

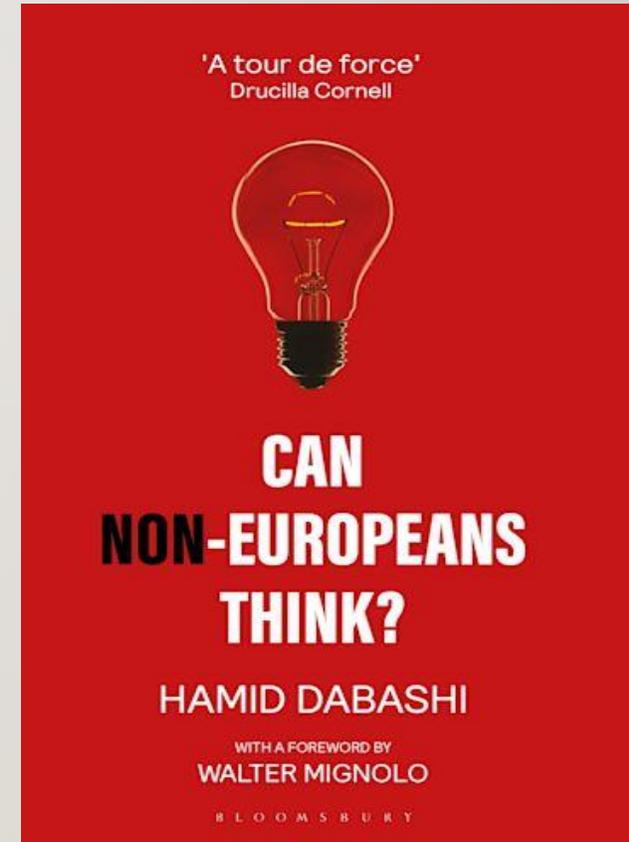
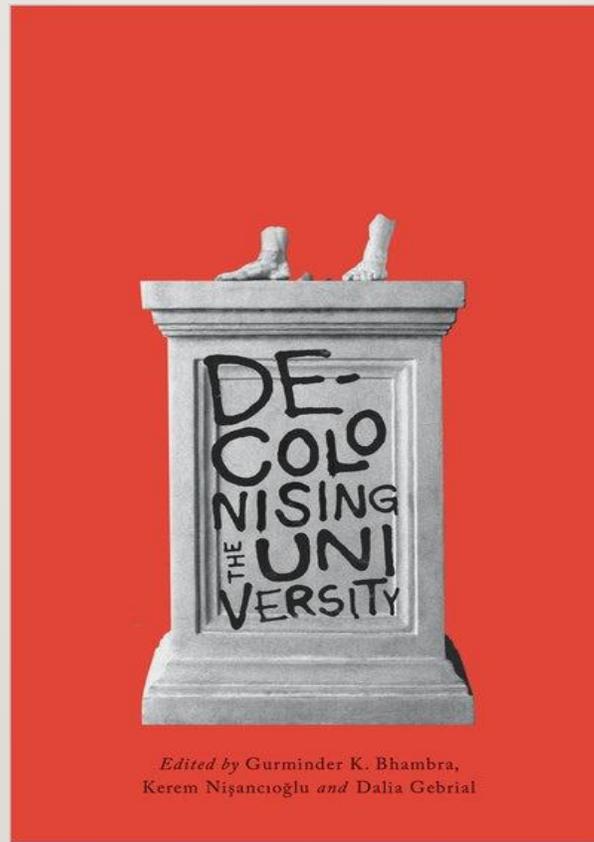
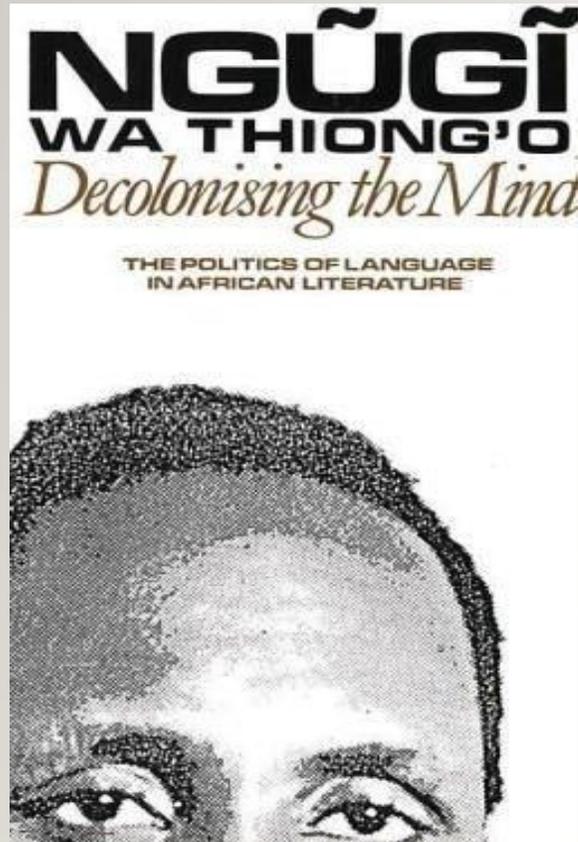
# **DECOLONIZING EDUCATION**

