

How can the decolonial project become the ground for the decolonial humanities ? A few reflections from the “vanished” second world

«J’ai de sérieuses raisons de croire que la planète d’où venait le petit prince est l’astéroïde B 612. Cet astéroïde n’a été aperçu qu’une fois au télescope, en 1909, par un astronome turc. Il avait fait alors une grande démonstration de sa découverte à un Congrès International d’Astronomie. Mais personne ne l’avait cru à cause de son costume. Les grandes personnes sont comme ça. Heureusement pour la réputation de l’astéroïde B 612 un dictateur turc imposa à son peuple, sous peine de mort, de s’habiller à l’Européenne. L’astronome refit sa démonstration en 1920, dans un habit très élégant. Et cette fois-ci tout le monde fut de son avis».

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The following few disheveled reflections certainly do not lay claim to any ultimate scholarly status but may be curious as a voice of a scholar who by her very positioning and origins does not belong to the high road of modernity and its main dichotomies such as the first world/vs the third one, the colonizer /vs the colonized, the global North/ vs the global South, etc., representing instead the ex-second world, which has vanished for the West and moreover, being the outcast of this world whose position becomes a border one not just by choice but also by necessity.

The topic of this seminar was announced as a dialogue between shifting the geography and biography of knowledge and trans-cultural humanities between globalization and postcolonial re-readings of history. The key concepts here then are the biography and geography of reason, a shift in which presupposes a movement toward a geopolitical and body-political perspective that puts in the center of knowledge production what can be called following and reformulating a bit G. Anzaldúa, “the colonial wound”, and not the achievements of modernity (Mignolo & Tlostanova 2007: 112). I believe that the decolonial project itself is a perfect example of the new understanding of humanities and social sciences in and for the 21st century, although potentially the decolonial project goes much farther than the humanities disciplinary sphere. So the growing pains, the methodological difficulties and the future prospects of this project itself can be regarded also as pertaining to the humanities in general and de-colonial humanities in particular.

In the preamble that we all received from W. Mignolo there are several moments that I find particularly important for the dialogue announced as the subject of this seminar. First, the attention is drawn intentionally to the logical operation which lies in the basis of the de-colonial project and, consequently the de-colonial humanities. I mean the rejection of both postmodernity and postcoloniality and choosing de-coloniality instead. Why is it crucial ? Because by doing it we reject the very essence and structure of the existing system of knowledge in humanities, we refuse to accept its fundamental logic and methodological apparatus which is impossible to disentangle from the material being analyzed. This shift is a qualitative one, not a quantitative as is often the case in postcolonial studies. What happens in the majority of postcolonial studies ? They start from the version of history that places the British empire (or sometimes, French) at the center of the modern colonial history, which constitutes one of its limits seen from the perspective of the de-colonial project (Mignolo & Tlostanova 2007: 110). On a more metacritical level, a relatively new material is studied in the postcolonial theories by the (ex)representative of the third world, but by means of the well known postmodernist analytical methods or with a minimal variation/deviation from them. What remains untouched in this case is the fundamental logic of modernity and its humanities and particularly, the typical for modernity understanding of the human.

The postcolonial studies remain blind to the fundamental task that stands today before the humanities and social sciences. This task can be defined in decolonial project's terms, as the shift to geo- and body-politics of knowledge and the decolonization of knowledge based on arguing from a new perspective that comes from the very phenomena we seek to define and is often in fact their product. The postcolonial studies would not even formulate their task like this. Because they remain "studies", i.e. confined within the typical for modernity division into subject and object and taking scholarship basically down to descriptivity. The postcolonial studies do not alter the inherent discourses of progress and development fundamental for the myth of modernity as it is.

Postmodernism in this respect seems to be a more interesting project, because even if it is eurocentrically provincial, it at least strives to work out a new categorical apparatus, mechanisms and logic in contrast with postcolonial studies. Decolonial project in this context becomes similar in its goals and extend to postmodernism but lacking its provincialism and performing its deconstruction and dismantling of modernity in a much wider and deeper sense. Besides, it strives to get rid of its own remnants of epistemic provincialism as it incorporates more and more locales and contesting epistemic traditions into its frame along with the initial Latin American basis.

