, Walter Mignolo", I did not take as a personal insult, but understood rather as a deep malaise he was confronting and had been keeping under the table.

Let us further elaborate on the long-standing philosophical assumptions of epistemic racism, which are highlighted in Mahbubani's and Dabashi's titles. Frantz Fanon understood it:

> It is clear that what divides this world is first and foremost what species, what race one belongs to. In the colonies the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure. The cause is effect: you are rich because you are white; you are white because you are rich[9].

One could translate Fanon's unveiling of the hidden principles of racial socio-economic classification into epistemic and ontological ones: "You do philosophy because you are white" ; "you are white because you do [European] philosophy" where "whiteness" and "doing philosophy" stand for the ontological dimensions of the person. Behind the person is not just a skin color but also a language operating on principles and assumptions of knowledge. That is, there is an epistemology at work that transforms "black skin" into "Negro", and "Negro" is much more than skin color. The same applies to "thinking". Fanon again perceived this in 1952 when he wrote that to speak (and I believe he implied also to write) a language is not just to master a grammar and a vocabulary but to carry the weight of a civilization[10]; that racism was not only a question of the color of one's skin but of language, and therefore of categories of thought.

If according to racial classifications one is epistemically and ontologically inferior (or suspect), one cannot think (that is, one can, but one is not believable), one does not belong to the club of "universal" genealogy grounded in the Greek and Latin languages that mutated into the six modern/colonial European languages.

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9 Fanon Frantz, *Les damnés de la terre*, Paris, Maspero, 1961, p. 65.

10 Fanon F., *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Paris, Gallimard, 1952.

Persian doesn't belong to that genealogy. And Spanish missed the train of the second era of modernity in the eighteenth century. In addition, Spanish has been further devalued as a Third World language of Spanish America. Therefore, if one wishes to join the club of continental philosophy and one's language is Persian, Latin American Spanish, Urdu, Aymara or Bambara, or even a civilizational language like Mandarin, Russian or Turkish, one must learn the *languages* of secular philosophy (German and French, mainly). At this point we can take the argument a step further: if one speaks and writes in Spanish, one has trouble in aspiring to become a philosopher. That is what motivated Chilean Victor Farías to write his book on Heidegger. As Farías relates in his preface, Heidegger informed him that Spanish was not a language of philosophy, something José Ortega y Gasset understood at the beginning of the twentieth century. Hence Ortega y Gasset's declaration that he was himself a philosopher *in partibus infidelium*[11]. The South of Europe was already, and openly, considered suspect in terms of rationality by Enlightenment philosophers, chiefly Kant and Hegel.

Robert Bernasconi, trained in continental philosophy, has reflected on the challenges that African philosophy poses to continental philosophy:

> Western philosophy traps African philosophy in a double bind: either African philosophy is so similar to Western philosophy that it makes no distinctive contribution and effectively disappears; or it is so different that its credentials to be genuine philosophy will always be in doubt[12].

Bernasconi does not ask whether and/or how continental philosophy traps African (and non-Western) philosophies. I am not faulting Bernasconi for not asking that question. The question asked by Dabashi, "Can non-Europeans think?", addresses the silence revealed in Bernasconi's observation in his role as continental philosopher. This may not be the type of question one has to ask in order to be the most important European philosopher. But it is a question some philosophers engaged in continental philosophy do ask; a question that is crucial to non-European thinkers, philosophers or not.

Mahbubani, with no connection to Bernasconi but attuned to Eurocentrism, points towards other possibilities. Imagine, he suggests, that I ask "Can Europeans think?" or "Can Africans think?" These questions he rejects. He could, he says, ask

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11 Farías Victor, *Heidegger and Nazism*, Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1991. For Ortega y Gasset, see Fernández Jesús Ruiz, "La idea de filosofía en José Ortega y Gasset", Departamento de Filosofía, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2009, http://eprints.ucm.es/9522/1/T31067.pdf.

12 Bernasconi Robert, "African Philosophy's Challenge to Continental Philosopy", *in* Eze (ed.), *Postcolonial African Philosophy…, op.cit.*, pp. 183–96.

about Asians because he is Asian[13]. Why so? He doesn't answer his own questions, but I imagine that "Can Europeans think?" asked by an Asian would have been taken by Europeans to be a question asked by someone who had lost his mind or as confirmation that Asians really cannot think, for supposedly Europeans are the only ones who can do so. And if he asked "Can Africans think?" most likely Europeans would not dissent, for since Hume's (in)famous dictum, repeated by Kant, Africans cannot think. Kant challenges his readers to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries *although many of them have even been set free*, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praise-worthy quality, even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world[14].

Small wonder that Nigerian philosopher Emmanuel Chuckwudi Eze unveiled Kant's epistemic racism. The paragraph quoted might explain also why Slavoj Žižek was not impressed by the non-European philosophers referred to in my article. For they are all on the other side of the fence, picking flowers from the European philosophical garden. Last but not least, it might be understood why Dabashi and Mahbubani phrased the question as they did and why I am here following suit.