---

**TAHRIR HAMD**



# BOOKS ON DECOLONIZATION



# **REVOLUTION IN EDUCATION IS NEEDED**

---

- **We are in need of a revolutionary transformation in education, specifically in English language and literature departments in the Arab world.**
- **This transformation is linked to the:**
- **Production**
- **Ordering**
- **Dissemination of Knowledge**

# **NECESSARY PRECONDITION FOR POLITICAL DECOLONIZATION AND LIBERATION**

---

- **The decolonization of our university curricula is a necessary precondition for political decolonization and the genuine liberation of our lands and minds.**
- **The connection between culture and power has long been established by the likes of Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Paolo Freire, Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral, Ghassan Kanafani and Edward Said.**

# EPISTEMIC DISOBEDIENCE, DECOLONIAL FREEDOM

---

- In his important article entitled "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom," Walter D. Mignolo (2010) argues that the Global South is in need of de-linking their knowledge from that of the imperial West, and this entails "epistemic disobedience" in the humanities.
- According to Mignolo, this knowledge-power formula is clear in the West's representation of Western knowledge as the "zero point epistemology."

# **GOALS OF WESTERN ZERO POINT EPISTEMOLOGY**

---

- **1.) Ingrain epistemic obedience**
- **2.) Maintain control over the  
knowledge making process**

# MASKS OF CONQUEST

---

- In her book *Masks of Conquest* (1989), Gauri Viswanathan argues that “English literary study had its beginnings as a strategy of containment” that would be used as a “disguised form of authority” or mask of conquest to “maintain[...] social control,” and I would add mind control.

# PUT IN THE SERVICE OF BRITISH IMPERIALISM

---

- **Although Viswanathan warns against making a direct cause-effect connection between today's English literature departments and colonial/imperial control—that “imperialism can be swiftly undone merely by hurling away the texts it institutionalized,” she does underscore the absolute necessity of recognizing that these same literary texts “were put in the service of British imperialism.”**

# MINUTE ON INDIAN EDUCATION (1835)

---

- In “Minute on Indian Education” (1835), a treatise which became official British policy, Thomas Macaulay specifically states that the aim behind teaching English literature is to create a “class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, opinions, in morals, and in intellect.”

# SELF-ORIENTALISM AND SELF-COLONIZATION

---

- **How are we to understand the seemingly unbreakable, but self-imposed, chains of the imperialistic ideology of Englishness that pervades English literature departments at Arab universities?**
- **One important reason is official state policy such as the careful control of local accreditation institutions in the Arab world that will accredit programmes in English literature *only* if they include study plans comprised of courses that are *purely English* in terms of specifically relating to the literature of the United Kingdom and the United States.**

# ADVANCING A WESTERN AGENDA AND WORLDVIEW

---

- I would like to emphasize Viswanathan's effective and evidenced-based argument that English literary study is indeed a "mask of conquest" now disguised in the cloak of "modernity." But the question remains, why should English literary study constitute modernity for the "developing" nations or the Global South? Here I agree with Mignolo that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Western epistemology, of which English literary study is a part, is used as a way of advancing a Western agenda and worldview with the hope of making those who are "less developed" "submit to the European (and, in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, to the United States also) knowledge, belief, life style and world view."

