Interviews

An Interview with Dipesh Chakrabarty

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SA & RE: Hello Professor Chakrabarty. It is a real pleasure and a genuine privilege to have this talk with you today. Thank you so much for accepting the invitation.

DC: Thank you so much. The pleasure is mine.

RE: Before we start our conversation, allow me to express my admiration for your writing style. Your prose flows seamlessly which offers your readers the opportunity to engage deeply with your arguments. Particularly because its *literariness* does not hinder comprehension as is the case with many theoretical and historical texts. I would also like to commend your subtle sense of humor, which gracefully underlies your sentences, enhancing the overall fluidity and charm of your writing. I'm intrigued whether it is spontaneous or a deliberate choice.

DC: Thank you so much. I think I got my sense of humor from my mother who used to love joking. I should express my gratitude for your questions; they are really meaningful questions that speak of a degree of engagement with what I have written. I feel very honored. There are so many books to read these days. People read hastily because there is so much to read. In the humanities, we are supposed to read closely, but we usually don't. So, it is a very gratifying experience when one is read carefully.

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RE: To begin with, in 1992, in your essay," Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?**"**, you (employing an apt analogy) wrote: "The task, as I see it, will be to wrestle ideas that legitimize the modern state and its attendant institutions, in order to return to political philosophy-in the same way as suspect coins returned to their owners in an Indian bazaar-its categories whose global currency can no longer be taken for granted." Your words speak to a reevaluation/reassessment of the foundational principles and categories upon which modern political thought is built. Would you agree that concepts such as human rights, civilization, humanity, freedom, democracy, diversity, equity and citizenship—which have been shaped by colonial legacies/ biases—still need (almost 25 years later) to be reimagined to conjure up alternatives, that reflect the diverse realities of the world and better serve the needs of diverse/ marginalized populations?

DC: I will begin by setting the scene. European expansion, colonization and decolonization happened over almost 500 years. Sometimes people ask me, Why did you provincialize Europe in 2000, and not the United States, since this is the dominant power today. This is often my answer: If you think of the history of the world, from Columbus's time to decolonization of the 50s and 60s as a play, you will possibly find that the most impressively self-contradictory character in that play is Europe. In the sense that European powers begin to expand beyond Europe; they take over other people's land; they're make slaves of some people; they oppress others; they kill; they take over the seas. Yet, at the same time, they are inventing humanism, undergoing the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, debating from the beginning whether they have the right to colonize or take other people's land. In the end they do what serves their interest; I'm not denying that. But at the same time, it's almost like Europe also develops a conscience, a faint sense of guilt, about what they are doing. That conscience becomes part of what we call modernity.

European empires had two kinds of impact. On the one hand, a very clear example of the first are settler colonial countries, where colonial powers basically destroyed the cultures and lifestyles of the natives. For instance, in the Americas, between 1492 and 1650, 50 million people died from diseases brought by Europeans. The Australian Aboriginal population in the 19th Century was literally decimated--becoming one tenth of what it was. On the other hand, in places like India, Malaysia, to some degree Egypt, and other places (where the people already had what Europeans regarded as civilization - cities, built space, educated people, Islamic traditions, in your case, etc.), they also created a kind of Western-educated middle class. For example, I am a descendent of that European-rule-produced middle class. So, European domination was not destructive in the same way everywhere. But at the same

time, there are enough similarities in the experience of destruction. Franz Fanon, for instance, who was from Martinique, but wrote eventually out of the experience of Martinique, his time in France, and the Algerian war - very particular experiences - but his texts find resonances across the world. There is something in his poetry of anticolonialism (his language is quite poetic, after all) that captures some truth about colonial violence. That's why, for me, if you imagined history as a play, then Europe would be a fascinating character because of its powerful and self-contradictory nature. There are aspects of European culture that everyone in India loved about Europe; like Shakespeare. The European Renaissance came into our lives through Shakespeare and Milton. People fell in love with European culture mainly through English literature. Like the Bengali tradition of writing Petrarchan sonnets. The tradition was initiated, in the 19th century, by a Bengali poet who learned Italian to read Dante and Petrarch in the original. He introduced the sonnet. He read Milton and introduced free verse into our literature. Before that, all our poetry rhymed. And when we adopted the punctuation marks from the Europeans, our sentences changed. As a result, this Bengali poet was able to write poetry where the full stop came in the middle of the sentence. i.e. he did not rhyme it. But all these innovations of imaginations were made possible by the European impact. It was not all destructive as in the cases of settler-colonial violence.

There were clearly two streams within South Asia: Some people, mostly Muslims, but also some Hindus, were completely in love with the Islamic tradition. Even in the 19th century, they knew Persian and Arabic. For example, Tagore's father was an avid reader of Hafez and Rummy [Rumi?] and he used to read them out in Persian / Farsi to his son, Tagore, who never learned Persian. So, the father did not ask his son to learn the language that he was reading out to him. There were also these modern Hindus, particularly some of the Bengali intellectuals in colonial times, who also fell in love with the ideals of the Enlightenment. So, colonial rule in India was, at least in the initial decades until the nationalist movement became powerful in the twentieth century, was a contradictory experience. Tagore said once that whatever we got from Europe, things we regarded as gifts of Europe, were not gifts they gave willingly. We had to wrest them away from their hands. He thought thus of modern science, modern rationalism, modern legal system, the idea of equality before the law. These were all good ideas, but Europeans did not practice them. We had to take them from their hands and say we want to learn this. But at the same time, when I look at India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, it is quite amazing how even for the most contemporary Muslims in India: thinkers and leaders, Rummy is still very important. In Pakistan, for example, you'd find people in the 20th century discussing this 13th century Sufi poet as

if he were present among them: going to Hafez and Rummy as a guidance to life. You would not see that to the same degree amongst the Hindus. So, when I look at the history of the subcontinent, I see it as complicated; there are multiple strands of thought, but within those, most thinkers accepted the ideas of secularism, difference between state and religion, the idea of equality before the law. Before, people used to criticize oppression out of a belief in equality in the eyes of God. So, if you go back to pre-English, pre-colonial criticisms of inequality, caste for instance, a low-caste Hindu would say to an upper-caste person, "You and I have the same body; God created this body; we're equal in the eyes of God, so why do you treat my body differently?" But that was an argument in terms of the oneness of God, and oneness of creation, a theological argument. The British, on the other hand, had a secular argument: punishment in law should be proportionate to the crime; one cannot be punished twice for the same crime; people are equal in the eyes of the law. They did not practice it. Europeans often did not like it if the judge deciding their legal cases happened to be Indian. They did not practice what they preached. That is why Tagore said these are things they are not giving willingly; we have to take them. This history is very different from that of the indigenous peoples, who actually lost their land, their lifestyle and had very little to be grateful for. I ended my book *Provincializing Europe* with what I called an "anti-colonial spirit of gratitude". An American friend from Venezuela asked me, "what is there to be grateful for?" I answered him thus. I see that there is very little to be grateful about if I am an indigenous person. But if one is a middle-class person like me, brought up on modern university-based education, then feminism, modern secular criticism of caste, or criticism of class and inequality cannot be ignored. There was an argument for equality in Buddhism and Islam, but not in Hinduism. There were pre-colonial versions of Hindu equality that were influenced by Islam and Sufism, but the postcolonial version is very indebted to European Enlightenment--the idea that men were born equal.

