

# **Remembering and its Challenges to Thinking Decoloniality's Contribution to Highlighting the Importance of Memory**

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We are all the pieces of what we remember. We hold in ourselves the hopes and fears of those who love us. As long as there is love and memory, there is no true loss." - *Cassandra Clare, City of Heavenly Fire*

## **Introduction**

Since time immemorial, our ancestors - whose origins arose out of Africa and wandered across Asia towards what is now our archipelago (Lanera 2021) - always relied on memory. Through wisdom accumulated through life experiences - without benefit of the capacity to read and write or to theorize thoughts and concepts - they managed to survive the vicissitudes of life despite the most difficult circumstances they faced.

Discovering the various ways of moving across vast seas where land bridges no longer afforded convenience of travel, they relied on their memory in locating the placement of the stars of heaven that guided them in their perilous journeys. When they began to cultivate the land, the same placements of stars in heaven guided their decisions as to the seasons of land preparation and planting. To

show deep respect for their dead with the assurance that they will always be remembered, indigenous peoples conduct elaborate rituals as the dead are buried. Today in cultures such as Philippines (*Undas* or *Kalag-kalag*) and Mexico, (*Día de los Muertos*) are big celebrations.

Burial markers were given major importance because remembering their dead ancestors was of primordial importance; so when developers centuries later would inundate their burial sites for purposes of a dam, a revolt could ensue as to what took in the Cordilleras with the Chico Dam opposed by Macliing Dulag. Needing to find meaning in their existence they told stories and remembered how the narratives unfolded as their shamans chanted the exploits of their forebears some of which have survived as epics studied in universities today.

One may ask: why such emphasis on remembering? One possible answer that anthropology could provide is this: indigenous cultures placed a lot of emphasis on roots and kinship. And these roots can only be deep enough to provide nourishment of their valued kinship if they do not forget the past, if they make sure that remembering was an essential aspect of their thoughts. Remnants of this manner of thinking has persisted despite the erosion of the role of memory in the post-modern persons' perspective as remembering is linked to memory and to no forget is to gain wisdom essential in moving forward.

Popular adage and expressions allow us a glimpse into this including: George Santayana's best-known maxim - "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it;" Jose Rizal's "*Ang hindi marunong lumingon sa kanyang pinanggagalingan ay hindi makakarating sa kanyang patutunguhan.*"

This is certainly true in terms of popular culture, whether borrowed from the West or arising out of native aspirations. Thus:

- In the musical *Cats*, its signature song is entitled Memory which ends with this line: Let the memory live again! (by Trevor Nunn and Adrew Llyod Webber.) Barbra Streisand's hit record *Memory* composed by Marvin Frederick Hamlisch, Alan and Marilyn Keith Bergman).

A classic Tagalog song *Maala-ala Mo Kaya?* (by Constancio de Guzman) and the classic Cebuano song *Buhi sa Kanunay* are other examples.

Films, songs, plays, novels and other forms of art have romanticized memory. Many times the song and the films have the same titles as in: *An Affair to Remember, The Memory of You, A Walk to Remember, Forget me Not, Remember When, Try to Remember that kind of September, hard to Forget*. Hundreds of novels have the word Memory and Remembering in their titles including Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* (1913-1927), also known by a more literal translation of its French title, *In Search of Lost Time*.

It cannot be denied that parts of our indigenous roots persist in our imagination which is why there are aspects of this original identity that are break out when we sing, celebrate rituals or pass on wisdom especially those moments when we privilege intuition, imagination, feelings and dreams. Integral to dreams is the desire to be free. Which is why in real life... revolutionaries, especially foot soldiers e.g. the Moro rebel or the Lumad NPA take up arms to avenge the brutalities committed against their families, as they will always remember such injustices. In fiction, many movies deal with vengeance as in (*John Wick, V for Vendetta, Kill Bill, Unforgiven, Payback, Braveheart, True Grit, Carrie and Death Wish*).

These are realities encased in deep emotions and emotions are strongly interlinked to memory. As Diderot wrote: "We are instruments endowed with feeling and memory. There is only one substance in the universe, in man and in the animals. (Stewart and Kemp 1943: 25). Among believers of faith traditions, remembrance is key to worship. For Christians, a key moment both in the narrative of Jesus life which continues to remain present in the lives of those practice who their faith today is that chronicled in one of the Gospels. And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me (Luke 22:19).

And our everyday lives, what would it be without anniversaries and jubilees?

## Understanding Memory

Memory is very much part of humanity's mythologies. In one Greek myth, we are told in our high school days that the goddess of memory, Mnemosyne, the daughter of Uranus and Gaea, slept with Zeus for nine consecutive nights, thereby begetting the nine Muses

How are we to understand Memory or Remembrance? One way to deal with memory is to pursue the question – what it is to remember. The philosopher Lacey posits:

“To remember an event ... we must have experienced it, and so perhaps remembering it involves remembering the experiencing of it, which involves somehow reproducing it, and how could we reproduce it except by an image. This may be where images are important for memory, but the image still need not constitute the memory... The most we can say seems to be that remembering an experience must include having some sort of an image which can be regarded as corresponding to it to some degree. ( Lacey 1996: 550).

Memory also “refers to the system, or systems, by which the mind registers, stores, and retrieves information for the purpose of optimizing future action. Memory can be divided into short-term and long-term, with long-term memory further divided into episodic and semantic.” (Perina 2018: 2). To add: “Remembering is a fundamental cognitive process, which is involved in virtually all other important cognitive functions, such as reasoning, perception, problem solving, and speech.” (Bernecker and Boart 2018).