# KNOW THYSELF

---

- **So it is precisely here that we need to pause and contemplate what Mignolo states, quoting Kwasi Wiredu, “African, know thyself,” which is also the dictum that Edward Said adopted from Antonio Gramsci when he decided to make agentive beginnings for his groundbreaking, decolonizing work.**

# SAID AND THE STARTING POINT

---

- In fact, Said, quoting Gramsci, uses this precise dictum in his book *Orientalism* (1978) and his essay entitled “Zionism from the Standpoint of its Victims” (1979):
- The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is “knowing thyself” as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. It is important therefore to make an inventory. (Gramsci qtd. in Said 1979)

# **DE-LINK, DECOLONIZE—EPISTEMIC DISOBEDIENCE**

---

- **Accordingly, instead of adopting other nations' notions of "modernity," which are based on their imperialist worldview, the Global South must start by constructing their own modernity based on "knowing thyself," which entails understanding one's own history, culture and traditions and the contexts that led to their colonization and in some cases the erasure of their cultures, languages and dispossession as we see in occupied Palestine today. This endeavor, by necessity, means that one needs to start by de-linking, decolonizing and waging a campaign of "epistemic disobedience" that would lead to liberation, and not merely reform as in "civil disobedience," writes Mignolo, but a total transformation of the social consciousness.**

# ARAB SCHOLARS CAN ONLY SEE FROM AN ORIENTALIST PRISM OF KNOWLEDGE

---

- **Magid Shihade (2017) argues that Arab universities need to teach Arab and other intellectuals from the Global South, such as Ibn Khaldun and Frantz Fanon. Shihade argues that the problem is that many Arab scholars have an inferior scope of vision and can only see Arab knowledge “through [the prism of] Orientalist knowledge,” (83). Agreeing with this assessment, Ismael Zeiny points out, scholars from the Global South continue to engage in a “mindless celebration of Anglo-American canonical literature.”**

# CORNELL UNIVERSITY

---

- **Cornell University’s “English department became the first in the United States to change its name... [from] ‘English literature’ to ‘Literatures in English’” (Thomas-Johnson, 2020). One of the professors who proposed this change, Carole Boyce Davies, a “professor of English and Africana Studies” at Cornell did so “in response to the slaying of George Floyd” at the hands of a white policeman in the American city of Minneapolis, which ignited protests all over the world in support of the “Black Lives Matter” movement. Boyce Davies poignantly argues, “[a]s academics we are responsible for maintaining the order of knowledge and then transferring this to students who then go out into society” (Qtd. in Thomas-Johnson).**

# KNOWLEDGE EMBEDDED IN REALITY

---

- **The George Floyd tragedy rightly inspired this most important move at Cornell University, so why hasn't the brutal settler colonialism of the genocidal Zionist state against the Palestinian people, who suffer daily brutality and expulsion from their homes, done the same in the Arab world? This decolonizing mindset has not even made inroads at Palestinian universities in 1967 occupied Palestine, as Magid Shihade argues, despite the hegemony of a Western knowledge that has enabled and supported the Zionist settler-colonial project.**

# PRISON OF THE MIND

---

- **This kind of self-policing (or prison of the mind) is an idea related to the argument expressed by Michel Foucault about the Panopticon, a disciplinary prison system of control whereby prisoners do not know *when* they are being watched and are obedient. Foucault argues that over time, this panopticism leads to mental imprisonment and blind obedience that becomes self-imposed. This self-imposed policing can be generalized to all institutions, including universities and schools.**

# CIRCULAR CAGE

---

- **Commenting on the circular cage, Foucault writes:**
- **The celebrated, transparent, circular cage, with its high tower, powerful and knowing, may have been for Bentham a project of a perfect disciplinary institution; but he also set out to show how one may ‘unlock’ the disciplines and get them to function in a diffused, multiple, polyvalent way throughout the whole social body (2008). This “circular cage” that has diffused “throughout the whole social body” can definitely be felt at English literature departments at Arab universities.**

•

# PALESTINIAN THINKER MUNIR FASHEH— HEALING FROM COLONIZATION

---

- Fasheh argues,
- **“Decolonization refers to something that is outside; healing refers to something that is defeating us from the inside. The difference exists in the tools we use. Whereas in colonialism we struggle against a danger from outside, in healing we protect, nurture, and strengthen our internal immune systems.”**

# ARAB SCHOLARS HAVE NOT HEALED

---

- **Based on Fasheh's reasoning, the majority of Arab scholars have not healed from the colonization that is defeating them from the inside. They have not even reached the stage of thinking about decolonizing or healing, a realization that can only be reached after becoming aware that they are indeed living in coloniality.**

# EDUCATION VERSUS LEARNING

---

- **As Fasheh explains it, the word education has no synonym in Arabic because education is a “modern” Western creation that is institutionalized and emphasizes the colonization of the mind as opposed to the Arabic word **تعليم** or learning, which is connected to life.**