The very tools and categories of the decolonial project can serve as a basis for the decolonial humanities. It is particularly important when it refers to the critique of the structure and genealogy of knowledge in modernity (including the humanities), the rethinking of the very philosophy of sciences and humanities, the philosophy which was forced upon the humankind and never questioned until recently. This is one more crucial difference between postcolonial studies and the decolonial project. The former does not question the established philosophy of scholarship and works, as has been mentioned before, in a quantitative key avoiding touching the deeper mechanisms of the scholarly cognition and understanding. One can reformulate Lacan's ideas in order to create Homi Bhabha's concepts, but one can also begin his or her path not from Lacan, but from Gloria Anzaldua or from the Zapatistas, from the Circassian cosmology or from Nakshbandi Sufism.

Today's dialogue between the scholars from Amsterdam and Bremen and the US decolonialists is crucial for both sides among other things because it is a dialogue of Europe and America in the most fundamental sense – European contesting scholarship dealing with the problematic of intellectual and cultural colonialism has been showing the need for more methodological freedom and options and a truly other thinking which cannot be obtained within the postcolonial or postmodernist paradigms. In this respect the decolonial project is a meta-theory in a good sense because it is not engaged only in the re-reading and re-writing of history per se, but radically changes the very categories and concepts that lie in the basis of such operations in a close connection with the geo-geography and bio-geography of reason. And it is symptomatic that more and more European scholars sensitive to these issues have turned lately to decolonial project striving to satiate this urge.

The first conference within this series that took place in Bremen in 2006 demonstrates several important points of confluence in this respect. But this dialogue is also important for the decolonial project itself because it imbues it with additional dimensions and allows to go outside America with its paradigmatic idea of race. I do not mean by any means to belittle the importance of race in the shaping of the modern imaginary, as its reverberations can be felt, albeit in distorted forms, even in such countries as Russia and its colonies which I would come back too in a second. But Europe with its long and complex history and the critical view of European scholars, linked with a not always conscious guilt in their reflections on racism and slavery legacy imbues their understanding of decolonial humanities with additional subtle overtones which are not clearly seen in the Americas

where everything is drawn with wide dabs and strokes of the paint-brush and therefore is more obvious.

These additional overtones become especially clear in the peripheral Europe and in the subaltern empires of modernity such as Russia and its colonies. What I mean here is not just race but ethnicity (often turning into the racism of microscopic differences typical for Russia and the South-East Europe), and not just a clear juxtaposition of the Amerindian languages erased from the Earth and the languages of European modernity, but also an array of more nuanced, blurred differences which are no less painful in their consequences. A good example would be the Romanian language which is a romance one, hence having a “sacred” language as its origin, but nevertheless belonging to a country and a people that was an Ottoman colony for a while, which stigmatized it forever in the eyes of the West, together with its improper variant of Christianity – the Orthodox one. Such a configuration unavoidably gives birth to additional overtones which cannot be taken down simply to the concept of race however widely we interpret it, and also generates more complex configurations in the subjectivity of the scholar herself. That is why the tasks of the decolonization of Romanian humanities would be different from those of a German scholar.

At the last conference I discussed in detail the imperial-colonial configuration of Russia and its colonies and stressed the reasons for the hopeless condition of the Russian humanities. So today I will not go into these details again. Instead of that I would like to stress a different moment linked directly with the human subjectivity in a secondary empire giving birth to a specific understanding of the human and humanism which necessarily brings specific problems in the rethinking of humanities and decolonizing the scholarship. In Russia we cannot speak of what it means to be a problem as in case of William Du Bois or Lewis Gordon (Gordon 2000), here a man is not a problem but a nuance in the eyes of the West, a nuance that irritates the West because this other looks too much like the same, becomes a caricature of the same (as one political scientist commented several years ago, Russians should have been Black, then it would have explained many things). As a Russian writer and critic Victor Yerofeev points out ironically, describing his emotions while traveling in Europe, “a Russian in Europe is like a cockroach. He is running, moving his whiskers, nervously smelling. He is scandalous for Europe’s clean surface. Europe can contemplate with interest the exotic insects, it would like some kind of poisonous tarantula or a caterpillar, ladybirds are a touching site for it, but there are no good cockroaches” (Yerofeev 2000). Moreover, historically in Russian orthodoxy a human being is a “worm”, not a man. Russia chose the apophatic (negative) variant of Christian theology, which

slowed down the development of anthropocentric and, later, ego-political culture. This Christianity that did not go through reformation created its own specific anthropology, if the same sees himself as a worm, then one can imagine how would he see the other !

