Towards Fairer Geo-Spiritual Ecosystems

Towards Fairer Geo-Spiritual Ecosystems:

Decolonial Education, Language, and Spirituality

Edited by

S. Sergio Saleem Scatolini

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Dedicated to
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Decoloniality, Education, and Geo-Spiritual Ecosystems

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Abstract: This chapter introduces the main strands of the book: decoloniality, education, and geo-spiritual ecosystems in a world where humans are both an important force of nature and no longer the only beings capable of abstract learning. A post-human world being led by forces focused on might rather than right could get in the way of greater inequality, eco-justice, and win-win growth paths. In fact, the world could be recolonised. Ideas put forward by thinkers such as Walter Mignolo, Achille Mbembe, Rosi Braidotti, Byung Chul Han, and Jan-Olav Henriksen are often part of the ongoing conversation in the background.

Keywords: colonisation, decoloniality, future, margins, posthumanism, praxis

> 'Such is the nature of progress. Pulling us forward are ingenuity, sympathy, and benign institutions. Pushing us back are the darker sides of human nature and the Second Law of Thermodynamics.' (Pinker, 2018, p. 344)

> 'My objective is to decolonize the Anthropocene by cataloguing life otherwise, or the emergent and heterogeneous forms of living that are not about destruction or mere survival within the extractive zone, but about the creation of emergent alternatives.' (Gómez-Barris, 2017, p. 4)

Introduction

This chapter is profoundly indebted to decolonial thinkers such as Walter Mignolo (2009, 2012, 2021), Catherine Walsh (2018), Aníbal Quijano (2000, 2002a), and Achile Mbembe (2017), but it is neither an introduction

to nor a commentary on their work. I integrate some of their insights into my own narrative, with which I seek to set the tone for the whole book.

That academics and researchers at high-ranking universities in the West or the Global North include critical thinkers like Mignolo, Walsh, Quijano, and Mbembe in their curricula bears witness to the fact that the realms in which our lives take place are constantly changing. This has always been the case to a greater or lesser extent, but our kind has never been more dramatically aware of it everywhere and all at once than we are now. It does not matter much whether the changes have natural or artificial causes; the result remains the same: we are faced with the task of making choices that will have profound and far-reaching consequences. Our decisions will redefine how our species evolves biologically, socially, and ethically.

Up to not so long ago, humankind tended to understand itself in terms of origin or creation tales that worked from a predominantly **privilege-based viewpoint**. Humans were *extremely special*. It was undeniable that out of all beings on Earth, both inert and alive, we humans peaked above all others. After all, our forerunners did affect the environment through knowledge and action more radically than any other species, and this realisation led to a sense of immense privilege, to the point at which humans believed their destiny to transcend death itself and merit the Deity's constant interest materialised in (eternal) reward or punishment.

Of course, importance was a continuum or spectrum with some people of greater significance than others. No matter what social group they belonged to or where they lived, some men (and women) amassed or were attributed more privilege than others. Some have always been the wrong colour, height, or look, or from the wrong family, religion, or warring faction. The privileged ones often deemed themselves to be *more liked* by the gods/spirits, even *more like* them.[1]

Coloniality, whether it is rationalised theologically or militarily, fits within paradigms of power and privilege, whereby some have a greater right to them than others. In some cases, the powerful and privileged have the right to possess and dispose of others, for example, through enslavement, serfdom, indentured labour, structural discrimination, ethnic cleansing, or even genocide.

Power here is meant in a broad sense, as Quijano (2000) described it.

'The phenomenon of power is characterized as a type of social relationship established by the permanent co-presence of three elements: domination, exploitation, and conflict. Power impacts the four basic areas of social existence and is both the result and the expression of the dispute, or struggle,

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[1] To avoid gender connotations, I shall use It/Its when referring to God/god.

over their control, namely (1) work, its resources, and its products; (2) sex, its resources, and its products; (3) collective (or public) authority, its resources, and its products; and (4) subjectivity/intersubjectivity, its resources, and its products (p. 1; my translation of the Spanish original).'