Let's go back to Bernasconi's unasked question. What kind of challenges does continental philosophy pose to non-European thinkers, philosophers and non-philosophers alike? In Argentina the challenge was taken up by Rodolfo Kusch (1922–1979), an Argentine of German descent (his parents emigrated to Argentina, from Germany, in 1920), and a philosopher – without his having read Bernasconi of course. The most elaborate of his works is *Pensamiento indígena y pensamiento popular en América* (1970). The first chapter is titled "El pensamiento Americano" (translated as "Thinking in América"). In its opening sentences Kusch confronts head-on continental philosophy's challenges to Argentinian (and South American) philosophers.

Kusch points out that in America there is, on the one hand, an official way of proceeding and, on the other, a private way of proceeding. The first, learned at university, consists basically of a European set of problems and issues translated into philosophical language. The second is implicit in the way of life and the thinking on city streets and in the countryside alike, and at home, and parallels the official

[13] Mahbubani K., *Can Asians Think?*, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

[14] Kant Immanuel, *Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen* [1764]. English translation: *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*, trans. John T. Goldthwait, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1981, p. 11.

way of doing philosophy at university. Kusch stresses that it is a question not of rejecting continental philosophy but of looking for what, a few years later, he called *pensamiento propio*: losing the fear of thinking on one's own, fear instilled by the force of colonial epistemic and ontological differences. The colonized, we know, more often than not assumes him- or herself as belonging to the ontology in which the classifications have placed him or her. Once you "see" the trick, you delink and start walking on your own, rather than translating European problems into the language of philosophy as taught in America (or Asia or Africa).

Kusch means by *pensamiento propio* the freedom "to appropriate" continental philosophy in this case and delink from the official way of studying it. Delinking implies epistemic disobedience. And that was Kusch's response to the challenge of continental philosophy to Third World philosophers. To do what he proposes in response to the challenges of continental philosophy is not an easy task:

> But this is what is so weighty. In order to carry out such a conceptualization, it is necessary not just to know philosophy, but above all – and this is very important – to face reality abiding a degree of distortion few can sustain. To investigate daily life in order to translate it into thinking is a dangerous venture, since it is necessary, particularly here in America, to make the grave mistake of contradicting the frameworks to which we are attached[15].

Kusch starts with Heidegger's *Dasein* and then departs from it. That is how border epistemology works. He asks what could be the meaning of *Dasein* in America given that it was a concept nourished and propelled by a certain ethos of the German middle class between the two wars. From that question Kusch derived the conviction that thinking may be a universal activity of all living organisms endowed with a nervous system, but that thinking organisms do so in their own niche – memories, languages, and socio-historical tensions and dissatisfactions. Heidegger's experience, which led to his conceiving of *Dasein*, is quite alien to America. Consequently, how could the purported universality of Being be accepted? Kusch realized also that the Argentinian middle class lived in a parallel universe of meaning but in extremely different socio-historical conditions to those experienced by the German middle class. Kusch's intellectual life began in the last years of the first presidency of Juan Domingo Perón, a so-called "populist" leader; he wrote his *Indigenous and Popular Thinking in America* between the fall and the return of Perón.

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[15] Kusch Rodolfo, *Pensamiento Indígena y Popular en América* [1970]. Translation: *Indigenous and Popular Thinking in América*, trans. María Lugones and Joshua Price, Introduction by Walter Mignolo, Durham NC, Duke University Press, 2010, p. 2.

From his early work in the 1950s (at the time Fanon was fighting his fight in France) Kusch turned his back on his social roots and turned his gaze towards Indigenous culture. It was not Kusch's intention to describe the life of Indigenous people, as anthropologists do, but to understand the logic of their thinking. This was not easy as he had to deal with the baggage of continental philosophy he learned at university. Here one again experiences epistemic colonial difference and is reminded of the question Bernasconi fails to ask: continental philosophers do not have to deal with thinking and rationality beyond the line that connects Ancient Greece and Rome with the heart of Europe. On the contrary, in order to do philosophy in the colonies and ex-colonies one has two options: to join a branch of continental philosophy (science, psychoanalysis, sociology, etc.), which is equivalent to a branch of McDonald's; or to delink and engage in *pensamiento propio*[16]. At that moment one is already engaging border epistemology, on account of one's residing on the borders.