# **WORLD BANK IN OCCUPIED PALESTINE**

---

**Fasheh points out that when the World Bank came to occupied Palestine (in Ramallah) after the installation of the Palestinian Authority (1993-1994), they started their work on three main areas: “ ‘national’ security forces, ‘national’ curriculum, and ‘national’ banks – the first to control bodies, the second to control minds, and the third to own the future.”**



# KNOWING PAST AND PRESENT, PLANNING FOR FUTURE

---

- It is for this reason that **knowing thyself**, which includes knowing one's past and present and therefore the future should figure into the study of the humanities, especially when foreign literatures are taught.

# **PUBLIC UNIVERSITY'S ENGLISH STUDY PLAN I**

---

- **English Literature until 1660**
- **American Literature until 1800**
- **English Literature from 1660-1798**
- **19<sup>th</sup>-Century English Literature**
- **American Literature in the 19th-Century**
- **Novel (I)**

# **PUBLIC UNIVERSITY'S ENGLISH STUDY PLAN 2**

---

- **Shakespeare**
- **20<sup>th</sup>-Century English Literature**
- **20<sup>th</sup>-Century American Literature**
- **Criticism and Literary Theory**
- **Ancient and Classical Literature**

# **PRIVATE UNIVERSITY'S ENGLISH STUDY PLAN I**

---

- **English Literature until 1660**
- **Shakespeare**
- **17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries [English] Literature**
- **English Literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**
- **American Literature (I)**

# **PRIVATE UNIVERSITY'S ENGLISH STUDY PLAN I**

---

- **English Literature in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**
- **Introduction to English Literature**
- **Introduction to Drama**
- **Introduction to Poetry**
- **Literary Criticism and Literary Schools**

# **TRANSMITTING ENGLISH LITERATURE UNCRITICALLY**

---

- **The course descriptions of some of these courses confirm that the above mentioned courses at both public and private Jordanian universities are taught for the purpose of transmitting knowledge rather than critiquing it. General sounding courses, such as “Introduction to Drama” and “Introduction to Poetry” are mostly restricted to English and American literature and more marginally Western European literature. Again, the aims and mission behind such programs and curricula at Arab universities remain colonially-minded.**

# WHAT ARE THE GOALS, AIMS OF SUCH PROGRAMS?

---

- To contribute to the improvement of higher education in English [l]anguage and literature, literary criticism and linguistics.
- To send distinguished students on scholarships to the best US universities to obtain Ph.D. degrees in Literary Criticism, Literature, and Linguistics.
- To foster ties with other departments of English and Literature [at] Jordanian and foreign universities for the benefit of faculty members and students.
- To develop study plans and programs in the Department to suit recent developments.
- To sign agreements with American universities for the sake of establishing join[t] Ph.D. programs in English Literature and Linguistics.

# NO DELINKING AIM

---

- **As can be seen from the vision and goals for the English department at this university and *all* (although I do not like to use absolute words) universities in Jordan and perhaps the Arab world, the slightest inclination or indication to decolonize or delink from Western knowledge, and here specifically the English literary paradigm, does not exist and is, in fact, out of the question.**

# **DISMANTLE WESTERN KNOWLEDGE**

---

- **It is incumbent upon all academics and instructors in different areas of the Humanities to begin the process of decolonizing and reordering knowledge, which is, as Srivastava, states an “always unfinished, never complete [...] effort to uncover and dismantle the founding stereotypes and institutional biases at the heart of what we call knowledge.”**

# **MY OWN EFFORTS TO DELINK, DECOLONIZE THE MA IN LITERATURE CURRICULUM AT MY UNIVERSITY**

---

- **My efforts include introducing comparative literature courses, such as the “Studies in Poetry” course that examines the anticolonial and decolonizing poetry of the Irish poet William Butler Yeats and the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish. Other decolonial courses include the theoretical and revolutionary works of intellectuals, such as Frantz Fanon, Ghassan Kanafani, Amilcar Cabral, Malcolm X and other thinkers from the Global South and marginalized groups in the Global North.**

# RESTRUCTURING AND ANIMATING KNOWLEDGE

---

- **Rather than obediently repeating and at times mindlessly parroting Western colonial texts, Arab professors and students need to engage in a more agentive project of critically “restructure[ing] and animat[ing] knowledge, not as already achieved result, but ‘as something to be done, as a task and as a search’” (Said in *Beginnings*).**