How do we manage to keep our beliefs which result from stories that we hear from friends and other sources about our lives and other realities of the world around us apart from whatever we have learned by reading books through the years? “The natural answer is: by memory. It is not too hard to understand that memory allows us to retain information. It is harder to understand exactly how memory allows us to retain knowledge and reasons for our beliefs.

Learning is largely a matter of acquiring reasons for changing views.” (Frise 2017: 3).

We are often perplexed with the complexities of memories. This is not surprising as “(m)emory is mysterious, even miraculous: organic brain matter somehow re-arranges itself to encode experiences, facts, and procedures. The most mysterious and miraculous type of memory is prospective memory, or ‘remembering to remember’.” (Bernecker and Michaelian 2015: 2)

We oftentimes take memory for granted as an everyday reality in our lives. Not until something tragic occurs, especially the onset of alzheimer’s disease or dementia, when a person can no longer remember. It is as if the person has died even as he/she is still breathing. A psychiatrist remembers:

I am often asked to assess people with dementia, making me all too aware of the importance of memory to daily life. To live without memory is to live in a perpetual present, without past and without future, going through the same thoughts, the same questions, the same fears, over and over and over again. Without any memory at all, it would be impossible to: speak, read, learn, find one’s way, make decisions, identify or use objects, cook, wash, dress, and develop and maintain human relationships. More fundamentally, it would be impossible to know anything, and therefore to reason—reasoning being the process of extracting knowledge out of knowledge. (Bernecker and Michaelian 2015: 4)

If there is no memory, “it would be impossible to build upon anything or engage in any form of sustained goal-directed activity;” neither would there “be art or science, no craft or culture... and no meaning either.” (Bernecker and Michaelian 2015: 5). When we are lonely, feeling disconnected and life has become meaningless, we often resort to nostalgia and sentimentality of the past. This was certainly true for many people during this pandemic for “(r)evisting the past can lend us much needed context, perspective, and direction, reminding and reassuring us that our life is not as banal as it might

seem, that it is rooted in a narrative, and that there have been...meaningful moments and memories.” (Ibid).

But if we consider today’s Decision-Making Processes, does memory prominently figure in such processes in both the economic and political realms of our society? Today, especially in the corridors of power that is in corporate board rooms and political institutions like our local and national legislative and executive branches of government, as well as in academic and media institutions, very few of our decisions are based on remembering and/or tapping into our memory.

When we gather together to think how to solve social and ecological issues, how do we go about discussing the various strategies in responding to these. Like the indigenous peoples of yore, do we seek the counsel of the elders who presumably are the ones who have the repository of wisdom as much as we raise our eyes to the heavens to seek help from the higher powers? Are these decisions guided as we remember that kinship demands that when decisions are made these are for the good of all, and not just to benefit a few? But look at how our society operate these days in regard to who are consulted? Of course those with the power as constituted by those with capital either political, economic social or symbolic capital. And is the common good the main criteria, or to further the accumulation of power?

What could be behind this? Could one possible way to explain this is to see how memory is factored in our decision-making processes? We are a people who seem to have suffered a collective alzheimer’s disease for it is often said that Filipinos have such short memory. Just a few years after we ended the Spanish colonial regime and established the first democratic Republic in Asia, we then succumbed to the lure of another colonial power. Just a few years after World War II we hardly remember the atrocities and brutalities committed the soldiers of the Japanese Imperial Army.

And just a few years after the end of the Marcos dictatorship that drove the dictator, his family and cronies to exile, then we almost elect his son to be Vice-President and then allow his burial at *Libingan*

*ng mga Bayani*, just a few years after EDSA. And today, we are back to an authoritarian government with a license to kill its own citizens.

What might have happened that for most of us in this society including so-called educated class in society today or public intellectuals: have lost this capacity to remember? Might our exposure to colonial rule have something to do with this, considering that colonial empires always aim to fragment peoples, because as we know united we stand, divided we fall?<sup>1</sup>

### **Remnants of Colonialism and the Decoloniality Discourse**

Until today, we face the remnants of colonialism and our Western-oriented system of education, unfortunately, has perpetuated this. A decolonial discourse is then appropriated to help us understand this phenomenon. By dealing with decoloniality, we might be able to shed light on how come memory has not figured very well in forms of thinking these days.

From an epistemic perspective, what is this decoloniality discourse all about? We are indebted to two Latin American theorists in advancing this discourse, namely Anibal Quijano (from Peru) and Walter Migdolo (Brazil). They posit that decoloniality arose not just from a greater appreciation of the Western tradition of wisdom-making, but also from the knowledge production and reproduction of the East (especially Chinese and Hindu philosophies) and those arising out of the Latin American and African continents. One can tell through Quijano's explanation of decoloniality's goals.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Whether the powers are colonial or neo-colonial, our history has experienced the powers-that-be pitting us with each other (as in we become part of *sabong*) e.g. Visayan forces sent to fight in the Moro wars in Mindanao, Marcos' Ilokano soldiers fought the Moro and NPA rebels in the south. Could it be that the colonial powers and later the native elite that would find themselves in positions of power would make sure we do not remember for the dangerous memory of what our ancestors did to resist oppression can cause new movements of resistance?

<sup>2</sup> Quijano summarizes the goals of decoloniality thus: "to recognize that the instrumentalization of reason by the colonial matrix of power produced distorted paradigms of knowledge and spoiled the liberating promises of modernity, and by that recognition, realize the destruction of global coloniality of power." (Mignolo 2007: 452). This involves resisting coloniality manifested in racialized and gendered socioeconomic and political stratification. Quijano introduced the concept of

Some of the famous names who embodied visions constitutive of decoloniality include Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Mandela and Nyerere. On the other hand, mass movements that manifested decoloniality's praxis include the Zapatistas of Mexico, indigenous movements for autonomy in various parts of the world, peasant and workers' movements across the Third World e.g. the Landless Workers Movement in Brazil.