In other words what we find here is certainly racism but it is the kind of racism that demonstrates how the concept really has little to do with the color of skin. Instead of that it is connected with the belonging or non-belonging to Europe and to modernity. This unique configuration should have given the Russian humanists a wonderful chance to think critically and reformulate many racial discourses. However, this never happened because of the imperial difference, always marked with the urge to prove its sameness.

If we also look at the non-European colonies of Russia from this perspective of what it means to be a problem, we will see that here the many layers of colonization generate the necessity of several distinct layers of decolonization in each of which a human being needs to be rehabilitated in different ways. Decolonizing from Islam means one set of issues, decolonizing from the Russian and Soviet variant of modernity means a different thing, decolonizing from the mainstream western modernity today means a third thing.

Within the genealogy of knowledge traced by the decolonial project the western modernity acts as the main target for criticism by default. This is understandable taking into account the history of the project. However, it is not enough. This picture should be enriched not only with more focus on gender and imperial difference, but also with the engagement with other religious, cosmological, cultural traditions, such as Islam or Buddhism. We all agree that western modernity acted historically in the forms of Christianity, liberalism or socialism in imposing its dictate over the world, but it is not enough to state this, as it was not the whole story, it is not enough to simply add new voices and perspectives. It is crucial also to reconstruct the genealogy of internal hierarchies and relations within these other spaces and realize that similarly to the conquering variant of modernity these locales also fashioned particular power relations with each other and followed their own logic of coloniality of power and of being which clashed against that of modernity and without which we cannot hope to understand and rethink the social sciences and the humanities in these spaces.

Thus, in the peripheric Eurasia Islam originally acted in a similar unattractive role to that of Catholicism in the New World. However, in both locales the indigenous peoples elaborated specific strategies of domesticating the imposed religions (be it Catholicism or Islam), by means of preserving their outward look but changing the meaning and introducing these religions into the indigenous cosmologies as only their small part, hence shifting the geo-geography and bio-geography of reason. The well studied Amerindian religious

duality, the peculiar symbiosis of Islamic and indigenous beliefs in Caucasus and in Central Asia and even the Russian “double faith” that was preserved during several centuries after its official Christianization are all examples of this essentially decolonial sentiment that was later recast in secular political terms and today can be recast once again in the rethinking of humanities and social sciences from the perspective of these locales.

One more aspect of decolonial humanities that has been actively discussed and obviously stands in the center of attention is ethics. However, I would like to point out not just the importance of declarative ethics in an abstract sense connected with the goal of giving rights back to the wretched of the Earth but also and more importantly, the link of the ethical moment with the self-positioning of the author – the decolonial humanist. Postmodernists actively discussed this problem but predictably within the framework of western modernity and ego-logy. That is why the self-positioning in postmodernism often turns into a contemplation of one’s own navel, instead of the critical assessment of oneself as a scholar, an activist and a human being. That is why the idea that a scholar should be not a public intellectual, but a true activist of a contesting persuasion, who would not work for the benefit of the corporate university and who would not be afraid of stressing her or his critical positioning towards this university and herself/himself being potentially bought and sold by such a university – seldom if ever is verbalized in postcolonial studies or postmodernism. What we find there instead is the preservation of the western modernity position of studying the contesting movements from the outside instead of becoming their integral part. Luckily there are exceptions. I can give you two examples - the Mexican activist and anthropologist Sylvia Marcos and her positioning as a scholar and the stance of the Central Asian gender activist Svetlana Shakirova. A crucial part here is played by the subjectivity of these scholars but again, not taken outside of their local history, not interpreted as just their individual intellectual genealogy in the Western sense.