When one feels European oppression at its most intense, one has the urge to decolonize completely; one has the urge to say: take your coins back; I want to go back to where I was. To those people, who said "the world is becoming smaller", Gandhi famously said that he would not mind it if the world became bigger again. So, when I wrote 'take your suspect coins back', it was the decolonial urge coming through. But today, I think it is very hard to think about the idea of freedom without that idea being already influenced by some European traditions. European traditions are themselves not just European traditions. It is well known that without the Islam of the 12th and 13th centuries, and without the interest Islamic/Arab scholars had in the ancient Greeks, discovering Aristotle, Plato and others, the Renaissance would not have

happened. That is well known and accepted. So. clearly if you look at the world around the Mediterranean, there was a shared world. There is an Islamic tradition that comes to India and runs deep through our lives. There was a pre-colonial debate between loving God like a Sufi person would do (losing yourself) and the rational- exercise of reason. One of the first Hindu social reformers was trained in the Arab Mu'tazila, traditional rationalism. He used that rationalism to defend his version of monotheism and even to criticize the idea of revelation. So, Muslim intellectuals often didn't like him, finding his views too radical. This debate, which still goes on in India about whether to approach God through fate or through reason, has both pre-colonial and Islamic origins. But it is also mixed in with the European idea about what reason is. It is very hard to disentangle everything today. That's why I say that we are all entangled, whatever the differences we want to highlight. We can only talk about them within a recognition of our entanglement with one another. It doesn't mean that there is no power questions or questions of inequality. There are all kinds of inequalities. But the fact is that these intellectual relations are entangled. Even with the most decolonizing of contemporary approaches, those that call for going back to before Columbus's time, in their very claim of freedom from Europe there is some influence of European thinking. That, I am sorry, is a long answer to your question.

RE: But you don't think that these grand narratives can be re-imagined?

DC: Not in complete independence of the history of entanglement. The sentence that you quoted is from the very first article I published in 1992 announcing the project of "provincializing Europe." By the time I finished my book, *Provincializing Europe,* in 2000, I was working more with the idea of translation: that reimagining is translating and translating always means what Deleuze would call "repetition with difference". So, when I translate you, I repeat you but some difference comes in.

***RE**: Can we move to the second question.*

***DC**: Yes, sure.*

***RE**:* I find your perspective on historical knowledge as expressed in your book, *The Calling of History,* quite intriguing. You say, "I think of historical knowledge as conversational, as a series of statements that relate sequentially to one another without any overall movement toward an imagined goal of finality." (p 36). How might it be of help in navigating the complexities of power dynamics and resistance movements? What, in your view, are the implications on social justice and decolonial praxis in the pursuit of decolonial alternatives? As dynamic as historical knowledge becomes, opening history to

reinterpretation and revision, wouldn't it be possible that dominant or privileged narratives could continue to overshadow marginalized voices/experiences perpetuating inequalities and even erasure in some contexts? How do you perceive the role of "decentralized" (if you'd agree) social media in realizing this dynamic view of historical knowledge—conjuring up alternatives? Do you see a contradiction between this view and your emphasized interest in "facts"?

DC: Let me speak about history first; about the distinction between the words, "fact" and "truth. What is a fact in history? A fact in history is not what you find in the archives. A fact in history is what a historian eventually deduces - that is, something they think of having actually taken place in the past - by looking at many different kinds of evidence, weighing them against one another. One considers the possibility of bias in a source and, accordingly, consults additional sources to cross-check the information. This is the method Marc Bloch, the great French historian, called the "historian's method of doubt"—doubting and interrogating evidence. The term goes back to Descartes' *Meditations*. Descartes exercises what he called the method of doubt to ultimately arrive at the conclusion that "I think and therefore I exist;' in other words, one cannot doubt that one is thinking / doubting. Marc Bloch uses that idea analogically to claim that the very fact that historians actually question their evidence, is their method of doubt. The factual narrative a historian constructs using this method is subject to doubt, as another historian might present a stronger argument supported by superior or new evidence, which could contradict the initial account. Therefore, Marc Bloch claimed that historians have to submit to facts. The idea of truth, on the other hand, is different. The idea of truth relates to the question of bias. So, any historian would argue and agree that we all have biases. One might be a feminist historian, a Marxist historian, a nationalist historian or an Islamicist historian. We all have biases. The question is: do I have to fight my own bias to get to the truth? Or should the truth be such that it proves my bias to be right? There was a time when historians used to think that one can only approach the truth by fighting one's own bias. That is why I often used to tell my students that if you are a Marxist historian, then the history you write should be Marxist not because you are a Marxist, but in spite of your being a Marxist. The question of truth is actually a question of truthfulness. It is a question of the ethics of my writing and thinking; what is the relationship I have to my own prejudices and biases? I cannot be without bias or a point of view. I may be a Marxist, but do I question my Marxism even in the act of being a Marxist? Or do I expect the world to prove my Marxism to be right? When I was training to be a historian with a professor in India, one day we were reading a book together, in which some facts did not agree with Marxism or my understanding of it.

So, I told him: "Sir, but this facts go against Marxism", and he answered: "Yes, truth is more important than Marxism". He was a Marxist! So, I have never forgotten that truth is more important than Marxism. Yet, at the same time what I have realized is that there is no final truth. There is only the question of being truthful, which is how one deals with one's own biases.

In my life I have encountered two types of scholars. The first adopts a point of view, be it Marxist, Feminist, decolonial or anticolonial, and then they spend the rest of their lives wanting the world to confirm their biases and prove that they are right. Whereas, temperamentally, I have more joy when the world ambushes me : the moment when the world produces a thing and you say: "Oh dear! This does not fit in. I cannot explain it. I need to re-think." For me, that is the moment of joy because I always think that our thinking falls short of the world and of truth. Therefore, truth has to have something mysterious about it. This sense I get from Sufism. Truth is something we keep looking for and never find. No one finds the ultimate truth. That's why I have never been sectarian; well, not in my mature years. I have never believed in belonging to a sect with an opinion and fighting another intellectual as belonging to another sect. I am incapable of doing it because I think nobody has the truth as our thinking falls short of what reality is. Reality is neither physics nor chemistry nor literature. We create these disciplines; each of which gives one a mixture of insight and blindness. Life is also about finding out how your own training has made you blind to certain things. What is it that you cannot see as a physicist, an economist, a historian or a nutrition specialist? If this question does not bother you, then you have a view of the world where it keeps confirming what you think about it. The world is then a slave of your thought, whereas I prefer to think that the world is my master. It is not a servant of my thinking; and here I am speaking almost theologically: you will never meet the master. Actually, I think that thinking can produce the same feelings of the joys of mystery that a Sufi might find in his state of *fana* (except that you don't want your faculty of reasoning to be dissolved, that would be a critical difference with the devotee). Tagore's father used to become so impatient with not feeling God that he used to go into an ecstatic form of dancing. I've realized that his dance was probably a *darwishi* dance. He was dancing like a Sufi. It is that same sense of mysteriousness that can be at the back of your head. So, that is why I said that there is no finality to this conversation. You and I come to the same problem with different kinds of blindnesses. The result is a joy of discovery, which can include polemics and rational argumentation against each other; yet that rational argumentation does not have to divest itself of the joy of the part of discovery where ultimately you never find that which you are looking for because ultimately human categories and human perceptions are all limited. Even physicists, in their cosmological statements,

say that, with all the advances in physics and chemistry, only 4% of the universe is actually known.

SA: There are echoes of the Mu'tazila doctrine in what you're saying, won't you agree?

DC: Yes, right. What I meant to say is that in becoming a Marxist, I haven't given up on that. It is part of who I am because I see people become too polemical too quickly. I see people wanting to kill each other - speaking metaphorically.