For example, Kusch found that in the Aymara language the word *utcatha* has certain parallels with *Dasein*, a word that Heidegger picked up from popular German. Through *utcatha* Kusch unfolds a complex universe of meaning that allows him to work his understanding of indigenous ways of thinking (philosophy, if you will) into the simultaneous process of delinking from continental philosophy and uncovering what may constitute thinking in America. In this process, the issue is not to *reject* continental philosophy but, on the contrary, to know it in order to *delink* from it. That is, to undermine it and by the same token undermine epistemic classifications that sometimes operate not by empirical description but by unconscious or conscious silences. Kusch finds out first that the Aymara word *utcatha* has several meanings, all of which he finds are associated with the type of experience that Heidegger was exploring through the word *Dasein*. He then connects the meaning of an Aymara word with Indigenous people's expressions of their sense and understanding of themselves. He discovers a "passive" attitude that has been used to justify "white" middle-class perceptions of "Indians" laziness.

But Kusch saw something else in what was defined as "passiveness" and the refusal to work. What appeared from the perspective of modernity and modernization, the dream of the urban middle class at the time, as passiveness and laziness was for Kusch an "active passiveness" and a refusal to sell one's labour and change one's way of life. Kusch created the concept of *estar siendo*, taking advantage of the distinction between the verbs *ser* and *estar* in Spanish, which has no equivalent in

16 Mignolo Walter, *Local Histories, Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 2000; 2e éd. 2012.

other Western languages: Italian, *essere–essere*; German, *werden–werden*; French, *être–être*; English, to be–to be. Kusch's groundbreaking category *estar siendo* denotes an active passiveness that refuses, rejects, *negates* the expectation to join the storytelling of modernity and modernization. *Estar siendo* is a negation that at the same time affirms what modernity wants to eliminate or incorporate into "development". *Estar siendo* is a negation that affirms indigeneity and prevents it from being absorbed by and into nationality. From the active–passiveness emerged the revolutionary, philosophical and political, idea of "plurinational state" recently inscribed in the constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador.

To find one's own way one cannot depend on the words of the master; one has to delink and disobey. Delinking and disobeying here means avoiding the traps of colonial differences, and has nothing to do with the rebellious artistic and intellectual acts that we are used to hearing about in European history. In the history of Europe reactions against the past are part of the idea of progress and of dialectical movement. In the non-European world it is a matter of delinking from dialectics and turning to analectics (Dussel), and delinking from progress and seeking equilibrium. These are parallel trajectories coexisting, in the non-European world, with European critical dissenters. But they must not be confused. The latter is the path Dabashi, Mahbubani, Kusch, Eze and I are taking. The former is the path of Zabala reading Žižek, and Žižek responding to Dabashi's and my comments.

Mahbubani, as his positions in government indicate, thinks "from above" – but he thinks radically from above. If you are not interested in the process of thinking from above, whether radical or organic (like Kissinger, Huntington or Brzezinski), you can skip this section.

In the Preface to the second edition of *Can Asians Think?* Mahbubani writes:

> The title chosen for this volume of essays – "Can Asians Think?" – is not accidental. It represents essentially two questions folded into one. The first, addressed to my fellow Asians, reads as "Can you think? If you can, why have Asian societies lost a thousand years and slipped far behind the European societies that they were far ahead of at the turn of the last millennium?".
>
> The second question, addressed primarily to my friends in the West [remember, he is a diplomat – WM], is "Can Asians think for themselves?" We live in an essentially unbalanced world. The flow of ideas, reflecting 500 years of Western domination of the globe, remains a one-way street – from the West to the East. Most Westerners cannot see that they have arrogated to themselves the moral high ground from which they lecture the world. The rest of the world can see this[17].

[17] Mahbubani K., *Can Asians Think?*, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

Since the term "the West" is often used, let's pause to clarify it. First, north of the Mediterranean Sea the West refers to the area west of Jerusalem, where Western Christians dwell, before that territory became better known as Europe. South of the Mediterranean the word used is "Maghreb", which means west of Mecca and Medina. But of course neither Mahbubani nor I refer to Maghreb when we use the term "the West". Second, by the West neither I nor probably he means Romania, former Yugoslavia, Poland or Latvia. What constitutes the West more than geography is a linguistic family, a belief system and an epistemology. It is constituted by six modern European and imperial languages: Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, which were dominant during the Renaissance, and English, French and German, which have been dominant since the Enlightenment. The latter states and languages form the "heart of Europe", in Hegel's expression, but they are also held by Kant to be the three states with the highest degree of civilization. Thus "the West" is shorthand for "Western civilization".

Let's stay with Mahbubani for one more paragraph[18]. He continues:

> Similarly, Western intellectuals are convinced that their minds and cultures are open, self-critical and – in contrast to ossified Asian minds and cultures – have no "sacred cows". The most shocking discovery of my adult life was the realisation that "sacred cows" also exist in the Western mind. During the period of Western triumphalism that followed the end of the Cold War, a huge bubble of moral pretentiousness enveloped the Western intellectual universe[19].

