

TALKING GLOBAL CRITICALITY

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ABSTRACT: This paper presents excerpts from the 2021 session of a roundtable at the Modern Language Association, repeated for the last four years and connecting each year to the Presidential theme because of interest expressed by the upper administration of the MLA. In 2021, the roundtable focused on Davida Malo's *Mo'olelo Hawai'i*, the first text in written Hawaiian and on the Presidential theme of persistence. The introductory remarks frame the paper in terms of the persistent need for a humanities pedagogy which might teach the gendered realization that every generation needs to have the human affects of greed, fear, and violence undone.

Keywords: Translation, Global criticality, Imaginative activism, Nuclear weapons, Archipelagic

These remarks appear in *Postcolonial Directions in Education*.

A group of members of the Modern Language Association of America (MLA) – the authors of this piece – with some more added as the context changes each year, have been focusing on globality because, although the legacy and practice of colonialism is very much with us, the movement of capital is no longer siloed to nation-states and their colonial masters. We have been focusing on the contingency of education itself – the gendered realization that every generation needs to have greed, fear, and violence undone in order to transform the public world – by way of the counter-intuitive feeling of equality with those who do not resemble the “normal” or “developed.” This is the persistent need for humanities pedagogy, not a goal to be achieved for moving on, for “the majority of [human beings] resent and always have resented the idea of equality with most of their fellow [beings]” (Du Bois, 2014). As with the last three years, the group’s contextual focus will be the lack of fit between the specifically cultural capital of the metropolitan center and the anonymity of capital as such (commercial, industrial, financial, etc) in the global. How does our understanding of the task of humanities education – to persist in approaching the “other text” as globalization advances – affect the membership of the MLA, mostly literary critics and teachers in various languages – and beyond? We were able to bring someone from Bolivia (rather than a diasporic Bolivian) the last three years, and someone from India (rather than a diasporic Indian) the last two years, and this year a Hawaiian – neither native nor foreign. Please read everything that follows in that context – I am describing our latest attempt in this series.

This roundtable is a call. We are calling on ourselves to reconfigure the global. We are already globalized. Globalization carries with it the assurance of a *level* playing field. The ethical field, the ethico-political field, the ethico-politico-juridico-economic field, as we indefinitely expand the characteristics of this single field,

is seen to be seriously uneven, diversified by race, class, gender, language, idiom. Training into literary studies opens the imagination towards ethics because it teaches us to suspend ourselves and go into the text on its own terms. How do we develop “global criticality” when we are divided by different diachronies to achieve an apparent synchrony at the touch of a finger? When we have no historical background, no access to the specificity of language and no particular reason to expand our specialization with reference to the text we confront? We imagine this inevitably reconfigures the global. Persistence is important for us because this epistemological change – knowing ourselves as knowers of a different kind of object known – is not performed easily and does not last, unless persistently practiced, generation after generation. Therefore our call for *persistence* in reconfiguring the global.

In the last three years, our roundtable has discussed the work of René Mercado Zavaleta from Bolivia, the films of Ritwik Ghatak from India, and a written text in Sesotho by Sophonia Mofokeng.

This year, our text is *Mo’olelo Hawai’i*, the first written text in the previously oral language of Hawai’i, produced by Davida Malo, *formed* by the pre-colonial culture, Christianized, and then asked to report on his culture by the missionaries as part of a class exercise. This puts him in a classic double bind. Even behind this, as the critical editorial apparatus tells us that there is a spoken language previous to “systematization” by the missionaries that the editors had to tame. The untamed version stands behind what we read; although we are also told that the language of the healers can now be understood digitally.

Specific Reading of Davida Malo's *Mo'olelo Hawai'i*,\ \ the first written text in the Hawai'ian language.

Spivak (Columbia University)

Malo was a busy man, on the cusp of what was going to be an unevenly complicit appropriation into the United States, that was not at the time generalizable, except in the line of separation between missionaries and "foreigners" buying land and naturalizing, as the Sandwich Islands changed from passing-through point to something else. We cannot force this into the already-existing models of colonial or imperial discourse.