SA: and literally!

DC: and of course, literally! The literal thing you cannot even explain. I cannot find an explanation for what is happening in Gaza. This desire to kill and kill; that is the most monstrous side of humanity. But it also happens in polemics. The word polemics comes from the Greek word *Polemos* which means war. Some think that one has to kill one's opposition. That is why I don't believe in the idea of a compelling argument because it means that I produced an argument that tied your hands and feet together and you cannot go anywhere. I think that one must have claustrophobia about compelling arguments. You should try to make your argument as compelling as possible, knowing that no argument is compelling in the end. There has to be a place for reason. I want to argue hard with you but in a way that we both take the pleasure of argumentation. I was twice invited for a debate at Oxford. Because I believe that debate means you give me the position to defend, I asked them: "Do I have the freedom to say that my opposition has a better argument?" They said, "No, that is not what a debate is." I said, then I don't want to debate. So, what I am basically saying is that thinking, arguing are acts of conversation. When I speak polemically, I can only say what I say because you have already said something, even if I want to say that you are wrong. It is part of the conversation. Because I am not hundred percent sure that I am totally right about the world, there should be no finality. Once one knows that one falls short of knowing the reality, then you know there is mystery and mystery is part of knowing. In English, it is said of Marxism or Freud that they demystify capitalism or sexuality. I think, however, that a lot of the joy of being human comes out of these mysteries. That is actually why human beings write poetry; or think of Greek plays which ultimately revolve around some human problems which we don't fully understand or solve. We don't fully understand why we have to age or to die; or the contemporary concern with living longer. It is very interesting how the Greeks emphasize the mortality of human beings

versus the immortality of the gods. That is why I think literature is very important because it can maintain that sense of mystery.

SA: It just came to my mind how the West has been promoting secularism and all the while borrowing the language of theology and taking it to the outside. Think of words such as: demystify, orthodox and catholic. It is so interesting how they promote something and do the opposite

DC: That is why I said Europe is so contradictory.

SA: Yes. This is what I've been thinking of: both charming and contradictory.

DC: You could say very rich with contradictions.

RE: And what about the role of social media?

DC: In my view, what has been happening globally for the last fifty years or so is a decline of faith in liberal institutions and in the capacity of liberal democratic institutions to deliver equality, good services and good life. When social media first came (like Facebook) and in 2011, when Tahrir square happened in Egypt, there was hope throughout the world that social media would give us freedom of information; that the governments wouldn't be able to suppress information; that one could mobilize people via social media; that life on the streets would be democratized through social media. But if you look at the history of social media, what Zuckerburg and the others have done is to introduce a very polemical algorithm: like/ dislike. Social media helps to polarize people and today it is full of lies and falsehood. I know that out of personal experience. My wife and I work at the same institution. Some jealous people started to spread lies about us on social media and eventually my wife had to take this woman, the main spreader of lies, to court. Faced with evidence, she tendered a public apology retracting all her baseless accusations, all seven of them. Because American law allows us to see her emails, my wife saw that her emails were all full of lies. The hope that Tahrir Square spread around the world, namely, that social media would be liberating, was dashed, including in Egypt. We all know that social media allows the spread of fake news. Social media has been largely a big disappointment in the history of democracy. Not a complete one but it has actually eroded the distinction between true and false, and thus democracy I'd say. Democracy to my mind is where we come together to argue, to have polemics, but not to kill each other, because we acknowledge that whatever we are saying all parties fall short of the truth and therefore all parties have an obligation to be truthful to themselves; that is to have a critical relationship to their own frameworks, without that there is no middle ground. So, if you are a Marxist, who is

absolutely convinced that Marxism is the truth, and let's say I'm a doubter of Marxism, you'll have nothing to learn from my doubts.

RE: In "Planetary Humanities ", you mark how "the humanist literature on the politics of attending to the challenges of planetary climate change draws on two contrasting ways of thinking about "modernity" and thus about differences between humans." You also reiterate that the distinctions between postcolonial and decolonial approaches, as not "absolute;" that there are "many connections between these approaches", which "draw, ironically but differently, on some identifiable traditions of European thought". Would you elaborate on this?

DC: Yes sure; I discussed part of this above when I talked about entanglements, but I will elaborate to make things clearer to your readers. Take the case of that very talented Brazilian anthropologist, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. who was the first person to pose the very interesting proposition that the West thinks that there is one nature (which science discovers) and many cultures, whereas from an Amerindian perspective, there are many natures, which he calls 'multinaturalism'. But, if you inquire where he learnt his ideas from, you will find that he was in Paris around 1968 when Deleuze and Guattari were writing. Yet, they were then reading mainly-French, anthropology of Latin America and a little bit of Africa from the 40s and the 50s to make the argument that the indigenous modes of existence were a better way of sharing the earth than the modern state. The modern state centralizes, organizes and divides land by creating boundaries whereas tribal people are nomadic. That is where Deleuze and Guattari come up with the notion of Nomadology. Nomadology is against the modernist state. They also came up with the idea of rhizomatic connections, which spread like grass, instead of centralization of connections; that is, we have sort of a network. Think about the circulation of ideas here: French anthropologists went to Africa or Latin America and learned about these tribes. That knowledge was then repurposed in a different way during May 1968 in Paris by French philosophers. And, somebody from Rio, who is in France as a student, learns all that and works with these ideas to create Amerindian perspectivism, bringing it back as a critique in his criticism of the West; then, he becomes very special in the development of decolonial approaches. But you cannot totally separate his work - nor would he himself propose this - from the upheavals in European thinking around May1968. Postcolonials also drank at the same source. Through Derrida we discovered Heidegger, through Foucault both Nietzsche and Heidegger. Through Nietzsche we discover his opposition to Hegel. We're all entangled. But where I agree with De Castro (and he is a good friend through correspondences, I greatly respect him) is in his idea which he once

told me : we go to study the indigenous people to know that another world is possible, we do not have to think of the world we're given as the only possible world. I completely accept that because that is what Fanon and Gandhi teach me; and even Kant teaches it. Kant argues that, for a human slave to imagine freedom, even before he is free, he has to be mentally free enough to think that another world is possible, that another life is possible. I think that this possibility of another world is illustrated by many of these cultures' lives, even by our pasts. Once upon a time our ancestors were indigenous or peasants. I reckon that in many ways modern technological urban civilization has made us forget many things about life, planetarity, etc. That is why I find the decolonial position quite salutary, but I don't think we can go back to being indigenous. I wonder if people are willing to give up MRI machines or not get treatment when they have cancer. But the idea is that the world does not have to be like this, I think that is very important.

RE: *You also talk about a: "mismatch between the oneness of the planet (IPCC's assumption) and the not-oneness of humans", making the case that it "will keep open the place for decolonial and postcolonial political thought jostling together and around the intensifying problems of anthropogenic climate change." How would you respond to a view of the irrelevance of decolonial and postcolonial perspectives which have no alternative lenses to offer, and would potentially politicize climate change and distract from "real" scientific and technical solutions?*

DC: What I said is a bit different. Let me give you a concrete example to explain why I think a decolonial perspective is important and why I also think it doesn't work. There are things to learn from it, but it is not a solution. Consider a book entitled, *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster*, by the philanthropist billionaire Bill Gates that came out last year. It is a very smart book. He is an intelligent, knowledgeable and successful man. In his book, he says: I'm a white man with a lot of money and a lot of opinions. I believe in technofixes. Now, the reality of climate change is that the world is getting hotter more quickly than before. The UN Secretary General Guterres said: "We're not talking about global warming. We're talking about global boiling."