Indigenous and local scholars have helped built upon decolonial theory by proposing Critical Indigenous Methodologies for research e.g. the Andean Indigenous thinkers, who coined the term *vincularidad*. These theorists highlight the connection between politics or decoloniality and the production of knowledge—between programmatic and analytics - and thus critique capitalist modernity, liberal democracy, and individualism. This makes decoloniality “both a political and epistemic project” (Mignolo 2011: xxiv-xxiv).

We do not really have the time to dwell into the details of decoloniality except to lay down some of the general features as to why this theoretical frame might help cement the proposition that indeed remembering and thinking are directly intertwined. This is of course contrary to some philosophical presuppositions with a skeptical view of remembering as having epistemic value in philosophy.

Migdolo helps explain this discourse:

Decoloniality or decolonialism is a school of thought used principally by an emerging Latin American movement which focuses on untangling the production of knowledge from what they claim is a primarily Eurocentric episteme.. It critiques the perceived universality of Western knowledge and the superiority of Western culture.. Decolonial perspectives see this hegemony <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hegemony> as

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decoloniality in the context of the rise of the promises of modernity given the realities of coloniality.

the basis of Western knowledge. The decolonial movement include diverse forms of critical theory, articulated by pluriversal forms of liberatory thinking that arise out of distinct situations. In its academic forms, it analyzes class distinctions, ethnic studies, gender studies and area studies which have been described as consisting of analytic (in the sense of semiotics) and practical 'options confronting and delinking from ... the colonial matrix of power' or from a 'matrix of modernity' rooted in colonialism. It considers colonialism 'the underlying logic of the foundation and unfolding of Western civilization from the Renaissance to today,' although this foundational interconnectedness is often downplayed." (Mignolo 2011:2).

Decoloniality is not synonymous with decolonization which refers to the decolonization of the Americas (as well as the Philippines) from the fifteenth century which originated from Castille and Portugal with Christianity as a tool of conquest and colonization of the Americas, expanding to Asia (Macao, the Philippines and Taiwan). This year, of course, we are celebrating the quintcentennial beginnings of this colonization in our islands. Spaniards and Portuguese were later followed by other Europeans including the Dutch, French and British and much later the US. Privileging the discourse linked to a "a civilizational rhetoric (in the sense of persuasive discourses) of salvation being the West" owing to its connection to Christianity as a tool of colonization, the West then thought of itself as the savior while the rest of the world needed salvation. (Migdolo 2017: 3) .

Salvation can be appropriated beyond its religious meaning going back 500 years ago referring to conversion to Christianity, for today "salvation has several designs, all co-existing today," apart from "salvation by conversion to Christianity," it includes "salvation by progress and civilization, salvation by development and modernization, salvation by global market democracy (e.g. neoliberalism).

Thus, the rhetoric of modernity is the constant updating of the rhetoric of salvation hiding the logic of coloniality – war, destruction, racism, sexism, inequalities, injustice, etc." (Ibid). Today, this is the

whole scenario of Western imperialism and globalization which have only perpetuated poverty, marginalization and inequalities. For Quijano, “this colonial matrix or coloniaity of of power produced social discrimination eventually variously codified as racial, ethnic, anthropological or national according to specific historic, social, and geographic contexts” (Quijano 2007: 168). It is interesting to note that one of the first international event that began to advance some ideas that later constitute elements of decoloniality arose in Asia.<sup>3</sup>

Two simultaneous movements arose out of this colonial matrix of power, namely “the building itself as a civilizational project and destroying other civilizations. That means, silencing, disavowing, racializing in a vast vocabulary from barbarians, to primitives, from communists to terrorists.” (Migdolo 2017: 4). Unfortunately, this involved processes of silencing the native population. Missionaries along with other colonizers then got busy “to rebuild knowledge they destroyed, officers of the monarchic State to establish governance following their European models, and merchants who built a capitalist economy over the destroyed and silenced economy of communal reciprocity;” this silencing also involved “disavowing, shattering down, demonizing co-existing ways of knowing, sensing, believing and living/being in the world.” (Ibid)

What helped legitimized this was the introduction of Christian theology and the transplant of the Renaissance university to the New World. An acculturation process was then put in place as “Christians managed to install, by military force, institutional settlements, actors in those institutions and languages (Spanish and Portuguese grounded in Greek and Latin), their world-sense and world-view (cosmo-sense and cosmo-vision) over the co-existing ones” (Migdolo 2017: 6). We know, of course that this long historical narrative continues to persist today with the West’s assertion of privileges and superiority.

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<sup>3</sup> With regard to its origins: Quijano posits: “Decolonization first appeared as initiatives from various sources including Bandung Conference, of 1955 lead by Sukarno and the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement, in 1961, that gathered the Third World states during the Cold War between the First and the Second World. These movements could serve as founding foundations of a decolonial perspective.” (Quijano 2007: 168).

Various terms have arisen to label decoloniality including: a form of "epistemic disobedience" (Mignolo 2011: 122-123), "epistemic de-linking" (Mignolo 2007: 450), and "epistemic reconstruction" (Quijano 2007: 176). As such, various social movements can be covered under this category which are in search of a "new humanity" (Mignolo 2011: 52) or for "social liberation from all power organized as inequality, discrimination, exploitation, and domination" (Quijano 2007: 178). Requiring an epistemic reconstruction, this involves accepting the fact that the decolonization during the Cold War which involved liberation struggles in the Third World only led to the formation of nation-states claiming sovereignty but still constituted by an elite. By the 1990s, it was clear that decolonization has failed in most nations. This can be gleaned from the persistence of the patterns of colonial power as it is sustained both internally and vis-à-vis global structures.