Quijano (2000) also pointed out that social existence is currently being shaped by key variables: (1) the **coloniality of power** (with race, or ethnic groups, as an indicator); (2) **capitalism** as an exploitative paradigm not only in the management of natural resources but also of human resources (including slavery and indentured labour in the modern period; and the *kafâla* system, illegal underpaid labour, and new forms of slavery in recent years); (3) the **nation-state** as a centralized, homogeneous control apparatus, regardless of the pluri-national and multilingual configuration of society; (4) **eurocentrism** as the binding paradigm for defining and controlling subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and knowledge production; and (5) **economic, mediatic, and educational globalization** (p. 1). To that, one may add that when *the world* is depicted as *a global village*, and variables 1 to 4 are the binding paradigm for organizing 'village life', globalisation does not generate a complex pluriverse but a universe where privileged epistemic narratives position themselves, or are placed by those who wield power, as the centre of oneness, truth, goodness, and beauty. Additionally, as Mbembe (2017) noted, such a representation of the world implies the post-imperial militarisation of the world, especially for the sake of economic relations (e.g., the repercussions for global commerce following the Russian invasion of Ukrainian territory and the corresponding international sanctions).

Given that ethnic, cultural, and political uniformity is impossible, a more versatile unifying banner must be raised: the economy. *Financial and commercial relations are turned into the common denominator.* We are told and taught that colour, sex and gender, language, customs, and religion divide the global village into different realms, gated communities, reservations, and 'hoods,' but the economy (i.e., resources, goods and services, labour, and the value labels placed on all of them) makes us one. Everyone needs to buy and sell, including one's time, knowledge, and skills. The global economy is the real shared human space; at least, so we are told. This new paradigm is symbolised by Dubai, the global village's market and theme park, where a privileged few set the stage so that segregated groups from all corners of the world can meet in, through and for commercial transactions. In an existential sense, Dubai is nobody's native home, not even for the locals—not much more than a market can be a home for its owners. Dubai is but a symbol and a symptom.

The global village as an economic or mercantile space is not really shared, since a small minority control most of it. Most of the physical, biological, and cultural world is in the hands and primarily at the service of the interests of a small group of countries, corporations, and families, some of whom are now preparing for the colonisation and exploitation of Earth's moon and Mars. And what will happen with Antarctica remains to be seen.

Political colonialism was but one of the manifestations of power relations based on or aimed at amassing privilege, denying it to others or dispossessing them of it. Predictably, the official discontinuation of the colonial system did not usher in an era of equality, let alone equity. In some cases, political colonialism transformed itself into other types of dominance, such as cultural imperialism, financial or commercial hegemony, technological monopoly, etc. Did West African countries, perchance, automatically become France's equals when they ceased to be French colonies? Regional and international influence, trade, financial standing, and educational capital demonstrate that they did not. Although France requires the natural resources of West Africa, African leaders have never been able to establish the rules of engagement with France. They are still being subjected to the needs and priorities of *La République*. The same could be said of Central and South America and the Caribbean with the 'successive march of colonial and neocolonial actors operating in relation' to the territory 'as if it were an extractible continent' (Gómez-Barris, 2017, p. XVI). Something similar could also be said of the USA's approach to and presence in practically the whole globe, including the political geography of the United Nations, whose performance the USA either dictates or hampers, even in situations of televised genocide such as that in Gaza.

Political colonies may have been given their formal political independence, but **coloniality** *has not come to an end*. Indigenous and rural people often live at 'the heart of resource-rich territories' and 'the geographies that constitute the Earth's highest biodiversity' (Gómez-Barris, 2017, p. XIX-XX), which affluent countries and corporations wish to control and exploit, such as sugar, spices, cotton, tobacco, gold, diamonds, enslaved workers, etc. This predicament generates tensions between the priorities of extractive capitalism; the protection of the land, its inhabitants, and their lifestyles and interests; and the neo-liberal state.

As Mbembe (2017) put it, 'Given the technical development, military conquests, commerce, and propagation of Christianity that marked the period, Europe exercised a properly despotic power over other peoples throughout the world— the sort of power that one can exercise only outside of one's own borders and over people with whom one assumes one has nothing in common (p. 54).' However, since most human beings wish to

think of ourselves as *buena gente* (reasonably good people), we always need narratives that help us remain good while conquering and exploiting ecosystems and peoples. Europeans once spoke of primitives and savages in need of being civilised. Muslims occasionally did this, too, by declaring others *kuffâr* (ungrateful infidels), comparable to the heathens in Christian speech. In the 20th century, North Americans labelled people communists or terrorists. The colonisers of old sought to justify viewing people as fair game and their geography as '*terra nullius*' (no man's land), so that reasonable and good people like them could empty nature from culture and exploit ecosystems with a clear conscience. Nonetheless, by 'its very existence, the community of the enslaved constantly tore at the veil of hypocrisy and lies in which slave-owning societies clothed themselves (Mbembe, 2017, p. 48).' Even when the revolutions for political independence succeeded, the colonial economic paradigms survived. Post-independence coloniality is not only subtle but also incredibly tempting. The foreign Master is dead; long live the local-born Master! —hopefully myself or someone whose favour I can count on or whose arm I can twist.