SA: It's true!

DC: This means that we should take some drastic steps; but what is the world doing? The world is actually trying to find more technical solutions, such as putting out big umbrellas in space to reduce sunlight or putting aerosol particles in the stratosphere to reflect sunlight. They are all risky propositions, but they'll probably happen one day. Bill Gates supports them in his book

because he can't imagine a situation where people today and, in the future, do not want a lifestyle that requires so much consumption of energy because energy is central to the story of the good life that many humans think they must have. If you examine the energy-consumption rates of well-to-do people, you'll see an increase in the number of consumers in the world. If there are, let's say, eight billion people, you'll find three billion people are really badly off, the other four or five billion people are doing better, but their energy consumption is increasing more and more. In America, all I have to do is to calculate the number of gadgets I plug in to charge: the electric toothbrush, my hearing aids, the iPad, and the cell phone ...etc. to see that the number of gadgets I need to charge is growing. That is part of the good life or convenience or whatever you call it; even the addiction to the cellphone, which is an answer to boredom. So, when I read Bill Gates, I realized that he assumes that humans will never want any other world. For him, another world is not possible. I'll give you another example: the world is running out of naturally produced sand. Without sand you can't build. Bill Gates says that to provide housing for people, we'll have to build a New York city every year for the next forty or fifty years. That is the amount of urbanization you need, which means that that is the amount of sand you need. This also goes for glass. I read in a research paper that human beings are now using up sand at a higher rate than the rate at which it is produced by the earth. And desert sand can't be used in building because the grains don't bind well, so you need the cubical grains of sand. Accordingly, we're running out of sand; we're having to grow thousands of pigs, chicken and fish, which used to be a wild catch. We now farm fish; and we're now thinking of managing the oceans and the skies to keep this lifestyle going. It is not just Bill Gates; when I ask myself if another world is possible, I realize how addicted to energy consumption we've become. Even for our conversation on Zoom now, energy is being consumed is maintaining the server that makes it possible for us to meet. We too are using our computers and thus consuming energy. We are also consuming more energy by the very fact of having our cameras on, but it would have been strange to speak to a black screen had we turned them off. Increasingly, most of our human requirements or pleasures of life or whatever you want to call it are dependent on energy.

This drives me to think back about Gandhi and how he thought about freedom. Gandhi could imagine freedom is less energy-intensive forms (though his commitment to travel and the printing press did make him a person of the fossil fuel age). My point is that if we have to transition to another world, we have to start from where we are. We can't go back overnight to being indigenous; and no one would want to go back to an imagined indigenous state where human lifespan may have been shorter. In addition, we don't know if the

indigenous methods will be able to provide food for 12 billion people. Going back to the Arab Spring, what happened with the shortage of bread? You see, this modern world has meant that we live longer, and most people eat a lot better than they used to (though indigenous people had more balanced diets). Yet, at the same time, we have created a world where there are more refugees; one where many parts have are becoming or become inhabitable. The solution Bill Gates has is one that will allow us to continue this lifestyle for a number of years. We are, in fact, leaving the problem for later people to face. But where I acknowledge the contribution of decolonial thinking is with regard to the very important point in our politics of imagination: that another world is possible. The fact that 80% of biodiversity hotspots are where indigenous people live shows, clearly, that there is a connection between their lifestyle and sustainability. Nobody questions that indigenous lifestyle is probably the most sustainable. Australian Aboriginals lived in Australia for 60000 years before the Europeans came with more or less the same lifestyle. But the well-to-do classes of the world are simply trying to push the crisis away. I'd say, differing from my Marxist friends, it is not Bill Gates as a representative of Capitalism who does this. His book indirectly speaks for my class, the aspiring classes of India. In India, Modi says that by 2047 we'll be an absolutely rich and developed country. If you look at the speeches by politicians in China and India, it is all about growth. It has practically become very difficult for us to actually imagine another world that looks feasible for us.

I think we have to move from another world 'is possible' to another world 'is *feasible*'. This is not tackled by Decolonials because in working on alternative, practical, and feasible worlds, you encounter the path-dependency of the change process. You have to work through the capitalist consumerist world. The failure to imagine another feasible world ends up passing the buck to future humans. We're simply saying one day we'll face the problems; they are not intense enough for us now. Meanwhile, we'll keep getting hot winters, hot summers; disasters will happen; we'll keep getting more refugees, more illegal immigrants. Isabelle Stengers, the Belgian philosopher, has a book called *The Coming Barbarism*. She argues that there will come a barbaric future where one wouldn't want immigrants to come. Immigrants are not easy to deal with in large numbers. I heard Isabelle Stengers say recently that we are in transition, but we don't know to where. Previously we'd say, we're going to socialism or that we would be creating a more democratic or just world; for Stengers, though, the world is changing, but we don't know to where.

SA: Building on the concept of "another feasible world", you mentioned immigrants and refugees, but actually there exists another world. I'm thinking

of the people on the land. There is an increasing number of what I call, urban marginals / urban marginalized, for instance. There is a rise in shanty towns or Favelas, Brazilian style. These communities were built because the people could not cope with that costly style of life. It is a capitalist modern lifestyle that people could not afford and that is why they started their own communities.

DC: What you have, then, are problems of urban crime and gated communities

SA: It depends; sometimes yes, sometimes no. It is not a rule. It is very likely that you have gangs, crimes, and drugs.

DC: In many parts of Asia nowadays, there is the problem of marriageable poor men of reproductive age who move singly to the cities. Their families stay back in villages, but they move to the cities and live in slums together. They have access to cellphones and this and that. If you see photos of them and their parents, you will see that their parents wear one kind of clothes, while they wear very urban knock-offs of designer clothes. In India, we have had some cases of such people getting drunk socializing with their male friends and then committing sexual crimes or even gang rapes in their drunken state. They are all young men of reproductive age engaged in casual work in the informal sector of a big city.

SA: Yes, informal and marginalized.

DC: It has partly to do with the absolute destruction of the family structure.

SA: Then, these communities reflect, if we agree with Mignolo, the dark side of modernity.

DC: No question about that.

SA: Would any decolonial thinking help mitigate the effects of this stark modernity.

DC: I know the Indian story of this situation in more detail. Part of the story has to do with the failure of the agricultural sector to create employment. These people move to the cities because agriculture cannot not give them a livelihood and also because the cities themselves have become, sort of, objects of desire. A young peasant woman was interviewed in India, some years ago by Norwegian anthropologists. When they asked her where she would like to raise her children, in the village or the city, she chose the city. She gave three interesting reasons. She said in the city one can cook standing up using natural

gas, whereas in the village, the hearth is on the floor and they even have to squat to cook and then get up and so on. She added, in the city when she doesn't feel like cooking, she can eat out. Thirdly, she said in the city if her husband's older brother came for a cup of tea, she would not have to cover her face in his presence.

SA: That is important; freedom**.**

DC: Yes, exactly, freedom. This takes us back to the discussion we had earlier about freedom. You can see how ideas are entangled; and one of the most interesting facts about the modern capitalist economy is that it has made the agricultural weak in everywhere. In every country agriculture is subsidized. It is an amazing thing: you'd think that because humans can't do without eating, agricultural products would enjoy a certain degree of price elasticity; everybody has to eat! And you'd ask why it is that wheat has to be so heavily subsidized. American, Australian, European wheat are all subsidized and they fight for global markets through political institutions like GAT. I think it goes partly back to what capitalism has done to agriculture. It has increased productivity, created monocultures, and destroyed the family farm. In India, the government wanted to capitalize agriculture. But agricultural land is owned by small farmers, who resisted the move. These small agriculturists vote in the elections, and the government went back because it wanted their votes. This growing development of what Mike Davis calls the "planet of slums" comes out of the failure of the agricultural sector to create meaningful lives for people.