Coloniality, not just colonization, has a long history. It began to take shape in the sixteenth century, in the North and South Atlantic, but led by the North of course. The South also participated, by force, through the Atlantic slave trade and the dismantling of the civilizations in Mesoamerica and the Andes (Aztecs, Mayas, Incas) and the "Indian" genocide. It was not just brute force that made all of this possible. It was the control of knowledge that justified the demonization and dehumanization of people, civilizations, cultures and territories. People who are ontologically inferior human beings are also epistemically deficient. The panorama has changed in the past five hundred years, but only on the surface. The deep feelings and logic remain. When in the 1950s Mexican ethno-historian and philosopher Miguel León-Portilla published *La filosofía Náhuatl* (1958), translat-

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18 I recommend one of his earlier articles in this vein, an invited lecture at the BBC in 2000, collected in *Can Asians Think?*, *op.cit.,* pp. 47–67.

19 Mahbubani K., *Can Asians Think?*, *op.cit.,* p. 9.

ed as *Aztec Thought and Culture*[20], he was harshly attacked. How could he dare to think that "Indians" like Aztecs could have philosophy? The critique came not from continental philosophers, who did not care much about these debates in the New World, but from Eurocentric philosophers in Mexico – imperial collaborationists and defenders of philosophical universality (which means universality as interpreted by regional European philosophy).

Let us consider a more recent example of the way epistemic Eurocentrism works within the unconscious of even intelligent European philosophers. Slavoj Žižek was invited to speak at the *Seminarios Internacionales de la Vicepresidencia del Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia*, led by Álvaro García Linera, in 2011. The title was "¿ Es posible pensar un cambio radical hoy?" – "Is it possible to think a radical change today?"[21] At one point[22] Žižek examines the proposal of John Holloway, an Irish-born lawyer and sociologist of Marxist tendency, based in Puebla (Mexico), to "change the world without taking power". By "without taking power" Holloway means without the "taking of the state" by a revolutionary movement. Holloway based his arguments on the Zapatistas' uprising. His interpretation of the Zapatistas' goals and orientation is not necessarily that of the Zapatistas. Žižek starts by discussing and debunking Holloway's proposals, and at this moment brings the Zapatistas and Subcomandante Marcos into the conversation. At this point he introduces one of his frequent jokes. This one he apparently learned from his friends in Mexico. They told him that they don't use the title Subcomandante Marcos any more but rather Subcomediante Marcos (subcomedian). I surmise that Žižek's Mexican friends were Marxists. Marxists have a problem with Marcos because he had detached himself from Marxism shortly after arriving in Chiapas, in the 1980s, and immersed himself in Indigenous philosophy and politics – or, if you will, political philosophy[23].

I don't know about you, but I consider the act of debunking one's opponent, in public, with a joke that carries epistemic racial overtones quite uncalled for. Had the joke been made to an audience in Britain or Austria, it might have been uncontroversial. But in Bolivia, a self-proclaimed state promoting "communal socialism," and having the majority of the Indigenous population behind it, telling the joke certainly showed a lack of tact (and perhaps sureness of touch). The reader should

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20 *Aztec Thought and Culture: A Study of the Ancient Nahuatl Mind*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990.

21 Žižek in Bolivia, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YoQEi4rOVRU.

22 *Ibid*., minute 46.

23 Mignolo Walter, "The Zapatista's Theoretical Revolution. Its Historical, Ethical and Political Consequences", *Review: A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center for the Study of Economies, Historical Systems, and Civilizations*, 25, 3 (2002), p. 245–275.

know that Subcomandante Marcos refused President Evo Morales's invitation to attend his inauguration. There were laughs in the Bolivian audience, who were not visible – you hear the laughs in the recording but do not see the faces. Far from being a *comediante*, Marcos is an intellectual who converted from Marxism to Indianism (Indigenous people thinking about themselves and the world, much as how Marxism allows people to think about themselves and the world). He joined an already existing Indigenous organization in the Mayan area, Southern Mexico[24]. Certainly Subcomandante Marcos masqueraded in his outfits, watch, pipes, gun, and so on. But this was just a different sort of masquerade to that practiced by current kings and queens, secular presidents and vice presidents, unless we believe that these are not staged and only the public persona of Subcomandante Marcos is. An urban Marxist intellectual, Rafael Guillén (trained in philosophy at university), went to the South of Mexico to teach Indians that they were oppressed and had to liberate themselves, only to discover that Indians have known for 500 years, and without reading Marx, that they were oppressed and have not stopped fighting for their survival and a new existence. Far from being a *comediante*, Marcos (now Subcomandante Galeano) has the openness and courage both to perceive the limits of Marxism and to recognize the potential of decoloniality. This is the kind of philosophy and thinking that one finds among non-European thinkers and philosophers.

Žižek's comment on Subcomandante Marcos reminds me of what I have heard on several occasions in different countries from people who attended his talks. These things have been said in private, in the same way I imagine as Žižek heard about Subcomandante Marcos in private conversations with his Mexican friends. Many different people have observed that Žižek is a clown, in French a *buffon*. But I do not recall anyone saying this in public. It has remained in the realm of private conversation until this moment. I am now making it public to undermine Žižek's uncalled-for comment on Subcomandante Marcos[25]. And, parallel to this, to undermine his dictatorial inclination to confront with insults those who doubt or express indifference to his reputation as the most important (European) philosopher alive, even though this status is irrelevant to non-European thinkers who do not worship continental philosophy. The general issue of epistemic colonial differences touches all of us in different ways. We respond to it accordingly.