What the decolonial humanists should be after is an organic inter-penetration of serious activism and scholarly activity, stressing the painful and crucial question of the researcher’s and activist’s ethical stance, her/his scholarly, existential and political positioning which inevitably leaks into research but is seldom acknowledged. They should be thinking and living according to the very principles they describe. This is a rather rare quality in today’s academic world, where too often there is a gap between the wonderful ideas expressed on paper and the real life in its social and political dimensions and the inter-subjective relations, characteristic of their authors

The majority of decolonial project members in this respect are in a privileged position because they mostly come from South and Central America or are connected with it this way or another, i.e. come from a locale that has had a tradition of consciously fighting its intellectual colonization and merging political and social activism with scholarship. But for European (White) scholars it is a more difficult task. Their configuration is often marked with guilt and peculiar complexes that slow down productive scholarship and prevent them from easily merging the personal ethical stance with their scholarly *persona*. In peripheric Eurasia this problematic is additionally complicated by what an African scholar Obioma Nnaemeka calls “the politics of poverty and the politics of the belly” (Shu-mei Shih, Sylvia Marcos, Obioma Nnaemeka, and Marguerite Waller 2005: 159). For those like me, who occupy not just the position of internal others within the post-imperial Russia, but also, internal others of the Russian model of modernity, the ethical difficulties get still more complicated because outside of Russia we continue to be pigeon-holed as its imperial subjects while in reality and inside Russia we remain its paradigmatic outcasts.

In the last several years gender has become a more central topic in the works of the members of decolonial project who realized that it is not possible to understand the construct of race without deconstructing gender and hence working gender into the decolonial apparatus is regarded as one of the crucial tasks for the future. Gender means among other things, sexuality, a concrete body if you wish that together with racial markers constitutes the basis for the body-politics of knowledge. The most important contribution in this respect seems to be so far Maria Lugones’s article “Heterosexualism and the colonial/modern, gender system” (Lugones 2007), as well as a more specific text by Freya Schiwy in *Cultural Studies* (Schiwy 2007) and a few valuable comments in the work of Nelson Maldonado Torres in the same journal (Maldonado-Torres 2007). However gender requires much more attention and complication within the frame of decolonial humanities which once again can help to reframe the accepted hierarchy of disciplines and build promising bridges between them, like the bridge with the third world feminism which already did a lot in the dynamic and multi-logic analysis of the intersections of gender, race, class, religion. However theoretically third world feminism seems to lack the overarching pluriversality of the decolonial project and often grounds itself in the already existing approaches or their mixtures like Marxism, postcolonial theory, etc. There is nothing wrong with that of course, but these approaches are still based on the inherently Western modes of thinking, studying and perceiving the world and tend to drag with them the locality of the approaches named above, even while claiming at universality. Bringing

together the empirical research of the third world feminism and the methodology of the decolonial project in the future may also allow to introduce back into analysis the forgotten spaces and people of the second world erased from contemporary humanities and social sciences, by means of the tools and categories lacking in feminist thought but offered by the decolonial project such as the imperial difference and the colonality of being. Their specific gender manifestations should be among the first to be investigated in the future.

One of the important limitations of the decolonial project which it already started to cure is its relative neglect of certain locales such as Eurasia and the specific categories it brings into the decolonization of humanities. However the very principles of the decolonial project are open and allow to add and enrich it with more and more other knowledges and concepts that they generate. In other words, in this project we find a drive, an interest in other others which is lacking in many other intellectual projects today. When I mention the necessity of including Eastern Europe, Turkey, Russia or its non-European colonies into the decolonial talk I do not mean just the mechanical adding of their voices to the pluriversal picture of the world, although this is important in itself because the simple knowledge of Eurasia in both America and Europe is minimal and biased and more importantly, stands outside of the problematic of racism or colonialism. The latter can be illustrated with a simple example – even the most advanced scholars within the humanities seldom see a link between the famous Atlantic transit which brought death and misery to millions of Africans, and the forced exodus of North Caucasus peoples into the Ottoman empire after their lands were taken away by Russia, which resulted in their own Black Sea transit and the death of the hundreds of thousands of mostly undocumented people and the tragedy of Circassians most of whom now live abroad.

What is most important is not just to add these voices, but to shape and formulate based on these knowledges, memories and subjectivities - additional categories and concepts of the humanities that grow out of the immediate experience of these people and not imposed on them artificially from above as it happened before. Coloniality of power, knowledge and being is expressed differently in different spaces. The decolonial project so far has concentrated more on the colonial difference but the imperial difference would bring its own configurations – for instance, in those locales where the projection of modernity was not direct but mediated by the presence of a secondary empire which created its own distorted, doubling ineffective variant of modernity, the history, the genealogy of humanities and the ways of their regeneration would be quite specific. The humanities the

way we know them are indeed responsible for the shaping of the Western imperial reason, but in certain locales this formula would have to be altered and complicated. For example, in Russia this knowledge would be not quite Western but imperial and its non-western nature would not save it from the discriminatory stance towards its own internal and external others.