Malo was a controversial man, an intelligence that has left an open text for us, repeating repeatedly that it is incomplete. His lists, orality organized like the Bible, are of flora and fauna, and every detail of human life, telling us, for example, that sexuality was not clamped into the missionary position until Christianization – I wish we had Foucault's ear – his lists remind us that we are moving from memory-writing to pen and paper writing as he comments on the tradition mis-remembered. This bilingual book also reminds us that all translation starts with the death of the text's phonetic body.

Noelani Arista speaks repeatedly of the labor that Malo had to undertake in order for this text to be produced – ending in the middle of an uneven genealogical record, falling short of a description of ritual male circumcision that reminds me of the way *Capital* III (Marx, 1993) ends in the middle of a discussion of class. Apparently the digital practice that saves intellectual labor will produce "meaning" out of traditional transcendental texts. Arista's powerful biography allows us to say that such "meanings" should certainly be recorded but with a strong textual reminder that this is meaning without a noema – a performance of the intellectual labor to "know," imperfectly, rather than with digital perfection. Malo's

entire textual position is a double bind. And, Gregory Bateson, who invented the phrase as we know it, writes – “all science is an attempt to cover with explanatory devices, and thereby to obscure -- the vast darkness of the subject.”(Bateson, 1958: 280)

The text invites its own transgression through its detailed account of the performance of ritual and sport, the names of multitudinous gods, the clear indication that old objects were handmade and better, except for the new import Jehovah; perhaps because I am an atheist from within a secular polytheist upbringing. The Polynesian months, months of farming and sailing, are written within the Gregorian – Malo’s text is a text of translation within its original language – culture itself as translation, as I have suggested elsewhere. Lilikala Kameileihiwa and some Hawaiian women took me under the barbed wire to service Tutu Pele’s magma laden vagina with little bottles of Jack Daniel’s saved from airplanes and I spoke of Kali, so let me misread: “o Pele . . . ke akua o kahi po’e wahine.”

And Hawai’i is outside in. It is part of the United States. Its history therefore also began in 1619 with the arrival of the first enslaved Africans, and it was also reformed by the Civil War and it is part of the current electoral horror. This peculiar extra-moral requirement accompanying an exchange of civil society, especially into an exceptionalist ideological superpower practicing repressive and divisive tolerance of opposition, makes Malo’s case exemplary for much well-meaning diasporic global intervention today.

And there is more. This is the 75th anniversary of Pearl Harbor. In an artificial centrality, Hawai’i is the direct cause of the entry of the U.S. into World War II. But Hawai’i is also part of the politically and geographically diversified phenomenon of the hundred-plus islands of Oceania. Holding on to the cusp-figure of Davida Malo, who felt the unease of the peculiar colonial confrontation with the U.S., we note that the nuclear weapons test

legacy is the overriding issue in the Marshall Islands today and that the U.S. buried nuclear waste in the Pacific after WWII. Malo's lists are an absolute reminder, in today's terrifying context, of what the nuclear has erased. The aetiologies of the human he gives are from cliffs, from fish, from varieties of water and air. Every chapter speaks of changefulness in a poetry of geography.

Global criticality, old and new histories. "Asia" and "Israel," words in Malo, ask us for reconfiguration. Let us respond to this task, rather than only preserve traditional languages, as the United Nations does, and indeed as do most educational and linguistic institutions.

I now quote extracts from the contributions of some of the other members of the roundtable.

Noelani Arista (McGill)

To be named a Hawaiian specialist has often come with marginalization, a designation lacking a geographic/oceanic space of normativity. As a Hawaiian writer and translator I am placed in difficult positions, often seen as a native informant, a cultural consultant, a knowledge keeper, these roles keep the depth of epistemological knowledge and methodological innovation that Hawaiian can convey in abeyance. At best I may be able to be heard saying that the text is complex, singular. At worst, I can augment other people's passing interest in the field.

The trained historian wants to push back all the time and provide data: it may be singular that the Hawaiian language textual archive (which holds within it much oral performative material), is the largest in any native language in North America and the Polynesian Pacific. It seems paradoxical that in the face of the immensity of Hawaiian language textual archives, literature, letters, journals, prose, chant and prayers in many genres that

our work should be viewed, dismissed? as narrow, the purview of the specialist.