Decoloniality

In a globalised world, decoloniality implies more than politics in terms of indigenous representation, democracy, dictatorship, or absolutist monarchies. It is about the kind of politics (as social engineering) that the economy (as the geo-social engineering dictated by economic interests) imposes on local and national communities and nation-states. Political decoloniality requires the decoloniality of economic principles and relations, the deconstruction of both the gospel of boundless growth and self-justifying individual desire. Behind corporations are individuals, and old forms of coloniality will always be replaced with new ones.

From a human perspective, *ecological and economic crises have a crucial narrative dimension*; they are cultural and moral. Droughts are climatic phenomena, but poverty and famine are cultural and moral ones. Theoretically speaking, people and goods can move or be moved in the global village more easily than ever before. Yet, while food and work are absent in one place and found in abundance elsewhere, people cannot easily move in search of food and/or work. Goods are free to move, but people in need are not. We are left with the choice between hoarding resources and distributing them in new ways, even sharing them. After all, human reality is neither fixed nor instinctive. It is the result of ideas, accumulated choices, and habits. Since human nature is open-ended, the perception that we cannot do anything to improve the world is an ideological stance that benefits those

who hoard privilege. This ideology needs to be defeated time and time again, including where the poor become the new rich. Otherwise, our change of era might not usher in systemic change, but only the necessary practical readjustments so that the core can remain unchanged while the surface transfigures itself. In the last two centuries, our societies entered a singular period of episodic explosions of change, but they have often served the same old principles: power, exploitation, and privilege. We have not always moved forwards. The Israeli genocide perpetrated against Palestinians, partly with US weapons and the tacit approval of the New Arabs, is the unashamed political illustration of regression. Power facilitates exploitation. Exploits grant power. And power coupled with exploitation gives rise to privilege beyond accountability.

Historical narratives show that *for individuals, death halts change, but the species continues*. Moreover, many of the improvements which we enjoy today stem from dubious or reprehensible acts and events. Often unintentionally, some positives have resulted *partly* from negatives (Pinker, 2018). Colonisers left hospitals, schools, and roads behind, and Nazi scientists advanced science. Would the world be what it is today had it not been for the rush for power, exploitation, and privilege that visionary and over-ambitious individuals initiated? In fact, we cannot promote decolonial discourses and attempt decolonial agendas while wilfully ignoring that on a personal level, millions of poor people would like to live in the capitalist or neo-colonial Global North or the new segregated heavens, such as the Arab Gulf countries. Knowing that they would continue to belong to the lower class and be denied the opportunities and support that are limited only to the (first-class) nationals do not deter them because they know that despite the downsides, the lower classes have fewer chances in their 'native' Global South than in the 'foreign' Global North. Consequently, they are willing to 'fall upwards.' Conversely, others 'rise downwards' because, as many refugees will testify, they gain liberties and peace of mind in the West but lose much of themselves and their previous social standing.

Geo-spiritual ecosystems

Social evolution

According to Stewart-Williams (2020), humans are animals whose evolution has been marked by **genes** and **memes**. Although some scholars have criticised the concept of meme, for they see it as reduplicating the concept of idea, Stewart-Williams has made a plausible case that there is more to memes than ideas. Here, memes are understood as *basic semiotic*

and functional units that act as messengers carrying instructions for the survival of the group by influencing the make-up of individuals. Individuals differ from one another because they enact different memes, mostly unconsciously and occasionally consciously, but these differences tend to happen within larger settings of sameness or similarity (heredity). Ethnic Europeans may embody and reproduce different faith-driven or atheistic, lower-class or upper-class, urban or rural memes, but they will share enough memes that make them more like one another than like Africans, Asians, or Latin Americans. Additionally, memes either perform their functions themselves or they constitute a template for their (re-)production. The more general the meme, the more it will resemble a template. For example, the meme of 'age must be a criterion for ranking' will set the scene for more particular memes, such as 'older people should speak first,' 'youngsters must not sit at the head of the table,' or 'short pants are inappropriate clothing for adults in public.'