In a sense I am here following Chandra Muzaffar's recommendation regarding *Charlie Hebdo*'s freedom-of-expression insults. There is no reason to kill someone who insults you believing that what he or she did was legitimate according to free-

24 See *ibid*.
25 Žižek in Bolivia.

dom of expression. Someone who insults on the basis of such a belief is a victim of the arrogance of power and the privileges of zero-point epistemology. Muzaffar correctly understood the situation, and recommended that:

> One should respond to satirical cartoons with cartoons and other works of art that expose the prejudice and bigotry of the cartoonists and editors of Charlie Hebdo. *One should use the Charlie Hebdo cartoons as a platform to educate and raise the awareness of the French public about what the Quran actually teaches and who the Prophet really was and the sort of noble values that distinguished his life and struggle*[26].

We (non-European intellectuals, which Muzaffar is) should use racist jokes and insults (to paraphrase Muzaffar) as a platform to educate and raise the awareness of the European public about colonial epistemic differences and decolonial thinking. This is the spirit in which non-European thinkers and philosopher are, and should be, responding to European arrogance from the right and from the left. We are no longer silent, nor asking for recognition; this should be clear by now. As Tariq Ramadan observes, recognition and integration are words that belong to the past. As First Nation intellectuals, thinkers, artists and activists of Canada insist, recognition is to be wholly rejected[27]. What is at stake is affirmation and the re-emergence of the communal (rather than the commons and the common good). This is one of the paths that we non-European thinkers are following.

In order to flesh out what I have argued so far, starting from the question raised by Dabashi in his title, and elaborated in the book, I shall consider two examples. One is Arabs throwing their shoes; the other is Dabashi's elaboration of the concept of revolution.

The concern expressed by Dabashi in his Al Jazeera article finds forceful expression in a different guise in the essay "The Arabs and Their Flying Shoes". Humor is a crucial epistemic dimension here. It is not philosophy that is in question but a certain imaginary, of which philosophy is not exempt. The imputed discourse is that of anthropology and Western television anchors. The line of the argument is how Western anthropologists and news anchors relying on them make sense of an Iraqi throwing a shoe at George W. Bush in Tehran and, later on, an Egyptian

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26 Muzaffar Chandra, www.globalresearch.ca/paris-a-dastardly-act-of-terror-the-case-for-an-independent-investigation/5423889; stress added.

27 Simpson Leanne, *Dancing on our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence*, Toronto, Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011. Simpson observes, in a groundbreaking chapter, that storytelling is "our way of theorizing". Substitute philosophy for theory and you will get the picture. See also Coulthard, Glen Sean, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

enacting the same gesture. However, the target in the latter case is not Bush but Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The parallel is crucial, for they stood as the two pillars of a world order that is now governed by different actors and slightly different diplomatic styles. Here, the anti-imperial and anti-colonial arguments that Dabashi explores through the book reach their limit. This is not an "anti" (resistance, reaction) gesture. That is not what moves the revolutionary sirocco blowing through all the authoritarian states of North Africa and the Middle East (MENA), steered by the new generation of Muslims, Arabs, Persians and Turks born at the end of the Cold War and detached from the imperial/colonial antagonism that Dabashi details.

How, then, are we to characterize different manifestations of "revolution" in the making? To answer this question, Dabashi explores in "The Arabs and Their Flying Shoes" the epistemic colonial difference in anthropological knowledge and within mainstream journalism.

Through anecdote Dabashi stages a powerful philosophical argument, weaving different scenarios in which, for example, graduate students from some MENA country will be supported by local foundations and universities to conduct research into Western habits relating to shoes. Professors and institutions supporting the graduate student research would endorse publication of the resultant books, and such works could receive recognition within the profession by way of distinguished awards. Billions of Muslims and Arabs would be able to understand the curious behavior and beliefs of Western people through their habits and feelings concerning shoes. It is only a short step from this scenario to the question "Can non-Europeans think?" Non-Europeans do not think – they throw shoes so that Western scholars and social scientists can study them, and philosophers, if they are interested, can reflect on the meaning of the event of flying shoes in the MENA region. This issue was highlighted by more perceptive Western social scientists in the early 1980s. For example, Carl Pletsch published what was to become a celebrated article, albeit not within the social sciences. He explored the scientific distribution of labor across the "three worlds". Of significance here is that the First World has knowledge while the Third World has culture[28]. The flying shoes story perfectly exemplifies Pletsch's argument. In common parlance the dictum would go something like: Africans have experience, Europeans have philosophy; Native Americans have wisdom, Anglo-Americans have science; the Third World has cultures, the First World has science and philosophy.