RE: It's paradoxical.

SA: Yes, very paradoxical.

DC: It is quite paradoxical. Returning to Walter Mignolo's and the other Decolonials' concept of "epistemic disobedience" and the other related concepts then, I sometimes wonder how if I could connect them to what I have said about our ideas of freedom or emancipation in today's world being always-already entangled. Other worlds may be possible, they are never feasible unless you engage with what exists, i.e. global capitalism. To move forward, you have to deal with the young man in the slums *as he is* or the young woman in the countryside, who wants to come to the city, *as she is*. The political failure to deliver the "good and just life" as we imagine it today destroys democracy creating rage in the society. Rage produces politics that is sometimes consumed by a powerful and blind desire to fight the existing system. But we need to work through the institutions that exist unless you are in a situation of state-failure. I salute decolonial constantly thinking for

reminding us that maxim: we are not condemned to live for ever in the world that exists, another world is possible. But we have to create a politics that tells us that another world is feasible.

NE: Considering the ecological legacies of colonialism and the ongoing impact of global capitalism on environmental degradation, a decolonial perspective becomes essential in reimagining sustainable relationships with the environment within a globalized context. In light of critiques surrounding essentialism and universalism in your perspective on the Anthropocene explored in your book *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (2021), how do marginalized communities engage with alternative conceptual frameworks and reassert their agency within a discourse that often sidelines their contributions and perpetuates Eurocentric perspectives on environmental responsibility?

DC: From my point of view the alternative conceptual frameworks are not completely alternative in the sense that they are already entangled. So, I'll refer, for instance, to De Castro's statement that 80% of biodiversity hotspots are actually where indigenous people live. Accordingly, it makes sense that while moving forward we'd want to preserve biodiversity. We'd want to have these indigenous people maintain their lifestyle to maintain the biodiversity hotspots. But, would that mean that if they had cancer, they would not have access to an MRI machine or a good hospital? If one of their children wants to become an engineer, she/he wouldn't join a technical institute? Would they not want to modernize? These are some points that decolonial scholars ignore. The question of whether by indigeneity you mean an intellectual position or a world outlook that as a scholar you've abstracted from some observed lives; whether you are actually describing a reality where even the indigenous people may have some desires for modernization - these issues call for clarification.

How would you think of an indigenous professor of philosophy in a modern university or an indigenous medical doctor in a modern medical institute? We have some indigenous students in our university. They clearly have a very special relationship to the history of dispossession of their own people. Yet, at the same time, they're also learning to be historians. They are learning to argue with evidence like all historians do irrespective of the part of the world they work on. They may argue for "alternative histories" but in relation to the methods of the discipline. They will probably get teaching jobs somewhere. They'll also have, like me, a sense of difference from others, and may even have a sense of being double-voiced. It is this fractured, internally fissured relationship to modernization that we all have, and that's why we all have memories that allow us to think that, yes, another world is possible. The pull

of the good life harps on what by nature human beings cannot not love. It takes a lot of character to say I don't value human life. Or, if modern medicine can give me ten more years on the planet, I don't want it. It takes a very strong person to say I don't want to have another ten years with my grandchild. Many people turn to their grandchildren for affection, and you see it gives them a new life when it actually happens. The attachment to modernization or to this modern world is through the fact that it has prolonged our individual lives, that pleasure of living long, at least in the affluent societies. If you have a debilitating illness, modern medicine and the health industry fix you up and send you back to the workforce. These are very deep questions of individual life. Sometimes scholars take a position anchored in ideology but don't think through the contradictions of modern lives. I ended my youth, my college life, as a failed Maoist. I wanted to be a revolutionary, but I didn't have the courage. Today, people are all failed Maoists because Maoism itself failed. But I was one of the first because I thought Maoism would succeed. What I learnt from that is that it is very hard to express a moral thought that you cannot yourself live out. I personally think about the contradictions of my life because these contradictions tell me something. So, that is why I come back very deeply to the question: if modern technology could give me ten more years, would I say no to it? I probably wouldn't. I only know of Gandhi as a person who might have said "no" in answer to this hypothetical question. He didn't believe in modern medicine. There was an outbreak of smallpox once in his *ashram* in India. People were dying and he still was against vaccination. Eventually, when a three-year-old child died, his followers asked Gandhi to allow vaccination, at least for children. But he said: "I think my god is testing my resolve. You can all leave me if you want, but I will not allow vaccination." That was because, I think, Gandhi did not value human life as such, including his own. But his is a very difficult position for us to take. I don't know of any other modern leader who would have taken that position.

SA: Why did he do that?

DC: Because instinctively he didn't think humans had any more claim to a longer life than an animal has. He used to think that diseases resulted from our greediness. He used to think that these were God's punishment for human beings' moral lapses. I think the attachment to energy consumption is in the end an attachment to a longer productive life; "healthy," as the health industry understands it. It is entangled with capitalism. One technology that came to my mind, which helps prolong life and yet is very bad for the environment, is refrigeration. Without refrigeration, we wouldn't have been able to transport or store the Corona vaccine during the pandemic. That is a direct contribution to fewer people dying and to longer life for others. So, I think that what we are

deeply attached to, and that is why the planetary environmental crisis is such a difficult predicament, is the longer life that this modern infrastructure has made possible.

SA : I keep exploring methodologies that could facilitate replacing the hegemonic epistemology with a pluriverse vision; the two worlds that you talked about earlier. Although the 'center cannot hold' (I love Yeats' "The Second Coming"), 'epistemicide', as defined and advanced by Sousa Santos, is revived through many crises (we can see that in Gaza very clearly) and through the empowered agency of the settler colonial mindset. So, how can we start provincializing this hegemonic methodology and praxis in relation to gender studies in the global south? In the global south, we have another crisis: the regimes view colonial thinking as an imminent threat. How can we disentangle this intersection and find our way out of this trap?

DC: I don't deny the hegemonic, but it is sometimes more dominant than hegemonic. In *Subaltern Studies*, the publication I was long associated with, our guru Ranajit Guha coined the expression 'dominance without hegemony'; as in the Israel-Palestine question, it is dominance without hegemony. There may be hegemonic ideas about development that both Palestinian and Israeli intellectuals may share; but, at least in terms of the political force that Israel exerts on Palestinian life, it is sheer dominance. They will, of course, justify it by saying that if they don't dominate the Palestinians, terrorism will be the result. But, in the end, it is about wars, barbed wires, destruction, and prisoners. There is no other way to describe it, unfortunately.

The big dividing line, intellectually, in the Global South is between people like us, myself, who in some ways remain, for all our criticisms of the West, in conversation with it, and those who highlight or emphasize the utterly destructive role that settler-colonial rule played in indigenous lives. Look at Gandhi or Tagore. They both believed deeply in the West as an interlocutor. I ascribe this difference to different kinds of colonial domination. In India, Europeans needed our labor on the land, in factories, and in schools and universities. But they did not want our land, as in the settler-colonial countries or in Israel-Palestine. Nor did they want to enslave our bodies but in some other parts of the world they did.