That the texts once they are translated from Hawaiian into English have become the site of extractive practices, used solely for the harvesting of momi (pearls) on Hawaiian culture, people, on Hawai'i, by native and non-native scholars alike, signals that we need to develop better relational practices, and that this may require reading the text in broader global contexts to liberate Malo's work from the distortions of America's production of Hawai'i and away from the corrosive influence of American identity politics that have shaped the most recent Hawaiian scholarly discourses and practices.

Emily Apter (NYU)

Spivak's sense of translation is a medium of social harming and violation. It is offset, however, by her formulation of a reparative translation that takes its cue from Melanie Klein's 1937 essay "Love, Guilt and Reparation," where she casts translation as a response to the Kleinian *Schuldigsein*, associated with what she calls an unrepayable mother-debt, the guilt in seeing that one can treat one's mother tongue as one language among many. (Spivak, 2012: 243) It struck me that the new edition of *Mo'olelo Hawai'i* offers a single case of reparative translation by reconstituting this monumental work through careful collective labor and making it available in English to a wide public, it redresses past wrongs attributable to the text's repeated vulgarization. All that is spelled out in the book's Introduction.

Dr. Nathaniel Emerson, an early 20th-century translator, imposed his own Christian ethnocentrism on it by giving it the title *Hawaiian Antiquities* (Malo, 2013), and he framed it as an ethnographic artifact suited for exhibition under Western curatorial eyes. In compiling

footnotes on some of the more archaic terms, he consulted native Hawaiians only to consign them to the oblivion of anonymity. In an act of restorative justice, translators Langlas and Lyon try native informants then at least an expanded sourcebook of the text's archaic vocabulary. But even they acknowledge that this is really impossible. They consult Polynesian dictionaries and periodicals, but in the end, they say, you have to look at the original if you really want to get at the knowledge that it's offering, on the left hand side of our book. Here, one could say the translator's affirmation of *Mo'olelo's* reparative indifference to anglicization is of a piece with Natalie Diaz's post-colonial love poem "Manhattan is a Lenape Word," in which the siren song of the disappeared Native American tongue is picked up in the siren of an ambulance and the ghostly coyote is spied wandering west Twenty Ninth Street by offering its long list of light.

Luis Tapia (Universidad San Andrés, Bolivia)

Mo'olelo Hawai'i, or the history of Hawaii, is a vision of social totality, it is a combination of ethnography, oral history, elements of sociology, to put it in terms of modern culture, especially about the emergence of authority within this culture.

Malo makes an interesting reflection on how it is impossible to reconstruct the original. What there is is a set of versions which respond to the way in which each person and family remembers and transmits the memory of their history, their customs and beliefs, Malo builds his *Mo'olelo Hawaii* based on this plurality of versions with the idea that there will be no original version but a historical description. In principle, it could be said that this conception of the world and this history of Hawaii as a look of totality has a horizontal structure as a description of

geography, economic practices, bird species, the formation of couples, gods, food and all other aspects have more or less the same weight. Malo values and defends the political customs of caring for the community against the new customs brought by the new dominant culture. This means that everything new, that not everything new is always better.

Moinak Biswas (Jadavpur)

This strangely beautiful book asks us to think of the productive role of unfamiliarity. As the editors point out, unfamiliarity made both the missionaries and the indigenous Hawaii chiefs unhappy about this account. To the former, it did not conform to the Western rules of writing such accounts. To the chiefs, it was not a proper Mo'olelo. The word Mo'olelo itself is difficult to enter into another language. The difficulty of translating between the two worlds starts from the date of finding common names, Malo's in between-ness extended within each world. Within the old, he was critical of a certain political and racial order, but refrained, unlike his Christian peers, from excoriating it wholesale. He uses the oral systems of lists and genealogies, but says that these are not accurate. He's also critical of the mythical nature of the oldest stories of creation. I would like to speak briefly about historical resonances, that the lists and genealogies evoke. Unfamiliarity does not dissolve with these resonances. They just help a reader like me connect the text with other things.

Genealogy seems to have played a crucial role in all reconstructing accounts where a foreign system forced change among the people. The Indian historian Ranajit Guha showed in a series of lectures how the early colonial historians in India used local genealogies, chronicles, and oral accounts but brought them under a narrative

discipline that he likens to the post Enlightenment historiography of Europe. These histories became essential to the colonial rulers for collecting revenue by figuring out complicated land relations. Davida Malo was meant to explain an unfamiliar world that seemed irrational and therefore deceitful. He was conducting this operation on himself, which seems to have left marks of unfinished business in the text. Malo writes of the inconstancy of the old oral tradition: "the great ignorance of the ancient people of this place was the cause of their mistaken words and of the inconstancy of their oral tradition" (71). This strikes a distant chord.