Many concepts used by the decolonial project are altered and othered when they travel to other locales generating additional tools and categories for the humanities. Thus, Occidentalism and eurocentrism are key categories for the interpretation of the colonial difference in the relations of Europe and Americas. But in the subaltern empires of modernity these categories mutate into the *secondary eurocentrism*, *secondary orientalism*, *secondary racism* based on imperial difference (Tlostanova 2008). And without them we cannot rethink humanities in these spaces, we cannot hope to de-colonize or de-imperialize them because we would not have access to the grounds of subjectivity, the intellectual operations linked with it and the schizophrenic complexes it generates.

Another doubt that I have refers to the fact that so far the decolonial humanities are mostly negative, critical, they are not interested enough in shaping the positive model. Indeed, it is important to unveil the racial and patriarchal principles behind the foundation of the humanities, but along with negation there should be also the affirmation of something different. We all have to think more closely how exactly are we going to build a new non-racist and non-patriarchal future. Without having an access to the decision making which is the case of most academics it is a difficult task if only we do not attempt to change the previous forms of engagement and shift to different ones – the virtual, the spiritual, the aesthetic practices that would slowly change the consciousness instead of attempting to change the power structure. Changing the terms and not just the content of the conversation, to quote Walter Mignolo, we must also change the tactics of fighting modernity. If we contest modernity using its own methods we would inevitably lose because we do not have access to various tools of its power. But we can attempt to move this fight outside the system of values, coordinates and conditions that modernity created for itself and in which it feels comfortable. If we create the humanities discourses which would make modernity act not on its own field, not within its own materialist technocratic binary logic then we can hope to create viable decolonial humanities. Under modernity here I mean of course its champions many of which are “humanists”. The decolonial humanities should attempt to oppose themselves to their projects as a way of contributing to the on-going and long overdue process of dismantling modernity.

One has to be particularly careful in these new decolonial humanities because practically the whole conceptual apparatus of the previously existing humanities is ideologically biased. Let us take a seemingly innocent term “transcultural humanities” that has become popular today. It can easily slide into a typical for modernity and almost meaningless “dialogue of cultures”. However, we know that the word “culture” itself and all its derivations carries the birth marks of coloniality of being and of power. Because the cultures of other spaces have been studied, exoticized or demonized for centuries but always from the inherently European colonialist position as a norm and besides with an additional notion that culture is inferior to philosophy, to knowledge production. In many ways we know that culture is synonymous to race today or, to put it differently, race dissolves in culture. Cultural interactions almost always are still conceptualized in assimilationist terms, cultural categories are still formulated by the West and then imposed onto the reality of other spaces. This raw cultural experience is conceptualized either by the westerners or by their local zombies while the monopoly of knowledge remains safely in the hands of the West.

That is why I believe that it is more appropriate to talk about **trans-value and trans-epistemic humanities (not simply trans-cultural ones)** -- in order to stress the radical shift from the mere cosmetic repairs – the addition of other cultural features for the sake of their description within the frame of Western humanities; and switch to the interpretation of other cultures and cosmologies in their own terms and preferably, by the representatives of these cultures, who were not first turned into zombies. What is at work here is of course the fundamental categories of the decolonial project such as the shift of geo-geography and bio-geography of knowledge, the conceptual denaturalizing which questions the existing and generally accepted terms and disciplines, drawing attention to their links with the rhetoric of modernity. In my opinion this denaturalizing is best performed in multiply colonized spaces such as the Caribbean, but also Caucasus or Central Asia. For the “heart of Europe” the project of shifting the geo-geography and bio-geography of knowledge is a much more difficult task. Because a European scholar risks to slide into postmodernism or attempt to occupy an area studies seemingly disinterested observer standpoint. It becomes crucial in this case to observe carefully the following subtle difference: not to slide into the well known vein of comparative philosophy comparing, e.g. Europe and China but to create or open up a philosophy which would be inherently cross-epistemic, dialogic, pluritopic within itself like we find it in the works of Lewis Gordon.