The closing of the Cold War and the opening of neoliberal global designs in the 1990s has shifted to today's "right-wing nationalisms built on the darker side of neoliberal globalism, and so-called progressive states"...which ..."advance a twenty-first-century capitalism grounded in a politics and economy of extractivism that advances the destruction of lands-beings-knowledges, what many understand as Mother Earth." (Migdolo and Walsh 2018: 6). Even as there are differences in the rhetoric and politics of right-wing nationalism, neoliberal globalism, and progressivisms, all of them reinforce coloniality.

A decolonial perspective fosters relationality. This involves "the ways that different local histories and embodied conceptions and practices of decoloniality, including our own, can enter into conversations and build understandings that both cross geopolitical locations and colonial differences, and contest the totalizing claims and political-epistemic violence of modernity." (Ibid: 2). In the native American appropriation, the term used is *vincularidad* which is "the awareness of the integral relation and interdependence amongst all living organisms (in which humans are only a part) with territory or land and the cosmos. It is a relation and interdependence in search of balance and harmony of life in the planet." (Ibid).

More than just resistance, a decolonial political praxis involves re-existence, understood as “the redefining and re-signifying of life in conditions of dignity. It is the resurgence and insurgence of re-existence today that open and engage venues and paths of decolonial conviviality, venues and paths that take us beyond, while at the same time undoing, the singularity and linearity of the West” (Ibid:3)

### **Critique of Dominance of Western Philosophy**

Lending its voice to the growing critique of the dominance of Western philosophy, decoloniality’s proposition is “to advance the undoing of Eurocentrism’s totalizing claim and frame, including the Eurocentric legacies incarnated in U.S.-centrism and perpetuated in the Western geopolitics of knowledge. (Ibid: 2). For there is a need “to interrupt the idea of dislocated, disembodied, and disengaged abstraction, and to disobey the universal signifier that is the rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality, and the West’s global model.” (Migdolo and Walsh 2018: 3).

Western metaphysics notion of space and time are being questioned from many sides today, including the one being presented by the decolonial lens which posits the need for a pluriversal and interspersal view. This involves opening up “coexisting temporalities kept hostage by the Western idea of time and the belief that there is one single temporality: Western-imagined fictional temporality. Moreover, it connects and brings together in relation—as both pluri- and interspersals—local histories, subjectivities, knowledges, narratives, and struggles against the modern/colonial order.” (Ibid). An aberration arises out of this namely that we are to pretend that the rest of the world has to follow their lead (and the US) because their centrism is considered the more superior.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Migdolo’s arguments regarding this aberration: “The problem with Eurocentrism is not the right Europeans had/have (and then passed on to the US) to be Euro-centric. The problem is the aberration. Eurocentrism for me is tantamount with Western Civilization, and the aberration is common to both configurations. The aberration is to pretend that the rest of the world has to follow their lead (and the US) because their centrism is the ‘best’. Clearly an aberration, and we are all on the planet paying the consequences. There is need to identify this aberration: the pretense that Europe has achieved the perfect and happy stage of humanity and everybody else has to bend to it. Hence, the uni-linear concept of time, and the universal fictions invented to sustain that aberration; second, the specific way that decolonial thinking and

How do we distinguish decoloniality from postcolonialism and even post-modernism. We do not have time to deal with this for the moment except to indicate that post-colonialism mainly arose in reaction to colonialism arising out of mainly the historical narratives of the black peoples in the West, India and Palestine in more recent years compared to decoloniality's critique of colonialism which goes back to the 15th-16<sup>th</sup> century arising out of the empires of Spain and Portugal. Post-colonialism's discourse arose mainly out of academic pursuits while decoloniality is from theory and praxis, the academic interfacing grounded action.<sup>5</sup>

## Other Voices of Critique

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analytic contributes to the growing dismantling of the Eurocentric/US aberration, is by conceiving and analyzing the formation, transformation and management of the colonial matrix of power. The colonial matrix of power has been the tool, the instrument to enact the aberration; by analyzing the consequences, yesterday and today, of the aberration devaluing, destroying, expropriating, killing, marginalizing everyone who doesn't comply with the aberration, and more important, being attentive to decolonial-oriented responses all over the world, including inside Europe and the US." (Migdolo 2017: 5).

<sup>5</sup> Migdolo provides tis explanation to delineate decoloniality from postcolonialism and even post-modernism. . "Postcolonialism criticism and theory - which arose mainly as a project of scholarly transformation within the adademy - is often mainstreamed into general oppositional practices by marginalized groups including people of color and ethnic groups, as well as Third World intellectuals. This arose out of the 'analysis of colonial expansion and decolonization, in contexts such as Algeria, the 19th-century United States, and 19th-century Brazil (Mignolo 2007: 87). Main examples are those of Said (Orientalism), Fanon, Spivack and Bhabha). What distinguishes 'post' from 'de'-colonial are the historical and conceptual aspects. Both post-colonialism and decoloniality have the history of Western colonialism in common. But while post-colonialism is based on the Indian and Palestinian experiences, they both are consequences of the enlightenment in 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe. While for us, the historical experiences are the colonization of America and the European Renaissance. That in what concerns the historical differences between the 'post-' and the 'de-'. Conceptually, the 'post' keeps you trapped in unipolar time conceptions. As far as for Western (since the Renaissance) cosmology "time" is one, singular and universal, you have no way out: you are trapped in a universal time that is owned by a particular civilization. ...Decoloniality instead opens up to the multiple times of cultures and civilizations upon which Western civilisations impose its conceptualization of time." (Migdolo 2017: 7).