Moreover, just like epigenetics refers to the environment impacting the ways in which genes express themselves, one could speak of '**epimemetics'** as the ways in which environmental factors condition how memes express themselves. In this way, the memes that lead to the survival of ethnic groups are expressed differently in different. When the environment entails that memes from different memetic groups are active at the same time, only some memes from one group will be passed on and, thus, reinforced, while others will not, replaced by memes from other memetic groups, as is the case in ethnically mixed countries or the African, European, and Asian diasporas. Contextual factors will condition or determine to what extent memes are reinforced, weakened, lost, or re-found. In short, human cultural evolution includes both heredity and change along a continuum that is geo-historically situated and ensures that *no new generation is born in a memetic (semiotic and semantic) void*.

According to Stewart-Williams (2020), 'natural selection operating on genes gives rise to gene machines: organisms designed to pass on their genes. Natural selection operating on memes doesn't give rise to 'meme machines' exactly, but it does do something similar. It gives rise to ideas and ideologies that, in effect, convert human gene machines into meme machines–that is, into beings that devote their time and energy to passing on their memes: their values, religions, or love of art. Again, the rationale for this is simple: any memes that didn't somehow motivate their hosts to pass them on would quickly vanish from the culture, leaving only those that did (pp. 13-14).' *Genes relate to the biological and instinctive dimensions of human life, while memes are 'the stuff of culture'*—what we partly subsume under cumulative knowledge processes, human liberties, personality, and

ethos. Thinking and conceptual communication are dimensions of meme generation, transmission, adaptation, and, even, mutation.

Up until quite recently, we were the only meme experts on Earth. With the production (or emergence) and evolution of artificial intelligence (AI), it is predictable that we shall soon be beaten at our own game by artificial(ly) intelligent others (i.e. aliens, according to Harari; BBC, 2023). We shall no longer be the species that develops itself by narrating a past, present, and future for itself. *AI shall become a complementary or even competing source of memes to the point that we might not be able to distinguish their memes from ours*. Consequently, discussing what makes communication and thinking truly human is by no means insignificant.

We have been genetically predisposed to be and act in a number of ways, but those behaviours arose in response to concrete environments. Whenever the context of human life changes radically, a mismatch takes place, and profound changes occur. Stewart-Williams (2020) graphically illustrated this phenomenon as follows.

> 'Imagine you're a hedgehog. You're out foraging one night when you come to a road. You start making your way across the road when, all of a sudden, two white eyes appear on the horizon, burning bright as suns. The eyes belong to a noisy metal monster, and the monster is heading straight for you. What should you do? One thing you probably shouldn't do is stop where you are and roll up into a spiky ball. That might be a good idea if a predator were poking around, trying to work out whether you'd make a good meal. But it's not such a good idea when two tons of metal are about to turn you into a pancake. (...) Sadly, though, that's not what you're going to do. You're going to roll into a ball and get squished. (...) Thus, every time a hedgehog bumbles onto a road, its protective response is out of sync with its environment. This is an example of a phenomenon known as genome lag, evolutionary disequilibrium, or– my preferred term– evolutionary mismatch. The mismatch in question is between the hedgehog's present environment and the environment in which it evolved. In many ways, humans are in the same boat as the hedgehog: We're not adapted to the strange new world we've created for ourselves (p. 46).'

The idea of **evolutionary mismatches** borrowed from evolutionary psychology helps us explain many of our unwholesome modern habits and the need for us to find ways to re-adapt to our changed environments. The Anthropocene constitutes such a setting forcing change.

Epistemic colonial structures

That we (may) have entered a new geological phase does not mean that we have discarded the memetic paradigms, such as the colonial mindset and structures that shaped and ruled the previous era. Epistemic neo-coloniality expressed itself in dynamics either of exclusion or dependence (López Cardona, 2022), and they seem to be set to continue. Privileged narratives of what constitutes meritorious and reliable knowledge explicitly or tacitly still disregard other narratives or accept them only insofar as they become tributaries to, derivates from, or footnotes to their own. The state of current research and researchers' obligation to publish only in certain journals (preferably in English, the *de facto* language of knowledge and progress in the Global Village) illustrate the undeniable survival of epistemic colonial moulds. Furthermore, the imbalance between researchers from the Global North and the Global South go beyond access to journals, how much publishers charge per article, and their imposition of English. Nakamura, Soares, Pillar, et al. (2023) have accurately expressed how the very concept of expertise is warped because of what I would call *the gravitational pull of the Global North*.