When we start thinking of the array of meanings behind the term “transcultural humanities” and “trans-epistemic humanities” we in fact venture into the important sphere of

elaborating the language and discourse necessary for these new human sciences. No matter how many categories are already created by the decolonial project, they are not enough to rethink the humanities globally. Often the decolonial project has to express its ideas using still a number of western philosophic concepts which causes misunderstanding because these categories and concepts are inevitably reshaped when they are used by the decolonial humanists, but for the audiences they still mean what they used to mean within the generally accepted frame. The misunderstanding of the words “transcultural” and “transculture” are one of such examples. What happens is an active appropriation of this fashionable term by the main stream humanities far from contesting modernity or decolonizing the minds. This is as we know one of modernity’s strong points – it has been always very successful in appropriating the other, in its plasticity and skillful ability to tame alternative thinking by making it part of modernity.

An exotic and not very well known in the West example is the works of a late-Soviet dissident and today an immigrant to the US who by virtue of immigrating became a very successful public intellectual in Russia Michael Epstein. In one of his last works this scholar attempts to appropriate the concept of trans-culture and opposes it to both multiculturalism and cultural homogenization, understanding both in the primitive sense of a right conservative newspaper. Barely hiding his racism, Epstein strips transculture of its main element – the geo-politics and the body-politics of knowledge. He ignores the real lives of the real men and women from concrete locales that lie in the ground of transculturation and hides his own positioning as a person who cut off his roots and is assimilating in the multicultural US environment that he does not approve of or even understand but within which he has to survive. Hence his attempt to claim that he was the author of the idea of transcultural humanities. The following nonsensical Epstein’s definition makes it clear that this transculture has very little to do with the decolonial project: “Transculture is the condition of an individual who is liberated by culture from nature and by culturology from culture” (Epstein 2004: 624).

Another example of a concept used by the decolonial project but in need of redefinition and clarification is the fundamental concept of race. Race works wonderfully for the New World and for the local histories linked with the capitalist empires of modernity but it does not work as successfully in case of the second-rate non-capitalist and not quite western empires. Or rather the decolonial project understand something very specific under the categories of race and racism. It is not the color of skin but rather the racialization of religions, languages, knowledges, political regimes, economies, etc. within the logic of coloniality. Such a wide understanding of race is not typical of the modern humanities,

even those which specifically deal with this problematic, and besides is not easily understandable in those locales where race was not an endemic motif, as in the New World, where it was later brought from outside and not sufficiently reflected upon as it happened in Russia and its non-European colonies. So, maybe we need to talk not just of racialization of the total humanity and use the term of race speaking of all damnés, but work out a new and more overarching term, probably connected with the concept of the Fanonian damnés the way it was reconsidered by the decolonial humanists.

These are important steps because the demarcation from modernity and its discourse in the epistemic sense is necessarily connected with the change in the apparatus of terms and concepts and this is one of the important tasks of the de-colonial humanists. Each concept carries with it an array of ideological associations and is not innocent and no one understands this better than the decolonialists who are already doing a lot in this direction. It is crucial to keep this process alive. Otherwise the semantic fake similarities as in case of "race", "transculture" or the meaning of the "colonial" may lead to a dead end and endanger the decolonial project by making it dissolve in the well known and already digested by modernity theories and approaches.

Indirectly this brings us to the question of university as an institution and the necessity of its transformation into a more pluriversal enterprise. Unfortunately, here we face the all too familiar problems. They are not so acutely felt by our colleagues from the US due to their privileged financial positioning which means simply that if all money is concentrated in one place then quantitatively at least some of it will be distributed among the contesting points of view. If we talk about the old Europe or more so about the ex second world and its colonies which today turned into an almost forth world, here we come back to the politics of the belly. Scholars in order to survive would often write and say not what they are interested in or believe in but what they can get paid for through the Western NGOs and grants or, in case of Russia, through nationalistic imperial state grants and foundations. Predictably, where there is more drive towards the contesting critical decolonial thinking there is less or null opportunities of its realization except in the form of internet projects and few books published in small circulation. And where there are financial opportunities there is seldom such a drive, such an interest in the other. Instead of that we find apathy, a sclerosis of inter-group relations, an absurd disciplinary specialization. Unfortunately this diagnosis is true not only for such intellectually vanished spaces as Russia, but also for many places in the global North.