Let me quickly mention how important the European idea of equality before the law became for the bottom segments of the Indian society, the untouchables. The greatest leader of the so-called "untouchables" is on record saying that he wished Indian history had begun with 1789. While I was writing *Provincializing Europe*, I was always thinking about what my stakes were in

European intellectual traditions. I made a decision that if the worst-off persons or groups in India had a stake in the European intellectual tradition, in the Enlightenment, I would make that my starting point. This is a very different story to the people who now talk about 'epistemicide' and indigenous people. Even if you go back to Chinese or Japanese history, they began to look at Europe and began to have an intellectual conversation with them. Otherwise, you'd not have Marxism, the negritude literature and poetry that comes out of both the colonial experience as well as these people being in Paris and being in conversation with Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Hegel. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon says something to this effect: "All the ingredients for human emancipation are there in European thought but they can't implement them. It is up to the colonized to implement them. In addition, in the *Discourse on Colonialism*, Césaire, I think in chapter two, says: we want modernity; we want more modernization. It is the colonial power that is holding it back. We want more railways, more factories and universities. You are not giving us enough.' That was the position taken by Nehru and Nasser. Nasser famously announced once: 'The modern poets of Egypt are the engineers.' When you look at other countries that were semi-formally colonized, like Japan and Thailand, you will see their interest in Europe. Japan, for instance, had the biggest translation program—translating European medical and philosophical texts.

Thus, think of the history of the non-western intellectuals and middle classes' investment in Europe and then think of indigenous people and others coming out of settler-colonial experiences (which I don't have) and whose lives were destroyed. Remember, I told you earlier that in the nineteenth century the Australian Aboriginals were literally decimated. The numbers are also interesting. Globally middle-class people like us, in India and Egypt, outside the West, are roughly 3.5 billion people while the indigenous people are 700 million or so. The weight of numbers is on our side, which is not a good thing, though, because we are much more interlocked with this desire for modernization.

But there is something artificial about the distinction I am making between the modernizing middle classes and the indigenous, for who would not be interested in the benefits of modern medicine and public health? Something, which defines the human condition today, from my point of view, is the story of the prolongation of human life span and life expectancy, which is due to modern technology, with medicine included in technology. You can't separate the story of modern medicine from the refrigeration technology, for instance. So, that is something that even the indigenous person has invested in. If you look at the lifespan statistics, you'll find that the average was thirty years in

the 18th century, which did not mean that everybody died at thirty. Most of that was caused by infant mortalities. My grandfather, who married twice, had fifteen children. My parents had two. I am 76 now. Most of my peers have parents who had two kids because we are a post-antibiotic generation. I had diphtheria when I was 17. I would have died if not for antibiotics. Thus "progress" in human affairs has been critically dependent on our capacity to reduce infant and maternal mortality. Globally and politically we hold governments accountable for ensuring that human longevity grows, but we do so at a great environmental cost because we have not only prolonged individual lives, we have also been able to support a bigger number of humans. As a species we are 300,000 years old. It was 1900 when we first reached 1.6 billion in the whole world. In one hundred years, we became 6 billion. Now we're eight. But the thing is that in the last seventy years, humans have become much wealthier mainly due to the abstraction of wealth. Wealth is no longer dependent on concrete things like land. Your wealth is counted in terms of stocks; all these are abstractions, pieces of paper or even electronic bytes. The more abstract wealth becomes, the more we imagine ourselves to be wealthier. The bottom line of the good life today is increased human life expectancy which cannot be separated from technology.

SA: Or methodology

DC: Yes of course, if you think through it. Peter Haff has shown that if you took technology out of this world, i.e., everything that connects us (Zoom, shops, telephones…etc), human numbers would crash to 11 million. We now use antibiotics on animals we eat to keep them in large numbers. Some of the problems we have in our gut bacteria are actually due to having used antibiotics on animal feed. My question to my decolonial friends is: do you want to reduce life spans? Do you imagine a world in which we have shorter lives? In my opinion the only anti-colonial person who did not mind that was Gandhi. On the contrary, Nehru minded that. He didn't agree with Gandhi. He thought people should have healthier and longer lives. We have trained our emotions; we don't expect our children to die. When I think about my grandparents, eight of their fifteen children died. I believe that signifies a changing relationship to death. These, in my opinion, are fundamental changes that have affected the human condition. Hannah Arendt, who is a theorist of plurality who thought that politics is grounded in diversity, called it "the human condition". The argument is that there is something of which we all partake; what Bill Gates calls the "good life." The fundamental thing is the health and security of individual life. That seems to at the core of our commitment to an energy-driven cili===

SA: But Arendt has talked about 'the banality of evil'. You cannot have a good life if there exists this banal evil, as embodied by Arendt in the evil doings of Eichmann, unless we're talking about pure physical health.

DC: You're totally right. What we're now realizing is that if so many people live so well; if there are so many human beings who aspire to live as well, the world is in trouble. Today the earth is saying: you want to eat so many millions of cows, but I cannot naturally produce so many millions of cows; so we farm cows, industrializing their lives. Fish used to be a wild catch. Now we're farming fish. The banana story is very interesting. Everybody eats bananas. If you want to make the banana crop global (available to all), you'll find that among all the varieties of bananas, there is one or two varieties that you can actually genetically modify and make global. This means that the biodiversity of bananas gets reduced because one or two varieties have to be dominant. So, if a disease were to attack bananas, then they would be very vulnerable. Accordingly, you have to add to thinking about what I call 'the human condition today' the problem of what geologists call the biosphere—what the earth produces. Ultimately, it is due to solar energy and the fact that there is life on this planet that produces all this diversity of life. Vaclav Smil, a Canadian scholar, claims that 96% of the biomass of vertebrates is made up of humans and the animals we they keep to eat or as pets or animals that associate with us. And 4% vertebrates are wild animals. He also shows that human beings have now managed to hog 30% of what the biosphere produces. But numerically, the majority of forms of life are microbial. Humans are a minority form of life. One of the things that I end up doing in my climate-related work (that was pointed out to me by one of my friends) is to provincialize humans, philosophically. But, at the same time, as a human being I also recognize that I have a stake in this long-life story.

SA: I just want to make sure that I got it right. Can it be claimed that revising and exploring past experiences of people who suffered under settler colonialism or indigenous people, whether in the global south or what is called today "the global north," would help in subverting the dominant mythology in gender studies; in other words, checking how others dealt with that?

DC: Look, as I have said, it is beyond dispute that indigenous ways of allow for biodiversity to flourish and are the most sustainable; there is no question about that. But at the same time, we have developed a real stake in an unsustainable lifestyle. See Shereen, you can tell a story in which somebody else is the problem and I am the solution and that is the decolonial story, whereas I try to tell a story where I am part of the problem as well. These are two different narratives. From my position, I see that we have a lot to learn

from indigenous people's stories. As I said earlier, it is not enough to say that another world is possible. We need to find a world that is desirable, feasible and different from this world. Desirability determines our preference for what is feasible. We live in a world where most middle classes are embracing western technology and consumerism. That is causing a deep environmental problem. I think of the world as a contradictory formation.

NE: To delve further into the interplay you mentioned earlier, of power dynamics inherent in settler colonialism and indigenous agency and the way to find alternative paradigms, could you speak a little more about gender dynamics? How do you conceive these power dynamics manifesting themselves in the realm of gender studies?