> 'Global North researchers are often regarded as experts in their respective fields, enjoying a reputation beyond their local contexts. Conversely, Global South researchers are often perceived as being confined to their own regions, with their scientific authority seen as deriving from the knowledge and expertise originating in the Global North. The perception that expertise flows from the Global North to the Global South is maintained by deeply rooted practices in academia, creating the colonial structure of academic knowledge. Another example of academic neocolonialism is the bias in citations and claims of scientific discovery. Recognition of scientific achievements are usually measured through the number of citations (despite the controversies around this measure). However, it is common that papers with novel insights or findings published by researchers or institutions from the Global South are less cited in studies from research groups from the Global North, even publications presented in long-standing, high-impact journals. This situation creates a vicious cycle in which northern institutions, mainly in Europe and North America, dictate knowledge, maintaining the status quo of academic expertise (p. 1).'

Not surprisingly, according to Urzedo (2024), the advent and incidence of AI in knowledge dissemination follows the same trend. After analysing 30,000 ChatGPT responses on prompts related to ecological restoration expertise, their results showed 'that more than two-thirds of the chatbot's answers' relied 'on the expertise of male academics working at universities in the United States, while largely ignoring evidence from low- and lower-

middle-income countries (7%) and Indigenous and community restoration experiences (2%) (p. 1).' Until the moment when AI entities become wholly independent, they will necessarily reproduce the epistemic and hermeneutic parameters of their makers (i.e., their schemata, principles, limitations, and agendas). This is not odd since, after thousands of centuries of evolution, we continue to reproduce much of the genetic and memetic pre-programming that was meant to help our animal and humanoid ancestors navigate and survive in their world.

Biological programming is a matter of 'nature' mainly for the realm of geneticists, but memetic programming falls within the agency parameters of parents, the extended family, education systems, the media, and, more recently, the companies behind AI technologies. In the hands of mostly governments, which are usually led and populated by the elite, formal education has become the centralised system for memetic encoding. As a result, the official curricula have formed generations of youngsters and, notably, also experts, who have come to see the 'possibilities of knowing differently as delegitimised and subsumed under majoritarian canonical claims' (Seckinelgin, 2022, p. 2). The elite have not only trained the majority into accepting their (the elite's) version of history but also of the history of minority or marginalised individuals and groups, which, till recently, also included both elite and majority-group women. 'Rationality not only in industry, military and bureaucracy is a power relationship' (Széll, 2018, p. 3). Even if a given memetic code were to become completely globalised, we would still have 'to concede that "universal" is an ideal, which will never be reached (p. 4).'

Since it may arguably be more difficult, but not always impossible, to demonstrate in the hard sciences that knowledge claims are also ideological claims, I shall leave that matter to scientists. However, in human, social, and theological disciplines, knowledge tenets cannot pretend to be hard facts. This realisation is not insignificant, because these knowledge claims impact politics, legislation, social services, education, and mindsets. The fact that we often lead unhealthy and counterintuitive lives knowingly and willingly proves that 'nature' (the ecology and genes) is less decisive than semiotics and semantics (memes). In terms of academia, epistemic blind spots influence the education systems' intellectual focus and theoretical narrowness (Seckinelgin, 2022), as well as their principles for methodical validity. These epistemic shortcomings reduce institutional representation and knowledge dissemination allocated to less typical members of the academic world, for example, in terms of disciplinary authoritativeness, professional acknowledgement, research funding, access to prestigious journals, and employment. Understandably, the calls for decolonising

epistemic hegemony, regardless of the colour, ethnic group, or faith that is in control, are about full visibility and voice, without which decision-making frameworks can never be inclusive. In one community, decolonising the system may mean making it less Eurocentric and pro-white (male), whereas in others, it may imply making it less Arab and pro-Muslims, less high caste and pro-Hindus, or less pro-local born.