It brings to mind the anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's book, *The Inconstancy of the Indian Soul*, which speaks of the Portuguese Catholic missionaries' encounter with the Amerindians in Brazil.(de Castro, 2011)¹ Several 16th and 17th century missionary texts complain bitterly of the malleability of the native mind that would accept a new faith too easily, for the same malleability meant they could abandon this new faith with ease as well. They had no God, no king, no proper religion, no reason; only deceitful interpretations of the world.

Malo's lists of fish, canoes, birds, animals, food, directions, winds, rain, do not stay on the same plane always. As a list takes a lateral turn, he sometimes prefaces the unexpected new item with the phrase "here is another thing." Thus, in Chapter 6, we have a list of winds: from the mountain and the ocean, etc., then "there is another thing:" The place below where a person stood, the one below that, the place within the ocean where the fish live, the atmosphere where the birds live, etc.

¹ Eduardo Vivieros de Castro.

Surya Parekh (Binghamton)

David Malo's *Mo'olelo Hawai'i* is an unfinished text breaking off abruptly in Chapter 57. We don't know what it would have looked like in finalized form. Malo was intently working on the book in the last two years of his life (1852-1853), suffering from illness, working during the evenings and according to his secretary, tearing up and correcting a succession of copies. The manuscript was not published during Malo's life and first appears in Emerson's misleading translation some 50 years later.

In this brief presentation, I want to ask the impossible question about what the readership of this unfinished text might be. Malo's life (1795-1853), spans the period from Kamehameha I's military consolidation of Hawaii as a nation state in 1795 through to the Hawaiian constitutions of 1840 and 1852, establishing a formal system of written laws and rights. Malo was raised in pre-Christian Hawaii, trained in oral traditions and practices as a child, becoming a counselor and trusted adviser to Ali'i. In the 1820s, the arrival of the Christian missionaries, Congregationalists from Northeastern United States, brought with it an effort to codify Hawai'ian into a written language, at roughly the same time as Maori and Tahitian were also being codified and systematized. Samoan was codified a little bit later. Already an adult by this time, Malo was one of the earliest Hawaiians to become literate, and he was a student in the first class at the Lahainaluna Seminary run by missionaries, later staying on to teach. Malo's relationship to both the oral traditions he grew up in and to the literacy promoted by the missionaries is complex. For the missionaries, teaching literacy in Hawaiian to Hawaiian students necessitated breaking the habits that they associated with orality: memorization, reading aloud and a pleasure in recounting genealogy.

Malo's relationship to Christianity can't be easily reduced to dogmatic stances. It's with the help of missionaries that Malo protests the holding of important positions by foreigners in the Hawaiian government and questions of land redistribution. And it's the missionary, Dwight Baldwin, who initiates the process through which Malo was commissioned to write the *Mo'olelo Hawai'i*. Malo writes at a moment when there is intense interest in literacy by Hawaiians. . .

John Charlot has argued that Hawai'ian was the predominant language used by both Hawai'ians and most non-Hawai'ians for much of the 19th century, relaying an account where a Cantonese laborer on a plantation speaks to a Fukienese laborer in Hawai'ian. I want then to speculate as I end here that we might imagine the diversified readership of *Mo'olelo Hawai'i* to include both the first generation of literate Hawai'ians and also non-Hawai'ians speaking and reading the Hawai'ian language. It's a time when, for Malo and others, proficiency in English or other European languages wasn't necessary for political and religious engagements with Americans and Europeans. And so I wonder, as I finish here, whether or not we can think of Malo in his space imagining Hawai'ian as a global language, a situation that changes some 50 years later with Hawaii's annexation.

Hortense Spillers (Vanderbilt)

Mo'olelo Hawai'i, has a posture of displacement that lends an identity to worldlings, perhaps across cultures in so far as such postures signal homelessness if by the latter we mean the caught place, or the place in between. By that I am not referring to pieces of real estate and whether or not one has access to them. Homelessness refers to the loosening of the bonds that tie us to the continuity of generations, families, surnames, tribes, regions.