Finally the crucial aspect of decolonization of humanities is getting away from the strict disciplinarity and venturing into the areas that are traditionally not taken seriously by the scholars, thus making philosophy or sociology equal to various marginalized forms of knowledge. It can be the aesthetic sphere of the arts or literature (a more well studied subject within the decolonial project) or it can be a relatively less studied sphere of an other knowledge as an esoteric or occult, as a non-rational knowledge, as it happened in Sylvia Marcos' recent book *Taken from the Lips: Gender and Eros in Mesoamerican Religions* (Marcos 2006) which it is not only a wonderful anthropological study, but in many ways, a contemplation on the future of anthropology as a discipline and a model of a new type of anthropological research that is likely to emerge in the 21st century as part of the major rethinking of all humanities and social sciences. This project changes the very point of reference and the geography of reason and knowledge.

I would call this book a perfect example of de-colonial humanities as its author re-thinks and re-works her discipline and the very mode of cognition at its base. This refers not just to the methods and strategies but, more importantly, to the changing paradigm of thinking, of the interpretation of the world, the inter-personal communications and the very being in this world. In the Introduction to her book Marcos describes her own cognitive process which can be regarded as one of the models of self-description of de-colonial humanities. It is crucial how the author describes not just her subject but in a way, also her own interpretative method: it is the "adaptive and creative resistance", which is embodied in the Zapatistas's project of the "re-appropriation of a spirituality rooted in their soil" (Marcos 2006: XV).

Marcos's making of her personal intellectual history and changing a part of her research is developed in this book, which becomes a double blow striking at the narrow boundaries of traditional anthropology as a discipline, as here both the subject, the mode of the study and the subjectivity of the author (who looks at the material she studies not as a detached and objective scientist would do, but regards it as a "part of her own ancestral past") form a unity, which leads away from the typical assonances, silences and voids of subject-object relations, characteristic of Western anthropology, and towards a powerful and persuasive, truly dia-logic result.

The most attractive element in the model of thinking we find in Marcos's book is the attitude to the indigenous tradition as to a living, changing, variable within itself and not fixed, given once and for all, something which one has to go back to. Moreover, this cosmology is presented by Marcos as slipping out of the Western logic of either/or,

assuaging what the Western culture would interpret as contradictions in the all-penetrating act of balancing the change and the continuity. This element Marcos acquires from the material she writes about although in her case we cannot really speak of the usual strict division into the subject and the object. This is precisely what anthropology as any other Western discipline is often unable to understand, being fixed within the paradigm of modernity which juxtaposes itself and its myth to the constructed idea of tradition, taken outside of modernity seen as the norm. It is from this source that the familiar accusations in romanticizing and sentimentalizing the past usually come and are often used against intellectuals like Marcos. But the book itself is the best argument against such claims.

The mode of this book is completely subversive in relation to her discipline in yet another way. This work is spiral in the temporal sense, not because of its link with the Hegelian dialectic of synthesis, but due to its connection with and the conscious recreation of the specific mode of cyclical motion with a variation, characteristic of Mesoamerican culture, the state of “extreme dynamic tension and not a pragmatic compromise between the opposites” (Marcos 2006: 25), which is multi-logic by definition. She revisits in the spiral mode the many versions of the past which are unstable, changeable and yet also retain certain recurrent and always recognizable and reconstructable elements. Marcos’s work becomes also a dialogue of the synchronous and diachronous analysis, as it combines the historical ethnography and the unique ethnography of contemporary field studies. The concept of homeorrhesis, offered by Marcos, i.e. “the balance of conjunctions in flux” (Marcos 2006: 25) refers not only to the equilibrium of Mesoamerican cosmology, but also to her own book in which there are several point of confluence or major nerves which hold together the non-linear structure of this work that rejects the vector logic of the written discourse and attempts to reconstruct on paper a completely different logic of the oral tradition. As a result it becomes a book about its own creation in which the composition is no less important than the content.

I would call Marcos’s method an “empathic” one if the concept of “empathy” were not overloaded with Western associations and genealogies of thought thus becoming a platitude. Her approach is based on the strive to understand the past in its own terms, with its own world views, its own sense of gender and gendered spaces and times. Instead of that let us call her method a trans-epistemic inter-penetration and dialogue. And I believe that this is one of the many possible definitions of the future decolonial humanities...

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