[28] Pletsch Carl, "The Three Worlds, or the Division of Social Scientific Labor, circa 1950–1975", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 23, no. 4, 1981, pp. 565–87.

What is at stake in Dabashi's argument? Anthropological and philosophical knowledge is half the story. Anthropologists are in the main Western professionals making sense of the rest of the world for a Western audience. Thus, non-Western people, scholars and intellectuals (that is, people who think, regardless of whether or not they are philosophers or anthropologists in the Western provincial disciplinary sense) are by default left outside, watching. That was the case in the long history of coloniality of knowledge of being – for knowledge molds subjectivities, the subjectivity both of those who "feel" they are working for the Global Secretary of Knowledge and of those who felt, and perhaps still feel, that they should be recognized by the Secretary. If they are not, they do not exist or do not count as thinking human beings.

The point Dabashi highlights in the title of his response to Zabala's essay on Žižek invokes a sensitive issue. This is the issue that prompted me to enter the conversation. It is not new, although it is (understandably, given the procedure outlined above) unknown to or irrelevant for Western philosophy and other disciplinary formations. And of course there is no reason why Western philosophers and scholars should be interested in what Dabashi and I are arguing. European philosophers have their concerns; we non-European thinkers have ours. However, we cannot afford not to know Western philosophy. The splendors and miseries of non-European thinkers come from this double bind; and with it comes the epistemic potential of dwelling and thinking in the borders. That is, engaging in border thinking.

The second example is Dabashi's essay reflecting on the meaning of "revolution" today. The inquiry was motivated by the impact of the Arab Spring.

Starting from Hannah Arendt's study *On Revolution* (1963), Dabashi soon departs from it. He is interested in Tahrir Square and the Arab Spring or intifada in Egypt, and by extension in the succession of uprisings in North Africa. What kind of revolution were they, and do they fit Arendt's conception? To my mind, Dabashi starts with Arendt the sooner to take his leave, on account of the difficulty in matching what the world witnessed and millions of Egyptian experienced in Tahrir Square with the genealogy of the US and French revolutions analyzed by Arendt. So, in which genealogy of revolutions do the Arab Spring/intifadas belong, or are they a new departure?

First of all, Tahrir Square emerged from colonial difference, from the experience of colonial domination, physical and epistemic. Nothing like that had occurred in the US or France. Colonial difference was partially at work in the US Revolution but hardly so in the French Revolution. This was because the Founding Fathers were gaining independence from their rulers in England (similar to the

process of decolonization during the Cold War), while at once being their heirs, and at the same time suppressing Native Americans, expropriating their land and exploiting enslaved Africans. In this sense it was the rearticulation of coloniality exercised by the British Crown and other imperial monarchies of the time (France, Holland, Spain, Portugal). In the US, the revolutionaries were discontented Europeans, slave traders and repressors of indigenous cultures. In France, they were European bourgeois confronting the monarchy and the Church. Both were adding to the long history of Western imperialism that started with the Spanish colonial revolution in the sixteenth century. This revolution dismantled existing civilizations and built upon them monuments, institutions, educational, social and economic structures. The Levellers' movement, the so called "American" (US) Revolution, the Haitian Revolution, and the independence of Spanish America that led to a set of new republics were the first peripheral jolts of the modern colonial world, building upon the foundations of the Iberian colonial revolution in the New World. The Levellers' activity and the French Revolution took place in the heart of Europe, not in the periphery of the Americas where Europe set up the first colonies, before England and France extended their tentacles into Asia and Africa.

The era of decolonization, roughly 1945–1979, was the second peripheral jolt of the modern/colonial world system. But the process failed. Almost half a century later, the Arab Spring and intifadas to the south of the Mediterranean brought to prominence what many had long known. The great leaders and thinkers of decolonization and their work (Lumumba, Cabral, Beko) fell into the hands of imperial collaborators to their own benefit. At the same time in the north of the Mediterranean we have the *Indignados* of the South of Europe, in Greece and Spain. And forgotten at the time by mainstream and independent media were the uprisings in Bolivia and Ecuador that deposed several presidents. What is the genealogy of these revolutions, or are they revolutions without a genealogy?

Uprisings at the beginning of the twenty-first century created the conditions for the election of Evo Morales in Bolivia and, shortly after, Rafael Correa in Ecuador. Although today it is hard to see these governments as "leftist," they are certainly not "right-wing conservative". An important point, which cannot be explored here, is that the kind of revolutions that erupted in Bolivia and Ecuador at the beginning of the twenty-first century bear comparison to the Arab Spring/intifadas in MENA and to the *Indignados/as* in the south of Europe. They seem not to fit the model of the US and French revolutions. Indeed they appear to represent a moving away from the trajectory of the eighteenth-century revolutions, the one creating the United States of America and the other paving the way for the modern nation-state. In the south of Europe, two of the consequences of the *Indignados/as*

uprising was the consolidation of Syriza in Greece and the emergence of Podemos in Spain.