Up till today, critique of Western philosophy has persisted. Such a critiquing is not tantamount to rejecting Western thought, but neither can we succumb to the blind acceptance which could lead to a full surrender to North Atlantic fictions. Besides, (w)ithin Western thought itself, there have always been internal critiques, Eurocentric critiques of Eurocentrism, so to speak; e.g. Bartolomé de las Casas in the sixteenth century and Karl Marx in the nineteenth century are clear examples.” (Migdolo and Walsh 2018: 6).

I refer to two main philosophers and their critique, namely Baggini and Van Norden. Despite the fact that the origins of Indian, Chinese and ancient Greek philosophy, as well as Buddhism, can all be traced back to a period of roughly 300 years, beginning in the 8th century BC and that these “early philosophies have shaped the different ways people worship, live and think about the big questions that concern us all,” such philosophical traditions have often been ignored by Western philosophy. (Baggini 2018: 1). Despite the rich philosophical traditions when it comes to dealing with canonical texts, it is the western philosophy that is privileged and thus studied in the academe, as this is “presented as the universal philosophy, the ultimate inquiry into human understanding.” (Ibid). If a professor is interested in a comparative philosophy involving various philosophical traditions, this is not considered philosophical studies but instead fall under anthropology or cultural studies.

The fact is that there is a world of difference between the Western (of the North) vis-à-vis Eastern (of the South) mindset. Take the example of time. In the West, time is considered

linear, ordered into past, present and future and days are organized by the progression of the clock, in the short to medium term by calendars and diaries, history by timelines stretching back over millennia;” but on the other hand, the conceptions of a “sense of past, present and future, but for much of human history this has been underpinned by a more fundamental sense of time as cyclical. The past is also the future, the future is also the past, the beginning also the end... The dominance of linear time fits in with an eschatological worldview – a

consequence of viewing time from a predominantly Christian/western sense. in which all of human history is building up to a final judgment – which posits that “when God created the world, he began a story with a beginning, a middle and an end.” (Ibid: 3).

Other non-Western cultures (e.g. Mayans, Incans, Hopis) have a different notion which is cyclical, thus they believe that the beginning and the end are and have always been the same. The same perspective of time is also shared in Asian societies such as those of India and East Asia (especially Taoism) and even some aspects of Islamic thought. In Chinese thought, wisdom and truth are timeless; to learn does not require moving forward but to hold on to what already have been learned. “Thinking of time cyclically especially made sense in pre-modern societies, where there were few innovations across generations and people lived very similar lives to those of their grandparents, their great-grandparents and going back many generations...Meaning could therefore only be found in embracing the cycle of life and death and playing your part in it as best you could.” (ibid: 4).

More important than the distinction between linear or cyclical time is whether time is separated from or intimately connected to place. This is clear in regard to how death is dealt with. In the West, a dead person is perceived to have expired with the body as locus and what happens then is irrelevant. But for indigenous peoples, the bodily death only means moving on to another location. There is also the question of the universal versus the particular. Western philosophy tends to highlight what is universal. In its pursuit of objectivity, Western philosophy puts no premium on the particular or the specifically located, unlike the indigenous people who hold intimate associations with those immediate interconnected with them. There are then very important implications for indigenous communities.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For most pre-modern societies as with the Maoris in New Zealand or the aborigines in Australia, what accounts for the importance of time and space is what provides the key underpinning of their indigenous thought which is kinship, “the connectedness between humanity, between one another, between the natural environment”. (Ibid: 5). The emphasis on connectedness and place leads to a way of thinking that runs counter to the abstract universalism developed to a certain extent in all the great written traditions of philosophy. Thus the indigenous principle is one

In the end, we can only agree with what Baggini posits:

“The different ways in which philosophical traditions have conceived time turn out to be far from mere metaphysical curiosities. They shape the way we think about both our temporal place in history and our relation to the physical places in which we live. It provides one of the easiest and clearest examples of how borrowing another way of thinking can bring a fresh perspective to our world. Sometimes, simply by changing the frame, the whole picture can look very different.” (Ibid: 7).

On the other hand Van Norden posits that “Western Philosophy is racist.” He further claims that “mainstream philosophy ... is narrow-minded, unimaginative, and even xenophobic. But how else can we explain the fact that the rich philosophical traditions of China, India, , Africa, and the Indigenous peoples of the Americas are completely ignored by almost all philosophy departments in both Europe and the English-speaking world?” (VanNorden 2017b: 3).

Arguing step by step, Van Norden posits that:

- **“The rich philosophical traditions of China, India, Africa, and the Indigenous peoples of the Americas are completely ignored by almost all philosophy departments in both Europe and the English-speaking world.”**
- **Western philosophy used to be more open-minded and cosmopolitan, as many philosophers especially including Leibniz, Wolff, and Francois Quesnay, ... took Chinese philosophy seriously.**
- **Kant, who was a Eurocentric xenophobe and racist, is the most important figure in Western philosophy since the 18th century, and therefore his work has had a formative influence on all Western philosophy since then. He was also biased against women and the blind. Heidegger,**

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where they are guided to live according to the available specific resources needed to respond to their needs within the specific time and place and that they perform responsibilities dictated by that specific location.