I would regard this kind of homelessness as a loosening of the bonds of love, which goes far to explain, I believe, the exilic consciousness that accompanies displacement. It's solitudinous quiddity. It must explore loneliness as a genuine human possibility and try to redeem its malformations. I believe that Malo's world is the world flooded with literacy, and in that sense, it looks rather like our own; a Viconian withdrawal of the mythic sense. In any case, what I am describing might have had some relevance in David Malo's life in so far as he experienced the dying of the traditional world and the birth pangs of the Hawai'ian modern.

As a translator, as a go-between, as himself in-between, David Malo might be thought of as a kind of native informant. As a member of this initial class of Hawai'ian clerks, Malo lends us a glimpse into his complicated cultural order at nodal points of change. But does such a posture involve cultural criticism and as a result, a kind of betrayal? In other words, culture work seems to take us far from home.

Q&A

The Q&A gave a preliminary sense of this collective response and so we include its edited version.

Hosam Aboul-Ela:

Would you consider rephrasing some things you've already said. What possibility is there of reading Malo as critical theory avoiding comparing him or producing him as general indigeneity. Would he be good for as critical theory for other contexts?

Spillers:

You know as you were asking that question, I was thinking about my sense of this text as I was reading it. I couldn't get over — and I don't know if this will be helpful toward

getting at what you're asking, I think I understand what you're asking — but naively what I kept feeling as I was reading this was that I was reading a kind of Genesis. That I was reading a kind of Pentateuch, right? The first five books of Holy Christian Scripture, where not only is the grid filled in but it's named, right? I mean existence or reality from top to bottom. I mean in some ways it was comparable also to reading Milton, what the world is like when Heaven and Earth change places, and it takes Satan so many days to fall to earth and when he does he hews out Hell, I mean that is tremendous work. I was thinking of all these other texts that we're familiar with, and the sense of this work as that which names the world that it has come into — [it] strikes me as a profound act of not only naming but, by naming, creating.

So that, well, I don't know if I want to say therefore that that's what critical theoretical texts are about — giving names to things — but that was my sense as a foreign reader of what is for me nothing that is really very familiar. I was very struck by the power and the beauty of naming, I mean everything that you can think of, clouds and Earth, and how things are situated, and perspectives — in relationship to what? I mean it's all there, so that it really is for me a kind of text that creates as it describes. Creation is describing or describing is creating. I think of it really as a kind of Scripture.

Emlyn Hughes:

I'm a professor of physics at Columbia. I'm very much outside this kind of discussion. But I've spent quite a lot of time on the topic of nuclear weapons in the Marshall Islands and on contaminated those islands got because of the nuclear weapons. I am going to refer a little bit to what Gayatri said in her introduction. A big issue today on the nuclear weapons tests that were done right after World War II is how damaged the islands are and what the impact on the people has been.

Even 70 years later, this is a big topic and it's about what the Marshallese refer to as nuclear justice. There is no comparable text to Davida Malo's for the Marshallese to describe their background and the culture. In terms of the reparation and justice, the US government has a responsibility to the Marshallese people and understanding the Marshallese culture. And obviously, the tie to the land is incredibly deep and the land was destroyed by these nuclear weapons. To what extent can one call the Marshall Islands as part of Oceania and use Davida Malo's text as a representation of the people of the entire Pacific?

Anupama Mohan:

I'm Anupama Mohan from Presidency University. And my question is simple: With a text like Malo's, is it relevant to think of strategies of reading such as close and distant reading?

Spivak:

I could just come into Emlyn's question. For me, it would be like the way Assia Djebar went into male texts to find moments where there were openings for women. And she imagined women's work to fill those moments. It is imaginative work, imaginative activism so that it is not just top-down philanthropy or organizing against the harm done by the nuclear intervention. If we can look at those places in Malo's text where he's clearly indicating that the spacing of his island is in a huge cluster of islands and insert this imagining. Tahiti stands in sometimes for all of them. Harry Garuba, a Professor at the University of Cape Town who is recently dead has an extraordinary idea of how to produce a simulacrum of historical origin when an African writes within a global context of production.