Therefore, it is imperative that we be critical about the situatedness of human knowledge, truth claims, and value judgements. For example, the discussion about the morality of sexual relationships and what constitutes either an acceptable or unacceptable practice is not a genetic matter but a memetic one. This is why a Christian can be convinced that polygamy may be natural for some animals but not for humans, while a Muslim will be certain that it is the natural dispensation for both, while decrying polyandry as purely animal-like and unfit for humans. On the other hand, someone born and educated in a society where polyandry is normal (i.e., the norm or one of the norms) will know and feel that it is compatible with human nature and, hence, not wrong, sinful, or necessarily illegal. If we were to analyse the school curricula for Social Sciences and Religious and Civic Education in countries that belong to the above-mentioned contexts, we would most likely find that each endorses one of these memetic codes as having a greater claim to representing 'human nature' or 'natural law' than the others. When these memetic codes become codes of law, and society is not or no longer homogeneous, some groups will be privileged, and others will be divested of memetic legitimacy.

Epistemic modesty in the multiverse

The positions of important politicians in the USA, UK, and Germany, on the one hand, and South Africa, Belgium, and Spain, on the other, vis-à-vis the carnage being perpetrated by Israel against Palestinians in Gaza clearly illustrate that the damage caused by memes can be as severe as that done by genes. There are other less recent examples of this phenomenon, such as the Nazi extermination of Jews, homosexuals, and disabled and Roma people; the enslavement of Africans and the racism endured by their descendants; and the suppression of women's socio-political agency. Epistemic violence is not new, neither will it end in the foreseeable future.

The field of epistemology has seen truth claims and staged debates about the objectivity and subjectivity of human knowledge claims. Therefore, the decolonial agenda is about *knowledge as power* and *knowledge as instrument*, whereby structures of dominion and privilege emerge and survive. As Mitova (2020) put it, '[t]he call to epistemic decolonisation is,

in the first instance, a call to dismantle' a 'way of thinking and its self-arrogated hegemonic authority. In the second instance, it is a call to re-centre the knowledge enterprise onto our geo-historical here and now (p. 191).'

Moreover, it is important to emphasise that the decolonial deconstruction, or dismantling, of epistemic, economic, political, and religious power, privilege, and purpose can and should be attempted *from within* (from the standpoint of the privileged) and *from without* (from the standpoint of the colonised, suppressed, or marginalised) (Mitova, 2020).

In the realm of human ecology, the decolonial agenda must be flanked by intellectual modesty, that is, the honesty not to pretend more knowledge than one can generate or demonstrably validate, or more shared principles for action than individuals and societies can enact at any given time. On the one hand, inclusive eco-social progress does not require dogmatism. On the other, it also cannot be engineered without standing on common ground.

The decolonial agenda ought never to be perceived as being against rationality. 'Opposing reason is, by definition, unreasonable (Pinker, 2018, p. 351).' The issue is not reason, but what is considered reasonable, and who decides what is reasonable or unreasonable. One way of avoiding unnecessary discussions is by being clear about *what* one is thinking about (the content), *how* and *with what* one does the thinking (the method, approach, and explanatory principles), *why* (the trigger), and *what for* (the goal). The decolonial agenda works better with a view of knowledge and ethics as intersubjective realities that are produced, maintained, and disseminated for different goals, from different points of departure, and within intersectional networks of relationships. Depending on what they are expected to deliver, both the explanatory hard sciences and the creative and critical disciplines may be appropriate and inappropriate ways of approaching reality. If one wants to reach Mars, it would be senseless to argue that one should rely on Vedantic, Viking, or Voodoo cosmological ideas, rather than the scientific knowledge, methods, and technologies, merely because the latter's golden age took place mostly in the West or Global North. On the other hand, if the goal is to understand why some countries and families are considerably wealthier than most others, relying exclusively on the established Western canon would be unreasonable.

Still, even when we speak of **epistemic justice**, we must realise that justice is always perspectival. I remember once asking my Critical Thinking students whether enslaving the defeated army in war situations could be ethically permissible and, hence, also probably more just than other options. Their answer was an almost unanimous 'Yes, because enslaving them would be better for them than being killed. As slaves, they would be alive,

have food, and a roof above their heads.' When labelling situations as good-better-best and, conversely, bad-worse-worst, we never stand on neutral grounds, on an epistemic *tabula rasa*, or at a point of absolute innocence. For example, the Muslim community could argue that Muslims suffered 'epistemicide' when they were expelled from the Iberian Peninsula, while some African communities could also argue that Muslims committed 'epistemicide' when the latter not only Islamised whole segments of the African continent but also Arabised many cultures, established Arabic as the new language, and declared the former religious practices as abhorrent. Stating that they did it less violently than European colonisers would not change the fact that a great deal of Africa was Islamised <u>and</u> Arabised.[2] After all, Arabic was not a/the local language of the indigenous populations of North Africa. The epistemic superiority of Arabic-speaking traditionalists, especially male ones, in matters of the Muhammadan religion is also undeniable. Malay, Indonesian, Turkish, Pakistani, or European Islamic religious scholars have mostly been considered epistemically sound when they more closely acquiesced and agreed with the narratives about the superiority and privileged position of Arabic and old Arabs in understanding the Divine Text and the Prophetic Tradition. Similarly, female scholars are considered good scholars mostly when they go along with the authoritative male scholars.