DC: To give you a quick example from the Bengal Delta region where has been rising, poor women from fishing communities are beginning to get fungal infections in their reproductive organs because they stand in rivers to catch small fish. The saline river waters give them fungal infections. In west Bengal, a lot of mischievous doctors began to practice hysterectomy on these women—taking money and destroying their lives. In Bangladesh, similar things have happened. Feminist friends in Calcutta are lobbying the government to regulate hysterectomy. At one level, this is the story of environmental change, the rising sea level, the increasing salinity of water; at another level, though, it is directly about human lives and practices of corruption. Again, the gender question in indigenous politics is particularly interesting and complicated. When I was teaching in Australia, a white Australian anthropologist working on Aboriginal kinship, wrote an article claiming that there was a noticeable incidence of rape cases in Aboriginal families she wrote about. Six Aboriginal feminists objected to her attempt in print---claiming that as a white person she has no right to write about what happens in these Aboriginal societies. She responded by saying that rape was everybody's business. To me, it sounded like the indigenous voices were saying that they were still colonized, a white woman's critique could become a part of the logic of colonial domination because it could be followed by the steps to "civilize" the native, and so on; whereas the anthropologist thought she was raising a universal gender question—saying that rape is everybody's business. This goes back to political problems that people like me don't face, which is the question of sovereignty of indigenous people. If you look at the question of sovereignty whether in Australia or in other settler colonial states, the sovereignty of indigenous peoples is a debated issue. It operates within the framework of law that the settlers have set up. I saw it in Australia again and again. You'd find someone, for instance, who is punished by Australian law. Yet, Aboriginal people would say, we have our own laws. When he comes out

of jail, we'll have to spear his leg because that's our punishment. But Australians courts would refuse that because under Australian law, one could not be punished twice for the same crime. This has always given rise to a very interesting debate about sovereignty. What's happened in more recent discussions is that this question of sovereignty has become more complicated. Australian theorists of indigenous sovereignty used to think of "graded sovereignty" for Aboriginal peoples. But the decolonial theorist dream of full sovereignty, it seems, as they otherwise consider "being colonized" as the permanent condition of the indigenous person. So, the decolonial position is based on dreams of full sovereignty.

If you ask me to become indigenous in a deep sense tomorrow, I can't do it. Because my life depends on technology. The paradox I often experience is that some people, who are against nuclear technology, will have no problem using an MRI machine that involves the use of nuclear technology. That's why I always go back to the question: what is your answer to feeding 8 billion people and to ensuring health for them? That for me is the crux of the problem. I'm very willing to give up on capitalism, Western hegemony, all those things, but this would be a practical problem. I see that capitalism defines the human condition; something that we all partake of. When I look at the Indian elections, for instance, which are coming up soon. One of the key issues is health: which party will designate more money for health care? That is why I think the decolonial position is very powerful because it's a more radical position; its rejection of the hegemon is more radical- "I don't want to have anything to do with you; I want a different epistemology." But, it doesn't pay enough attention to what defines the human condition which is our paradoxical and problematic success with expanding human beings life spans. If birds, snakes or lions could live longer, they would want to live longer. We somehow invented the technology for it!

NE: You've presented an intriguing perspective on the intersection of modern technology, colonial, trans-colonial contexts and a socio-political division. I was wondering if you could elaborate on the issue of transnational colonialism specially within the realm of data colonialism; as you know digital data is becoming a pressing matter.

DC: You need to move your imagination by scaling things up and down. When I gave you the example of the hysterectomy of the fishing women, you see how the planetary and the hegemonic dominant comes into the body. These issues emphasize the sovereignty of the person involved. The question of technology, what can governments do with the increasing technological capabilities, but also, what can local communities do? If you think of our

planetary problems as scalable, then you'll see the many scales on which you can intervene. The pandemic was a good case in point. China was initially not willing to share the information that WHO needed. Here is a case of a dilemma that arises in a global age: the clash between global management of public health and national sovereignty over data. The tension between resisting data collection to protect privacy and the collection of data we ourselves enable when we use technologies that connect us, technologies that you cannot escape (digitization of banks, for instance).

NE: Resisting, but also helping us because these modern technologies also make information available on an international scale.

DC: Yes, that is why you cannot see this technology as simply an enemy. You need to work with people with knowledge about this technology so they can tell you what to trust and what not to trust because these technologies also disseminate a lot of false information. I think we need to remove technology from this like/dislike binary. I see that as very damaging. But that's how the market works because they know if it is like/dislike, more people will hit the buttons. From Zuckerberg's point of view, this like/dislike algorithm makes it more viral. The tendency of this technology is to go more and more towards quick communication, for instance, Instagram, Tweeter…etc, where your words are limited—making it very difficult to have a nuanced argument. The need, from my point of view, is for nuanced arguments. Scaling is about becoming nuanced. On what scale can the decolonial work? It seems to me that on a planetary scale, it'd be very hard. But, may be on another scale because the indigenous position has shifted now. In the 1980s-90s, when I encountered the indigenous in Australia, I found that they had been familiar with Fanon since the 1960s and then they were thinking about how to attain full sovereignty. In the 80s and 90s, they were theorizing a different idea: graded sovereignty. Decolonials, today, have moved the rhetoric back to that of full sovereignty. Yet, do you think the white Americans or descendants of European Americans or white Australians will ever give up their countries? It will never happen. In practical life you have to work through the reality you have to live with. In the 80s and 90s, people were trying to accommodate to that reality. There was a very fine film made by an indigenous filmmaker, Tracy Moffatt, showing, for instance, a European foster mother and her aboriginal daughter; and here Homi Bhabha's idea of the "third space" was quite relevant; this was a space of intimacy fraught with difference. Derrida and Lacan were also very helpful in analyzing that space. Now the discourse has shifted to an ostensibly more radical position. But this radical position cannot be implemented on all scales. I will give you an example: my university has a gender studies program and recently there was a revolution in the

program because it was found that all white feminists had been taken off the syllabus; no Simone de Beauvoir or Betty Friedan. The syllabus pivoted on indigeneity, trans and queer literature. So, our faculty decided to convene to re-design the syllabus to get some of the white feminists back on it. We thus almost had a de-colonial program in gender studies. Yet, it split the faculty because it became too extreme. Honestly, I think that sometimes an extreme view is very helpful in giving a total perspective, giving the feeling that things could be different; another world is possible. But the possible world has to be able to get in conversation with a desirable and feasible world.

NE: With reference to your book *Provincializing Europe*, which I highly admire, what kind of 'other' world / alternative practices would you suggest?

DC: I was recently in Dhaka in Bangladesh and increasingly the infrastructure looks the same everywhere: buildings look the same (iron and steel), kitchens look the same. I read a book by Fernand Braudel where he bemoaned the fact that French kitchens are looking the same all over France, though they once used to look different. It is the same story in India. Yet, though the buildings are the same, the people who live in them are different and for them, the meaning of the buildings is different from one place to the other. This is precisely the problem of translation that I discussed in *Provincializing Europe*. It is not a matter of transitioning into Capitalism; it is a matter of being translated into Capitalism. When we translate, we betray the original. So, *Provincializing Europe* was a project of deliberately betraying Europe, such betrayal is also a part of your everyday life. That was generally the postcolonial position; Bhabha and Spivak were saying pretty much the same thing. Today's decolonial position, however, often has the rhetoric of wanting to go back to before the 1490s. I think that it is not possible to go back in history because we are formed by immediate and deep pasts. But there are also things to be learnt from the present, from indigenous societies. Before this consumerist society, every other human society was a more sustainable society, but they were incapable of extending human life at the level of the individual.

RE: Then, can we say that decolonial writers are torn between the two horns of a dilemma?

DC: This is how I view it. But they don't all say the same thing. For instance, Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, the Brazilian anthropologist, who is much more nuanced, much less extreme and very insightful, is a decolonial scholar. But, for him, decolonial outlook helps one to look at things from a different perspective. Mignolo, whom I am fond of personally and greatly admire as a

scholar, is much more programmatic. For him, it is not just about perspective; they have epistemological disobedience. Those things are sometimes productive, if playfully done, and sometimes thinking in extreme is good.