[M]ost if not all African literary texts in English are always already determined by an absence, a

lost origin which the text seeks to restore even while recognising the impossibility of such a restoration. This then is the postcolonial muse that haunts African writing – that it is a writing that seeks to restore an origin/original which, because of its absence in the language of the text, has to be continually simulated, Garuba writes in the unfinished work "Beyond the Postcolonial: Language, Translation and the Making of African Literature in English."²

As I wrote in the piece on Garuba: “Here again, my thoughts of history as lost object resonates very strongly with Harry's intuition. The past in a ceaseless series of strategies of simulation making and unmaking the vanishing present.”

So we take Malo not as a rational origin so much as an imaginative origin. We have to learn that to engage with the imagination, which is neither rational nor irrational, it's a different kind of status that you have to give to Malo. That's my answer to Emlyn, directing us toward a tough bit of imaginative activist labor. And as for the question about close reading, I think what we are looking at is not becoming a specialist. To an extent, this is about the impossibility of close reading. And yet. And yet. And yet, you know, I kept looking. This is why I think bilingual editions are very, very important.

In fact, I'm myself now engaged in trying to move into a bilingual edition of Bengali material, because it seems to me that if you can look at the other side and think about how to match up to it as a comparative literature person, it almost goes towards the impossibility of learning the original. I was constantly reading aloud the other side, knowing that, of course, I was not actually reproducing anything, but somehow it seems to me we have to

² Spivak, “A Few Words About Harry,” <https://casstup.co.za>. If text unavailable, email ns@cas.au.dk

recognize that what we are looking at when we do this kind of thing, global criticality, we are looking at the impossibility of genuine close reading; that this is the nature of the beast. That's why I asked the question, when it's not going to become one of our specialisms, what do we do? I think then of what Hortense was saying. I think then we connect on just one level above through structural connections like lists. You know, she was talking about Milton when she was reading the lists. I was thinking about Rosa Luxemburg. She was clearly opposing Marx and Engels in her thinking about general strikes in her influential pamphlet *The Mass Strike*.(Luxemburg,[1906] 1986)

In that book, rather than theorize, she just lists one mass strike after the other. This happened. This happened. All these strikes, they succeeded, beginning in Baku. I thought of Milton, Lucifer falling in *Paradise Lost* (Bush, 1949). And I was thinking, reading Malo, let's look at the list making aspect of it and relate it to the other oralities rather than Milton, the best example we English teachers know, etc. That's just one example because it occurred to both Hortense and me. So, once again, the nature of global criticality (we used to say “transnational literacy,” but literacy about world events is no longer enough. In the so-called globalization of our discipline, we ask, how do we remain active critics even when we do not and will not have the ingredients for close reading? Is the choice between being imprisoned within a specialty and academic tourism? No, if we can't touch texture (close reading based on language), we can move with structure.

Participant 1:

Aloha, thank you so much for holding this plenary, a quick question, given what you're saying about wanting to allow this text to circulate in different ways. I'm just wondering

if people could say more about the extent to which they think in the classroom this text will be allowed to decenter the inevitable. I hear intention in the presentations between the recognition that the list is a central conceptual organizing genre. But at the same time, we are stuck in the historical classroom logic that doesn't really play with the archipelagic or the expanding and contracting plurality that Malo's text gestures at. So I'm wondering again, the question is, to what extent do you think it's possible to allow this text to decenter those returning structures of ours.

Jesús Ramos-Kitrell:

Yes, thank you very much, Jesús Ramos-Kitrell University of Connecticut. This question is first directed to Professor Spillers and in a way, touches with a piece that Professor Spivak wrote a while ago on an analysis of Mahasweta Devi in terms of how the novel stages a sort of precarious situation that a previous generation in which a previous generation tries to stage a context that only the next generation can exceed. And in that relation, I was considering how you were talking about the act of translation, this point of homelessness, not in terms of cartography, but of losing connections to other generations or to ancestral connections. And I'm wondering if perhaps this act of homelessness could stage a context for creating connections for further generations to counteract the effects of dislocation.