The issues and consequences that the Arab Spring/intifada raise reflect domestic and regional history and circumstances; as such they are closer to the uprisings in Ecuador and Bolivia than to events in Greece and Spain. That is, the MENA and Andean countries are part of the legacy of colonialism and coloniality (the underlying logic of any expression of modern colonialism), while the south of Europe emerged from a history of imperial differences between the north and the south of Europe.

Dabashi needs to depart from Arendt because the local histories he is dealing with demand a double critique, which is not a necessity for Arendt. "Double critique" is a concept introduced by another Third World philosopher and storyteller, the Moroccan Abdelkebir Khatibi. The double critique in Dabashi's essays moves between the Muslim Brotherhood and previous Egyptian governments led by elites collaborating with Westernization. In the case of Egypt it was no longer Britain but the US with which leaders collaborated. Coloniality doesn't need colonialism; it needs a collaborator. Here is one quotation from one of Dabashi's essays on revolution that makes clear the nature of his concern:

> To begin to think of the rights of that prototypical citizen, we should not start with the misleading distinction between "seculars" and "Muslims" but with non-Muslim Egyptians, with Copts, with Jews, and with any other so-called "religious minority". The whole notion of "religious minority" must be categorically dismantled, and in the drafting of the constitution the rights of citizenship irrespective of religious affiliation must be written in such sound terms that there is no distinction between a Copt, a Jew, or a Muslim, let alone a so-called "secular", who is also a Muslim in colonial disguise[29].

What are the issues at stake in the "revolutions" in North African and the South American Andes: who revolted and what are the consequences? First, it cannot be said that the eighteenth-century revolutions brought into being the pluri-national state. The European nation-state was mono-national. For in the South American Andes the revolts were led by the Indigenous rather than by Latin American whites (generally mestizos/as) ; the result being an Aymara president in Bolivia, and a mestizo in Ecuador who speaks Quichua, the most widely spoken Indigenous language in the country. The second consequence was the rewriting of both countries' constitutions, wherein each defined itself as a "plurinational state". "Plurality" of religion has not been a major issue in the history of the Americas since 1500. Ancient civili-

[29] "To Protect the Revolution, Overcome the False Secular–Islamist Divide".

zations – Mayas, Incas and Aztecs, and many other cultures invaded by the Spanish, Portuguese and later on the French, Dutch and British – were declared peoples without religion (and without history too, because they did not use the Latin alphabet – necessary, according to the Spanish, to have a history). Dabashi's paragraph quoted above points in that direction, and in so doing undermines the very foundation of the modern and secular (and bourgeois if you are a Marxist) nation-state. If we look, then, for the genealogy of the Arab Spring, we would trace it to the first revolutions that claimed the formation of a plurinational state. And this is also valid for the emergence of Podemos in Spain. Spain is ready to begin the conversation that will take it in the direction of a plurinational state. I am not sure that this will be a pressing issue in Greece, although globalization has undermined the very assumption that a nation should be mono-national – that is, to one state corresponds one ethnicity (Greek *ethnos*; Latin *nation*).

The nation-states that emerged from the first modern/colonial jolt in the periphery of Europe (the Americas) and in Europe itself have one element in common: the belief that to one state corresponds one nation. Or, put the other way, only one nation corresponds to the state. That myth was sustainable in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (it is no longer the case; in the twenty-first century, migration has destroyed the illusion), and it could be maintained in the Americas because the population of European descent controlled the state, declared themselves the nation and marginalized, from 1500 to 1800, the Indigenous and Afro-descendant population. When the steamboat and the railroad made migration on a massive scale possible, the idea of one nation/one state was consolidated so successfully that it appeared to be reality rather than a fiction.

Let's ask the question again: what are the meanings and the consequences of Indigenous uprisings in the Andes, the Zapatistas twenty years ago in Southern Mexico and Central America, the Indignados in the south of Europe, the intifadas in the MENA region, the Euromaidan revolution, and more recently the Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong? The meanings are not the same in South America, Southern Mexico, the MENA countries, Hong Kong or Ukraine. Each region has its own local history entangled with Westernization. But these are no longer a series of revolutions led by an emerging ethno-class in Europe, the bourgeoisie, and their heirs in the New World, Anglos and French in North America (the US and Canada); Spanish and Portuguese in South and Central America; Africans in Haiti, who were not supposed to take the matter of freedom into their own hands. And the consequences are clear. Indigenous uprisings, intifadas, *Indignados/as*, Euromaidan have been initiated by the world order to come, the ending of the era of the national state, the coming of plurinational states, the reaction of the extreme right

to the unstoppable forces of history, and, most likely, the decline of the nation-state in both its former mono-national and its plurination national versions. This may be the major consequence of a politicization of civil society and the emergence of a process that – in spite of revolutions being taken over by reactionary forces, as in Egypt and Ukraine, resultant chaos in Libya, and the cycle of peripheral and Southern European jolts of the captured decolonization of the twentieth century by native collaborationist elites – is announcing the emergence and re-emergence of a variegated global political society corresponding to the waning of the eras introduced by the US and French revolutions. There is no continuity but only discontinuity here. That is why Dabashi needed to depart from Arendt. And this is also another consequence of the way non-European philosophers think, as their/our own history is of course entangled with European history by the chains of coloniality.