# THE DECOLONIAL TURN

---

**Nelson Maldonado-Torres et al view the decolonial turn as a form of liberating and decolonising reason beyond the liberal and Enlightened emancipation of rationality, and beyond the more radical Euro-critiques that have failed to consistently challenge the legacies of Eurocentrism ... (often Eurocentric critiques of Eurocentrism). Otherwise put, the decolonial turn seeks to overcome hierarchies that impede true rigour and excellence in philosophical thinking.**

# **NOT DIVERSIFYING, BUT DISMANTLING, RESTRUCTURING AND REORDERING KNOWLEDGE**

---

- Thus, the aims and goals of English literature departments in the Arab world and other countries in the Global South (and the rest of the world) must include:
- 1.) Changing the names of departments from English literature departments to departments of literatures in English.
- 2.) Dismantling Western knowledge paradigms upon which these English departments are founded, especially the ideology of Englishness.
- 3.) Restructuring and reordering knowledge which entails basing the curricula taught in departments of literatures in English on anti-colonial philosophers, thinkers and writers from the Global South and other marginalized areas.

# **TOTAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE ARAB SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

---

- **This does not mean that Western literatures and philosophers are no longer to be taught—they would, of course, continue to be taught, but they would not constitute the sacred canon from which all else springs—the “zero point epistemology.” In conclusion, I would like to repeat an idea I mentioned at the outset of this talk: our educational system is indeed in need of an epistemic revolution that would mark the beginning of a total transformation of the Arab social consciousness.**

# **LIBERATE, NOT IMITATE**

---

- **It is time to end the feckless mimicry and blind adoption of Western literary programmes—the time has come to liberate, not imitate.**

# DECOLONIZATION IS A GLOBAL PROJECT

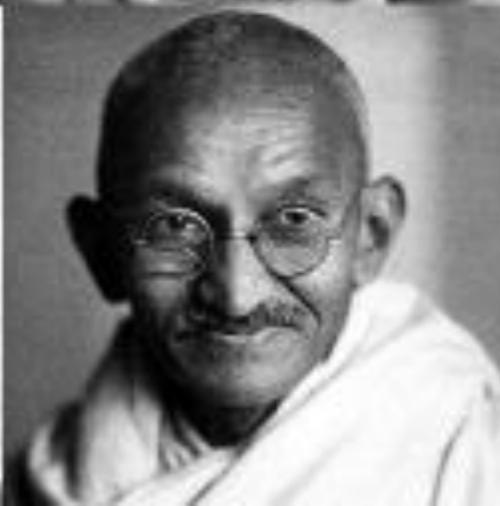
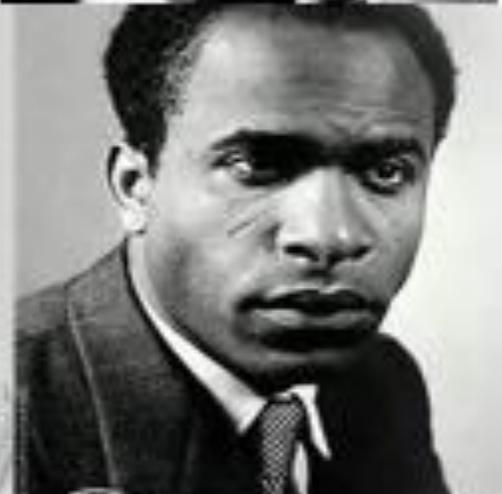
---

- **To quote Tabar and Desai,  
“Decolonization is a global project: from Palestine to the Americas.”**

# PEDAGOGY OF HOPE

---

- **Ibn Rushd, Ibn Khaldoun, Ibrahim Touqan, Fadwa Touqan, Nazik Al Malika, Bader Shaker Al Sayyab, Ghassan Kanafani, Naji al-Ali, Mahmoud Darwish, Adonis, Mourid Barghouti, Radwa Ashour, Assia Djebar, Abdelrahman Munif, Mahatma Gandhi, Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire, Amilcar Cabral, W.E. B Dubois, Malcolm X, James Baldwin, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Chinua Achebe, Paolo Freire, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, Edward Said, Angela Davis, Kwasi Wiredu, bell hooks, Audre Lord, Amiri Baraka, Walter Mignolo, Cornell West and many others.**



# **DECOLONIZE**

---

**Thank you for listening!**