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[2] There is a need to read the Qur'ânic verses making a distinction between God's *universal Message* applicable to all humans on Earth across time and space and the text's *concrete applications* of it in the socio-cultural and existential categories of the Prophet's contemporary Arab recipients (or the whole of the Judeo-Christian-Muhammadan religious communities). The desire to exclude the idea that the Prophet's culture (*Sitz im Leben* and *Zeitgeist*) played an important role in the revelation process caused hermeneutic deafness and blindness to the essential human dimension of the text despite the Text's admission that it was an *Arabic* text *clear to Arabs*. Clarity is not only lexical or semantic, but also pragmatic and existential. Yet, most commentators reduced clarity to lexical clarity, thus overlooking that the text was clear to its original audience because it spoke to their social and cultural lived reality. It was a Message worded primarily *for them*, an essentially *Arabic* Qur'ân (Recitative Text). This has resulted in the epistemic imposition of an Arab calque—presented as God's Word and the Prophet's normative precedent—upon Muslims across time and space and, presumably, upon Muslims on Mars when that day comes. If this is not an example of cultural imperialism, it comes close to it. Something similar could be said about other revealed or prophetic religious Traditions. As a result, it became cognitively almost impossible and socially often dangerous for people to methodologically separate the ahistorical, invisible, unfathomable Absolute Mystery from the culturally clothed god/gods and its/their linguistically or symbolically encoded revelations. Instead of making culture more spiritual, people ended up anthropomorphising God/the gods.

In short, without epistemic modesty and intersectionality, the decolonial endeavour becomes self-defeating and probably also impossible. However, since its alternative is what has caused many of our current problems, we must embark on decolonial endeavours; for 'progress is not utopia' and 'there is room—indeed, an imperative—for us to strive to continue that progress (Pinker, 2018, p. 326).' We need clarity and modesty about our own memetic programming so that our collective imagination may be set free from its confinement and apparent fixity and can evolve. This evolution has become increasingly necessary now that AI has joined the memetic realm within structures of power, privilege, and purpose, for poor and disfranchised groups do not control AI. Furthermore, AI has already altered the very nature of the memetic realm. Inorganic and inanimate entities are now producing memes for and about us, geo-historical embodied minds and conscious bodies.

Spirituality

The decolonial project should not stop at the borders of the epistemic. It should also dare go beyond them. In this chapter, I speak from within the Abrahamic (Judeo-Christian-Muhammadan/Islamic) Tradition, to which the Deity is a singularity. God is divine, and nothing else is. The Creator and the created order neither overlap nor merge into one and the same reality. God is all at once, unlike any other entity or process. Even though the Christian belief in the incarnation would seem to imply a mixing of God and the non-god, it has been framed within the doctrine of God as a singular, unified, perichoretic and eternal process (the Trinity). The so-called Divine Persons are entangled in a dynamic that eternally and perfectly constitutes God as Lover-Loved-Loving or Speaker-Spoken-Speech. (Needless to say, each of these words used about the Divine anthropomorphise the Unfathomable and, hence, muddle Who/What they attempt to clarify.) The incarnate Loved-One (the Father's Beloved) or the Spoken-One (God's Word), namely Jesus-the-Anointed, embodies and translates the Divine Inner Dynamic for concrete humans in and through human genes and memes at a precise moment of our species' genetic and memetic evolution. Still, unlike unofficial/heretical Christian theologies, the official Christian theological position qualified this faith conviction and experience by adding that Jesus' inner core was and always will be Divine. Jesus is God's Hand (God is Who reaches out), not humanity's USB pen drive into the Divine Hard Drive (humans did not engineer the incarnation, thereby expanding human consciousness). The Triune Deity is <u>One</u> Uncreated, Self-Generating, Self-Expressing, and Self-Giving God. In short, despite its

incarnational and trinitarian doctrine, deep down, the Christian Creed considers God to be a singularity, just as much as do the Jewish and Muḥammadan Creeds. The way in which the founding communities experienced the divine Self-revelation was different: the historically unfolding Torah (among Jews), the historical Jesus and the ongoing action of the Holy Spirit (among Christians), or the Qur'ân and Prophet Muhammad's precedent (among Muhammadan Muslims).