Spillers:

I want to address the question that Jesús has just raised. I want to do it by way of an example or analogy. I think one of the things that bothers me about the era that we're in is the way the police respond to people who are different from themselves — and it does look conspiratorial, as what happened earlier this week [the Insurrection on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021] looks exactly like something

like that but on a very different scale. What I think I believe about police power is that the police naively look at the world as if it is the repetition of intimacies that they understand from their mother's house. In other words they never broke the ties that bind them to the intimate connections of family and tribe. And so when they get out in the world, the demands that you live with and accept people other than yourself, unlike yourself — they can't do it! Their response is therefore violent. So it seems to me that what you're looking at in the United States today is that problem writ huge. It is huge. That everywhere one goes one expects to find one's mother, right? One's brother. One's kinfolk. But that's not the world that we live in. The world that we live in is difference. That's the modern world. That's the contemporary world. That's the changing world. It's not the traditional world, the world that is full of manna, the world that is full of the undifferentiated infant who can't tell himself from his mamma, right, and therefore you get the violence that has to kill the Other because the Self never really grew up, it never really gave up its infancy.

So this homelessness that I'm talking about really is a new way for us to try to come to grips with a world that is not me, right? A world that is not going to love me and embrace me like my mother and my father and my sisters and my brothers and the little girl next door whom I love and the boy across the street whom I love. That's not the world that we grow into. We grow away from families, we grow away from tribes, we grow away from the surname, we grow away from the father's name — and it hurts! I mean I understand how, or I think I understand, the older I get, the extent to which the modern world is a wound. It wounds me every day. It makes me lonely every day precisely because I have to live in globality or something other than my father's house, right. And so that's the way, it really is the way that I read homelessness.

It is a form of melancholy. It is not happiness. It demands that I understand freedom in a way that takes me further and further away from infancy, childhood, feeling good, feeling beloved in the world — that's not it. And so that really is the way I read homelessness or telling family secrets. I mean in the world that I'm talking about, dirty laundry — you have to spill it. I mean you have to tell the secrets, right? If you're going to, how to say this, if you're going to cauterize the wound, and the way to live with being wounded — that means you have to give up those self-prohibitions that make it impossible for those policemen at the capitol the other day from going in there and tearing down those idiots who were destroying the capitol. I mean, how does a policeman take a selfie with somebody who is going to destroy the capitol? Because he identifies that person in the same way that he identified with the member of his tribe. He needs to stop doing that. And he needs to stop shooting people who look like me if we just simply raise our hand, or even if we're running away — [we] get shot. It is a massive sickness.

It is a psychoanalytic moment in U.S. culture. And it is that sickness that sees my family everywhere in the world. Your family is not imprinted on the world. Otherness is imprinted on the modern world that we live in, the one that is changing every day. Every day there's an earthquake because there's something new I have to learn. So somebody's going to have to tell me by the time this is over what the hell Tik Tok is.

Basuli Deb:

There seems to be here a logic of the local, perhaps the regional and local, but also a planetary and even a cosmic logic from what I have gathered. If we were to use this text to teach degrowth, to contest the logic of colonality, then how do we practice degrowth in universities which are based on principles of growth and progress?

Spivak:

I just want to say to the person who asked about how to manage to teach Malo when there's such a different structure imposed on us, you actually just described how you would teach Malo in a classroom. How can we use this text to decenter the existing ideology of the classroom? Well, what you gave was a way in which you could actually decentralize and teach it through making it archipelagic. That's what I was saying in answer to Emlyn's question. It seems to me that rather than ask the question, you become the answer. It requires effort.

I would say to Jésus, adding to Hortense's lovely response that this is the question of staging, structure. There are moments in the text where the text asks to be taken somewhere else. This is why I think not only is the book, in fact incomplete, as Surya pointed out, the topos of "I am incomplete" is in the text as a central topos. So apart from lists, you can also take that it is a self-transgressive text, that asks to be moved out into something else. I have elsewhere defined that as the political text which asks for action by the reader to be opened up.

And to the last question I'll say yes. When I tried out my thinking on Planetarity in 1997, the reason why I recommended it was because it would take on board stuff from animisms all the way to white mythologies of rationality, the algebraic irrational, as it were. This text is cosmic in that way. But as to how you change the university for degrowth, it's a different undertaking. Maybe by teaching an archipelagic cosmic text imaginatively in the classroom, you produce students who work for degrowth when they enter the world of work. It's the hope we live in.

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