**Derrida and Moore were xenophobe and racist. However, he qualifies that it is not his intention to disparage Western philosophy.<sup>7</sup>  
(Van Nordeen 2017a: 3-5)**

**Not only are Chinese philosophy, Indian philosophy, African philosophy, and Indigenous philosophy ignored in mainstream contemporary Anglo-American philosophy, but many forms of philosophy that are even deeply influenced by the Greco-Roman tradition are also ignored in by most Philosophy academic departments, including African-American, Christian, feminist, Islamic, Jewish, Latin American, and LGBTQ philosophies. What is required is what Van Norden refers to as "borderlessness in philosophy," which requires a borderless philosophy. (Ibid: 4.**

Why have Latin America, Africa and Asia been excluded from the philosophical canon? One explanation is the confluence of two interrelated factors. On the one hand, defenders of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) "consciously rewrote the history of philosophy to make it appear that his critical idealism was the culmination toward which all earlier philosophy was groping, more or less successfully." (Van Norden 2017b: 5) On the other hand, European intellectuals held on to the belief of white racial superiority which asserted that non-Caucasians did not have the capacity to develop philosophy. A consequence was then their exclusion from the canon.<sup>8</sup> There are, however, some philosophers will grudgingly state

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**<sup>7</sup> Van Noren explains: But "I am not saying that mainstream Anglo-European philosophy is bad and all other philosophy is good... My goal is to broaden philosophy by tearing down barriers, not to narrow it by building new ones. To do this is to be more faithful to the ideals that motivate the best philosophy in every culture. Contemporary philosophy in the West has lost this perspective. In order to grow intellectually, to attract an increasingly diverse student body, and to remain culturally relevant, philosophy must recover its original cosmopolitan ideal." (Van Noren 2017b: 3).**

<sup>8</sup> This led to the exclusion of non-European philosophy from the canon based on a decision "based not on a reasoned argument, but rather on polemical considerations involving the pro-Kantian faction in European philosophy, as well as views about race that are both scientifically unsound and morally heinous." (Van Norden 2017b: 5). Some of their pejorative beliefs: the Hindus are incapable of abstract concepts, Negroes are good only to be educated to become servants,

China and India might have their philosophy but these pale in comparison with those of Europe. Such disparaging comments was critiqued by Said's *Orientalism*.<sup>9</sup>

A post-colonial but also decolonial orientation characterizes African philosophy that have arisen out of the continent's complex history of the field which makes this philosophy not just an academic discipline.

A political charge is at the heart of African philosophy, because it arose from a criticism of the dehumanizing tendencies of European culture which, over the past centuries, found expression in slavery, colonial expansionism, and the still very present racial discrimination. Like the critical philosophy of race and postcolonial theory, African philosophy maintains its acute social awareness and a readiness for political militancy. At the same time, African philosophy transcends political statements and emancipatory rhetoric both in its critical approach and in its own specific content. In the course of its prolonged struggle for existence, it has subjected the very pillars of European intellectual achievements to a radical and rigorous critique. (Rettova 2016: 1)

Constituted largely to oppose a Eurocentric philosophical tradition, in its current form it is as much European as it is African thought but often done from an essentialist context. "This essentialist

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Indigenous people are uneducable and lazy. And that only the race of the whites contains all the talents and motives to be good philosophers. (Ibid: 6-8).

<sup>9</sup> Van Norden makes this commentary: "The sad reality is that comments such as those by Kant, Heidegger, Derrida, Moore, Scalia and others are manifestations of what Edward W Said labelled 'Orientalism' in his eponymous book of 1979: the view that everything from Egypt to Japan is essentially the same, and is the polar opposite of the West: 'The Oriental is irrational, depraved (fallen), childlike, "different"; thus the European is rational, virtuous, mature, "normal".' Those under the influence of Orientalism do not need to really read Chinese (or other non-European) texts or take their arguments seriously, because they come pre-interpreted: "Orientals" for all practical purposes were a Platonic essence, which any Orientalist (or ruler of Orientals) might examine, understand, and expose.'" (Van Norden 2017b: 5).

thinking remains part of the heritage of African philosophy and many African and Africanist philosophers have exerted themselves in challenging such clear-cut binaries. Yet, the undeniable asset of this history lies in the fact that African philosophy has, in this convoluted search for its own definition and identity, questioned all the hitherto largely unquestioned assumptions of European philosophy, or indeed philosophy as such, both as an intellectual practice and as a scholarly discipline." (Ibid: 2).

Among the items that African philosophy would question in asserting its voice include: the nature of European philosophy, the idea of philosophy itself as a universal human activity and the self-image of philosophy as a prejudice-free, ahistorical form of knowledge. While questioning its own origins, it also questions the origins of European philosophy, thus reversing the historical primacy of philosophical discourse. Consequently, of locating the origins of philosophical thought in Greece, it shifts this to Ancient Egypt, another civilization on the border of the Mediterranean sea like the Ancient Greece but rooted on African soil. (Ibid). There are also other elements which are questioned.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> There are other elements which are questions: a) In terms of form, African philosophy questions the very canons of European philosophy: not only the canonical figures of European philosophical discourse are inspected but also the genres of philosophy. African philosophy brings new genres into the arena of philosophical debates. In analysing proverbs or poems it explores the way literature mediates experience and our conceptualization of it. In questioning the role of writing and of orality in philosophical thinking, African philosophy rediscovers for philosophy the magic of the spoken word . b) In terms of methods of philosophy. It questions the exclusive characterization of philosophy as *θεωρία* (*theoria*) and additionally explores philosophies embedded in life practices. It studies the embodiment of philosophical ideas in life activities as well as their expressions in various forms of material culture. It suggests social practice and art as ways *to do philosophy*. It reinterprets the fundamental epistemological, ontological, and axiological tenets of Western philosophy. It asks whether, instead of the cool and distanced knowledge of an object by a subject, knowledge can be achieved through embodiment and passion; whether it is possible to *dance the Other* (Senghor 1995); to *become the Other*, c) African philosophy presents a radical questioning that the discipline of philosophy urgently needs: a questioning of humanity which is sensitive to differences in culture, religion, politics, and language. Such examination cannot remain without a thorough exploration of its contexts and channels of expression. d) From this consideration emerge new fields of study of the discipline, staked out in this volume, in particular in the intersections between history and philosophy, philosophy and politics, and philosophy and literature and e) In terms of revealing the political roots and the

## Epistemology of Memory

We can now look into how Western philosophy has theorized on memory, specifically the epistemology of memory. We already indicated that memory has important cognitive functions, such as reasoning, perception, problem solving, and speech. Because memory is a central component of the mind, it is not surprising that theorizing about memory is as old as philosophy itself. One can readily assume that memory occupies an important place in philosophy as it plays a central role not just in the history of philosophy but also in philosophy of mind, epistemology, and ethics.