Furthermore, combining Graeco-Latin philosophical and biblical categories, I would like to describe the Deity as one, true, good, and beautiful; and past, present, and future. Based on Qur'ânic categories, I would also like to speak of the First and the Last, the infinite Uterus-Grave (the Creator-Destroyer) that makes the emergence and unfolding of the non-god possible (creation as utterance: God said, and it was), and frames and grounds it within a transcendental dispensation. However special we may be, we cannot lay the same claim as the Deity. We are always found at a crucible, always passing through from one point or state to another. When our passing is driven by ideas, we are not just being there; we exist. We predicate a narrative about our presence in and absence from the world. Paraphrasing Ben Okri, we may say that *our selves are stories*. Imagination and thought propel us *out of* one given situation *into* another. Indeed, they establish those situations as two recognizable points along a continuum. This existential passing is the context and breeding ground of spirituality.

Spirituality may be described as *what inspires and drives human existence to transcend the self and its situation*. It implies seeing reality differently, beyond physics, beyond instinct, and beyond the definitions that reduce it to being only what meets the eye or culture delimits. Spirituality deconstructs and restates fixity. It propels us 'into growth and creativity in an impulse of freedom' (Casaldáliga & Vigil, 1994, p. 2) to the point that self-centred, static spiritualities stop being spiritual. They deprive human existence of a greater destiny and chain it to matter and instinct. They deny the self the chance to exit the fixity of its predicaments. When religion is all about the *letter* (the confinement principle) rather than the *spirit* (the fluidity principle)*,* it becomes fixed and thwarted: a museum, the tightly choreographed display of the remnants of dead people in bygone times and old texts. God becomes a dead god who either ignores or cannot understand that reality is in continuous change and who, therefore, has nothing new to say. Religious texts stop being pointers for reflective lived experiences and become self-referential, codified, and canonised books. As a result, far too many religious scholars become god's librarians, translators, prison guards, assassins, and tomb keepers. Their very jobs depend on God being mute, absent, and uninventive. Religion ends up being about *their* opinions, and

no longer about what *God* might will in the here and now, in today's languages and cultures, for and of living people. The theologians turned librarians and museum curators are uninterested in and often oblivious to the intellectual and societal gains and losses that generations upon generations of humans have made since the religious founder's narrated *past eternal present*.

When religious devotion loses its faith in a living, forever communicating God, the Deity Itself is colonised, domesticated, and made into a tool to control people and preserve the status quo rather than free people's imagination and challenge individual and social fixity. Then, religion starts to revolve around reproducing a given lifestyle and society rather than producing fairer, healthier, and more self-transcending ones.

New times call for new mindscapes

We are living in disruptive times. We are starting to consider the idea that we shall soon not be the most intelligent beings on the planet and that our model of biological humans will most probably evolve when technology and biology are fused. We have been made aware of so many biases that were warping the majority view of nature as a commodity, social roles as untouchable, racial hierarchies as evolutive facts, binary sexual identities as biologically iron-cast moulds, political systems as clearly virtuous or evil, and international law as globally indisputable. Digital technologies have eroded the body as our anchor into reality to the point that our bodies no longer determine the space and time in which we exist. Our bodies may be in the desert but, online, we are in a meeting by the sea. Our bodies may be in a time zone, but our schedule may be in sync with another. While everyone around us sleeps in Muscat, we are at a virtual birthday party with friends in Quito, Busan, Cape Town, and Rome.

In response to all that, our spiritualities must be optimistically and imaginatively disruptive. The religious and ideological wars and crimes in the past should warn us that for the new spiritualities to be helpful, they will have to be different. We need spiritualities that can help us steer novel existential courses—not the same old dynamics—in the present and the future without reinforcing colonial and hegemonic agendas, especially as some governments and the wealthy seek to colonise our planet's moon and Mars. To recreate idealised ancient or medieval past scenarios, we would have to destroy much—if not most—of what we now know and can do as well as what we shall presently know and be able to do. We do not need to unmake ourselves, but we need to dismantle the structures of privilege and dominion. Otherwise, we shall reproduce on the moon and Mars the same