In conclusion I shall outline some of the philosophical, epistemological and political issues that this debate has brought into the open, an understanding of which is crucial to addressing the question "Can non-Europeans think?" Certainly we can and do, but the point is what do we think about, and what are the vital concerns for the Third World (up to 1989) and for non-European thinkers of the global South and the eastern hemisphere today[30].

First, let us consider the question of coloniality, postcoloniality and decoloniality. The term "postcolonial" appears frequently in Dabashi's book. He points to Edward Said, and particularly his *Orientalism* (1978), as a vital anchor of his thinking, but also of his life. He devotes an essay, now a chapter in this book, to his first encounter and subsequent friendship. I would venture to say that Said is for Dabashi what Jacques Lacan is for Žižek, and indeed what Anibal Quijano is for my own thinking.

Regarding "postcoloniality", Said became postcolonialist *après la lettre*. When he published *Orientalism*, in 1978, the words "postcoloniality" and "postcolonialism" were not yet the talk of the town. In the following year François Lyotard published *La condition postmoderne* (translated in 1984 as *The Postmodern Condition*). So arguably postcoloniality emerged piggybacking on postmodernity. Said's *Orientalism* became postcolonial retrospectively. However, relevant to the issues under discussion here is that Said published another important book in the same year, *The Question of Palestine* (1978), that seldom seems to make it onto lists of postcolonial works. Now, while *Orientalism* fits the postco-

[30] On the global South and eastern hemisphere, see Mignolo Walter, "The North of the South and the West of the East", *in Ibraaz. Contemporary Visual Cultures in North Africa and the Middle East,* November 2014.

lonial frame as defined in the 1980s, *The Question of Palestine* points in another direction, one that was framed in the 1950s: the decolonial rather than the postcolonial[31]. It parallels arguments made by Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1955), Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955) and Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961).

These arguments, and others similar to them, were contemporaneous with the Bandung Conference of 1955, a landmark event for decolonial thinking and acting, in terms of both interstate relations and intersubjective decolonization. Decolonization, Fanon stated,

> is the veritable creation of new men [*sic*]. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the "thing" which has been colonized becomes man [*sic*] during the same process by which it frees itself[32].

In Fanon's decolonization, and in today's decoloniality, there are two interrelated trajectories. One is the sphere of the state, involving both domestic and interstate relations; the other is the intersubjective sphere in each of us, as persons crossed by racial and gender lines. That is, there are colonial epistemic and ontological differences (as exemplified in the question "Can non-Europeans/Asians think?"). The interrelationship between the two spheres is a topic for another occasion. The point here is that while postcoloniality is anchored on postmodernity, decolonization and decoloniality are anchored on the symbolic legacies of the Bandung Conference and the debates of the 1950s, during the hard times of political decolonization. We have moved from Euro-centered to decolonial epistemology[33].

A second distinction I wish to make is between multipolarity and pluriversality. Multipolarity is a common concept in international relations and political theory today. As such, it names the coming world order in which there will no longer be one state self-appointed to lead a *unipolar* world order, but rather – and we are already entering this new age – a *multipolar* global world order. These are processes in the spheres of state and interstate relations that no doubt impinge on intersubjective relations in a multipolar world order.

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31 Bhambra Gurminder K., "Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues", *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2014, pp. 115–21.

32 Fanon F., *Les damnés…, op.cit.,* p. 28.

33 Martín Alcoff Linda, "Mignolo's Epistemology of Coloniality", *New Centennial Review*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2007, pp. 79–101.

Consequently, the goal enunciated by Fanon – the coming of a new human being – requires us to free ourselves from the non-human conditions in which racial and sexual lines have been drawn in the making of the unipolar world order. Freeing ourselves from the classification bequeathed to us requires us to break with the "unipolar" idea of knowledge, which in decolonial vocabulary translates into Eurocentric epistemic universality. Decolonial horizons aim at epistemic pluriversality ; or, if one wishes to maintain some kind of universality, one might refer to "pluriversality as a universal project", which today is one of the ultimate decolonial horizons. Argentine philosopher Enrique Dussel would describe it as transmodernity[34].

I hope that my contribution here helps to highlight the relevance of the issues raised by Hamid Dabashi's question. And I trust that it explains my intervention and the assertiveness of the response "Yes, we can" to the question "Can non-Europeans think?" Yes, we can, and we must. And we are doing so.

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