Why endorse the epistemic theory of memory? A main reason is that it fits our ordinary uses of “remembers” and “knows” (Frise 2017: 3) He further posits: “Remembering requires knowing just in case all of the following are true: remembering requires believing, remembering requires justification and remembering requires non-accidental truth. And we can argue, one at a time, that remembering does indeed have these requirements; but...” a premise is usable in justifying inference only if believed.... remembering requires believing.” (Ibid: 6).

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But many early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century epistemologists worried about this assumption. Why believe memory has an important, or even any, epistemic role? Since this question may invite skepticism, call it a skeptical question for simplicity. Satisfactorily answering this sort of skeptical question about memory is a fundamental epistemological problem.... If memory has no epistemic role, then we have no reason to believe just about anything we ever learned, or think we learned, at any time in the past.

What is more, memory appears to be involved not just in our retaining what we have learned, but in our very learning. Without memory there is no understanding of what is testified. If memory has no epistemic role, then it is hard to see how we could even learn from

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pragmatic nurturing grounds of traditions of philosophy as well as specific philosophical systems of beliefs: African philosophy questions the political and economic motifs behind the presumably disinterested and unbiased philosophical discourse. (Rettova 2016: 4-9).

testimony in the *present*. Memory seems similarly involved in intuition, reasoning, introspection and perception. Accordingly, it is hard to see how we could learn from those sources if memory plays no epistemic role. (Ibid: 8). That most of our knowledge is in memory at any particular time is a given. What is perhaps surprising, however, is the degree to which even our current conscious knowledge typically depends on memory..... (Senor 2009: 1)

The nature of memory was hotly debated in the early modern period by British empiricists David Hume and John Locke, as well as by Bertrand Russell. The Scottish Common Sense Realist Thomas Reid then critiqued all of them. There were, however, antecedents:

Traditionally, philosophers have likened memory to a storehouse or a recording device. In the *Theaetetus*, Plato claims that the mind is analogous to a wax tablet. To perceive is to make an impression on the tablet, leaving behind an exact image or representation of what was perceived. Memory keeps the images and forgetting is a matter of losing them. In his *Confessions*, Augustine says perception deposits images of objects into the storehouse of memory and the process of recalling is the process of retrieving these deposits. (Frise 2017: 2).

Locke and Hume tell much the same story, as do many other philosophers up through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Locke wondered about memory and its connection to the self. Locke believed that a continuity of consciousness and memory establish a "self" over time. Such views were debunked as psychology weighed in with new research suggesting that the relationship between memory and the self is even more complicated than that. (Hernecker and Michaelian 2017)

It was the field of psychology that also challenged the early philosophical theorizing on memory.

"During the 20<sup>th</sup> century psychologists generally abandoned the storehouse), though still thinking that memory stores information. They believe human memory processing is much more complicated than

the mere depositing of items and later withdrawing them. Memory selectively stores information, expands part of it, combines it with background information and adds data from the context, in which the subject later retrieves the information. In other words, memory generally alters significantly what enters it. As a result, recollecting is not the retrieving, but rather the generating of representations of the past. Recollecting actually generates new beliefs about the past.” (Frise 2)

An aspect of the epistemology of memory would be the various categories. However, owing to time and space limitations, this cannot be dealt with here.<sup>11</sup>

Psychologists argues that memory and self can come apart. In schizophrenia and other dementias, someone can have memories but not take them to be their own. On the other hand, Alzheimer’s patients without much remaining memory for events can still have a conviction that Alzheimer’s is happening to them.

Owing to limitation of time, I cannot anymore go into a deep discussion on the merits of the theorizing of Hume, Locke and Russell which fall under the category of “Representational Theory of Memory” (or RTM)” as well as the critique made of their theories made by the Scottish philosopher, Reid who instead proposed a Direct Theory of Memory (the DTM).

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<sup>11</sup> Frise provides some explanation on these different categories of memory: “Two memory systems that are important to distinguish are *declarative* memory and *procedural* memory. Declarative memory is memory of information and events. Procedural memory is memory for skills and of how to perform actions. Different parts of the brain house, on the one hand, our data about bicycle riding and our riding. Declarative memory divides into *semantic* (or propositional) memory and *episodic* (or experiential) memory. Semantic memory is memory for propositions and episodic memory is memory for events, one has experienced. To see this distinction, consider how these types of memory can come apart. I can remember that I was born in a hospital, but (mercifully) I cannot remember being born in a hospital. (Frise 2017: 4)

Gaps in Western Theorizing of Memory. One can certainly conclude that there have been gaps in the Western theorizing of memory. Only by interfacing philosophy with psychology and anthropology that we can gain a much more enlightened philosophical insight into memory.