RE: Because it helps one imagine the 'alternative', the 'different' and the 'other'.

DC: Yes, and in a conversation, you need somebody who thinks in a totally different way from you. But, sometimes, it becomes so adversarial that one of the conversation partners says "I don't' want to speak to you'. For example, an indigenous scholar, a Māori New Zealand scholar, wrote once I say what I say because I am rootless and global (a bad word in her book), claiming that she was more rooted than I. Whether true or false, that became a personal judgment. It also overlooks the tensions, tragedies and the ironies that might mark the lives of globalized people like myself.

NE: Extreme radical positions can also lead to marginalizing other groups.

DC: Morally, what happens if you take an extreme position is that you hate the person who is closest to you. The enemy is always the enemy. One doesn't hate the enemy because he is always transparent; I know him. But, if someone who stands next to you disagrees with you, you hate that person. So, my Māori interlocutor became a little abusive, at least unkind. She doesn't know anything about my problems, anxieties or whatever I carry with me. Yet, because I confronted her with certain questions, she made that remark. I can mention that because it is in print. She felt confident enough to write that! All I pointed out in reply was that this was an unkind position. I don't feel comfortable when the rhetoric becomes one of enmity and moral judgment. Humanity as a whole is in a state of predicament and we all partake of that predicament in different ways, with different responsibilities and capabilities, we are not all equally responsible for it. But if the metanarrative is that someone else is the problem and I am the solution, then you don't see yourself as part of the predicament: that's a very different approach. In the 80s and 90s, Marxists held the same paradigm: the person intellectually closest to me is someone morally inferior for they are betraying me.

NE: But, would you give us examples of alternative practices to confront this current predicament in which we're entrapped?

DC: I don't know if you can call them practices. But, in terms of interpretation, I always emphasize being dialogical, engaging in conversations, at least warfare should not be the rhetoric in our discussions about our differences. Even with Europeans, European thought is deep inside us; it's molded us. I

mean who has not read some Marx, Hegel, Kant, or Voltaire? Everyone has. There is a wonderful book entitled, *No Exit*, by an Israeli scholar about Sartre and the middle east. It is about the Arab love of existentialism in the 50s and 60s and their disappointment in Sartre when he went to visit Israel. The Arabs did not want him to go, but the Jewish question was too important for him not to go. Moreover, think of the huge influence the middle east had on Camus and the influence he had on the middle east. So, how do you forget those questions? Derrida is a middle eastern Jewish Algerian. The world is entangled. This is not a denial of power that sometimes becomes brutal— like Israeli power today which is brutal in Gaza. My own position is not one of warfare with others. Instead of thinking of global solutions (saying that only if you became indigenous the world would be alright) what one can do is to make one's imagination scaler. Literature is good at scaling. You can show what happens to an individual, but you can also scale up the narrative. We do this scaling all the time. But, if, like decolonials, one says this is a solution for everyone, that will be a solution on paper-- like Gandhi's solution. When Gandhi said his preference would be to give up industries and go back to the village, people didn't want to listen to him, except for a few followers. But, at the same time, reading him, I ask myself the question: "wouldn't that help me be more sustainable?" and my answer is "yes"; but can I go back? No, I can't.

RE: One last question: You have referred to Karl Jaspers's notion of an "epochal consciousness," a "form of argumentation that seeks to make a conceptual place for thinking the human condition before committing to any particular version of practical or activist politics" In the light of the state of affairs worldwide, do you still maintain the optimism that such a space of agreement, if you wish, could be reached before human beings start arguing their differences? Are you optimistic?

DC: Jasper's "epochal consciousness" is the space we've just had, where we're basically trying to be rational. It's a space for thinking together. But, at the end of the conversation, we might be doing different kinds of things, politically. So, it's just a space for rational thinking when you are faced with a crisis both imminent and consuming.

Am I optimistic? No I am not; but I am hopeful. Hope is existential. Human beings cannot but be hopeful. I think we will have more technology, more technofixes thrown at us by powerful entities trying to make money out of the crisis, but we'll also have more crises, more migration, and more racism in different forms. It may become a more barbarian world. On the other end, we will also learn from these experiences. Human beings are a species that learns. What I find also amazing about human beings is that suddenly somebody

messianic, whom everyone wants to listen to, can come. They don't come frequently, though. But we are facing a deep crisis between wanting this life, and that we all like about it, and its unsustainability on this scale, given the number of humans and increasing consumerism. See, a country like America doesn't live off its own land; rather, it lives off the produce of many other lands. Here there is a difference between the land you live on and the land you live from. A poor country lives on its own land. The richer it becomes; it takes things from other lands. That's why it is said that if everybody wants to live like America, we'll need four planets because we'll run out of land. So, it is unsustainable; there is an agreement on that. But, how to move away from such a situation? What is non-negotiable? For humans, the questions of having longer life spans and having better health services at the moment seem non-negotiable. These do not come out of indigenous technology; they come out of everything that may otherwise be wrong about western technology. I'll repeat what I heard Isabelle Stengers, when I met her in France last year, say:' We're in transition; but we don't know to where.' Sorry that I cannot be more optimistic than that! But, I can say this: we won't improve the situation by being more antagonistic to one another. The world is full of rage, of angry people; and they have good reasons to be angry. But anger doesn't lead to good politics or good knowledge. Anger plunders one's judgment. So, this epochal space has become harder to construct. It is important to note that nobody represents the norm in public life. We all have our difference with whatever is the norm, and what we have to think about is: what in our difference with the norm that is is non-negotiable of us? For me as a Bengali, for instance, the poet Tagore is non-negotiable. Reading Tagore helps me to make sense of my life as a Bengali person. I can imagine a Pakistani person saying Rumi or Hafez is that for me. I see that poets capture this sense within us better than others because they have a very finely honed sense of difference. We also learn from one another. I have a Pakistani student who is working on the influence of Rumi on Iqbal. What I found interesting in my student's research is what I see as difference within proximity my Pakistani student and myself. We share so much. The more I delve into his world, the better I understand the peculiarities of my own. Generally speaking, human differences are small. Skin color, for instance, evolved only few thousand years ago. Initially we were all black, having come from Africa. I think that the joy of being human is that ability to explore differences within sameness.

So, yes, I was always attracted to the postcolonialism of the 1980s, '90s, and the 2000s, because it allowed for conversation. It was not a conversation stopper, whereas sometimes people holding extreme positions are not curious about others. When I think about the multilingual scene of language within India, I realize that there is no space there for claiming absolute or total

difference. I am not absolutely different from anyone else and can't be! For instance, I use Arabic words in distorted ways without knowing they are Arabic. In addition, the word Bangla, what my language calls itself, is Farsi. The very word by which I name my mother-tongue is not Bengali. That is why I say that my starting point is entanglement and it is within this fact of entanglement that one thinks of power, domination and hegemony. Some of the decolonial positions, however, are about cutting off, at least the rhetoric is one of cutting off entanglement. But this is not what I want. It's like that angry moment when a husband or a wife says I am divorcing you, I am walking out. It doesn't necessarily mean that they are really going to walk out. When I said take your coins back at the bazaar, that was my angry decolonial moment. It's like saying I can do without you. But the reality is I can't do without you!

NE & RE: Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us. It was indeed a pleasure. We appreciate the opportunity!

DC: You're welcome. It was wonderful to meet and talk to you all.