For even Reid who has made an indepth study of the epistemology of memory cannot provide a “full-blown analysis of memory” even as he “points to certain characteristics of memory (i.e., that the object must be in the past, that it provides immediate knowledge, that the thing remembered is distinct from the remembrance of it, etc), he seems to hold that it is in the end unanalyzable and memory is unaccountable, meaning that it cannot be analyzed or reduced to component parts, or at least not over and above its characterization as direct knowledge of the past.<sup>12</sup>

There is also the question of the reliability of memory. Epistemologists of all stripes will agree that the reliability of memory is crucial if there is to be memory knowledge. However, There is little doubt that within certain parameters, there can be evidence of the reliability of memory, and of its reliability in particular situations and among particular groups. And memory is unreliable in other ways as well.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Reid posits: The knowledge which I have of things past, by my memory, seems to me as unaccountable as an immediate knowledge would be of things to come: and I can give no reason why I should have the one and not the other, but that such is the will of my Maker. I find in my mind a distinct conception, and a firm belief of a series of past events; but how this is produced I know not. I call it memory, but this is only giving a name to it; it is not an account of its cause. [Reid 1785, Essay III, Section I]

<sup>13</sup> Everyone’ said the writer John Barth, ‘is necessarily the hero of his own life story.’ We curate our memories by consolidating those that confirm or conform with our idea of self, while discarding or distorting those that conflict with it. We are most likely to remember events of existential significance such as our first kiss or first day at school—and, of course, it helps that we often rehearse those memories. Even then, we remember only one or two scenes, and only the main elements, and fill in the gaps and background with reconstructed or ‘averaged’ memories. *Déjà-vu*, the sense that an ongoing situation has already been experienced, may arise from a near match between the ongoing situation and an averaged memory of that sort of situation. (Bernecker and Michaelian 20167: 7).

So is there a way out of this dilemma as to how we can resolve the question as to the role of memory in the thinking process? As I already propose, a decoloniality discourse might provide for an alternative in regard to a knowledge production interlinking memory and thinking. Why is this possible with decoloniality? Among the reasons:

- Because theory and praxis are necessarily interrelated. ..for theory is doing and doing is thinking.
- This terrain is rooted in the praxis of living and in the idea of theory-and-as-praxis and praxis-and-as-theory, and in the interdependence and continuous flow of movement of both.
- Of interest here is how those who live the colonial difference think theory, theorize practice, and build, create, and enact concrete processes, struggles, and practices of resurgent and insurgent action and thought, including in the spheres of knowledge, territory-land, state, re-existences, and life itself. And, on the other hand, the question is how this praxis interrupts and cracks the modern/colonial/capitalist/heteropatriarchal matrices of power, and advances other ways of being, thinking, knowing, theorizing, analyzing, feeling, acting, and living for us all—the otherwise that is the decolonial for. (Migdolo and Walsh: 9)
- An epistemic reconstitution takes place in many places and in many forms. Decolonial analytics and decolonial enactment are two sides of the same movement. Decolonial analysis is not a scholarly enterprise, although it may follow scholarly procedures. But disciplines are being used to advance political goals in all the domains of the colonial matrix of power (knowledge, politics, economy, subjectivity, gender/sexuality, race/racism, nature/living). This reversal is a fundamental move to blur the lines separating theory/praxis and scholarship/activism. (Migdolo and Walsh 2018: 7-9, Migdolo 2017: 6-8).

If Philosophy in its broad sense is to mean "love of wisdom, " as it pertains to "an activity people undertake when they seek to understand fundamental truths about themselves, the world in which they live, and their relationships to the world and to each other, " we can no longer be myopic in our view as to the coverage of such

wisdom. As decoloniality insists, we need to recover the roots of our ancestors' wisdom embodied in their memories.

No less than the retrieval of our indigenous roots will be required for us to be able to move towards a full decolonization that augurs for the world's emancipation from all kinds of marginalization and disenfranchisement. By doing so, we are not just remembering our wise ancestors and their counsel, but in fact we heed the call of philosophers ranging from Karl Marx to the critical theorists who demand of us to have a sense of historicity and to see "the world to be set as the reality for man's coming into being"; as...(m)an's very destiny is carved out of this world and nowhere else. This is because seen as task, man is conscious of his responsibility for the future. Man therefore act and change his life. One is called to act, to do something in order to reform what is unacceptable." (Maboloc 2014:35).

But we do better if we go beyond even the most praxis-oriented Western philosophical thoughts because our basic presuppositions are so different as we already have discussed. Such presuppositions provide us a deeper appreciation of the role of memory in our thinking processes that would translate into liberating action. This is made clear in view of an accumulated list of brutal experiences that humanity has suffered under oppressive regimes across the centuries – the crimes committed against humanity ranging from the 1912 Tulsa Massacre against black slaves in southern states of the U.S.A, thousand Jews burnt in the concentration camps of Hitler's Nazi regime, the bombing by Americans of innocent civilians in Nagasaki and Heroshima, the My Lai massacre in Vietnam by US soldiers, the *desaparecidos* tortured and killed by the dictators from Chile to Argentina, the Filipinos under the Marcos martial law (and even perhaps if the ICC succeeds) the families victimized by Duterte's EJK campaign, and all the crimes committed against humanity by dictators around the world.

All these are remembered, memorial sites erected, and compensations sought so that justice – no matter how delayed – is rendered the descendants of the victims. The collective mind keeps the memories alive, for remembering the events is to re-ignite resistance as struggles persist until today.

To think that this earth still provides hope for humanity is to remember the landmark events of the past and to re-imagine perhaps how the lessons learned can be mobilized for today's struggle for full humanity.

“Memory is all we are. Moments and feelings, captured in amber, strung on filaments of reason. Take a man's memories and you take all of him. Chip away a memory at a time and you destroy him as surely as if you hammered nail after nail through his skull.”

— Mark Lawrence, *King of Thorns*

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