

Epistemic disobedience: the de-colonial option and the meaning of identity in politics.

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Resumo

O argumento deste artigo se baseia em duas teses interrelacionadas. A primeira tese, a identidade NA política (melhor do que política de identidade), é um movimento necessário de pensamento e ação no sentido de romper as grades da moderna teoria política (na Europa desde Maquiavel), que é – mesmo que não se perceba – racista e patriarcal por negar o agenciamento político às pessoas classificadas como inferiores (em termos de gênero, raça, sexualidade, etc). A segunda tese se fundamenta no fato de que estas pessoas, consideradas inferiores, tiveram negado o agenciamento epistêmico pela mesma razão. Assim, toda mudança de descolonização política (não-racista, não heterossexualmente patriarcal) deve suscitar uma desobediência política e epistêmica. A desobediência civil pregada por Mahatma Gandhi e Martin Luther King Jr. foram de fato grandes mudanças, porém, a desobediência civil sem desobediência epistêmica permanecerá presa em jogos controlados pela teoria política e pela economia política eurocêntricas. As duas teses são os pilares da opção descolonial, que nos permite pensar em termos do diversificado espectro da esquerda marxista e, de outro lado, do diversificado espectro da esquerda descolonial.

Palavras-chave: opção descolonial; desobediência epistêmica; desobediência política.

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Readers of *Gragoatá* may be not familiar with a fundamental paragraph by Anibal Quijano in his ground-breaking article “Colonialidad y Modernidad/Racionalidad” (1990. 1992).

La crítica del paradigma europeo de la racionalidad/modernidad es indispensable. Más aún, urgente. Pero es dudoso que el camino consista en la negación simple de todas sus categorías; en la disolución de la realidad en el discurso; en la pura negación de la idea y de la perspectiva de totalidad en el conocimiento. Lejos de esto, es necesario *desprenderse de las vinculaciones de la racionalidad-modernidad con la colonialidad, en primer término, y en definitiva con todo poder no constituido en la decisión libre de gentes libres*. Es la instrumentalización de la razón por el poder colonial, en primer lugar, lo que produjo paradigmas distorsionados de conocimiento y malogró las promesas liberadoras de la modernidad. La alternativa en consecuencia es clara: la destrucción de la colonialidad del poder mundial (QUIJANO, 1992, p. 447. Italics mine)

What Quijano is proposing here is nothing less than *epistemic disobedience*. Without taking that step, and making that move, *epistemic de-linking* will not be possible and, therefore, we will remain within the domain of internal opposition to modern and Eurocentered thoughts, ingrained in Greek and Latin categories of thoughts and the experiences and subjectivities formed from that foundation, both theological and secular. We won't be able to transgress the limits of Marxism, the limits of Freudism and Lacanism, the limits of Foucauldianism; or the limits of the Frankfurt School, including such a superb thinker grounded in Jewish history and German language like Walter Benjamin. I hope that it would be clear for reasonable readers that affirming the co-existence of de-colonial thinking won't be taken as “deligitimizing European critical thoughts or post-colonial thoughts grounded in Lacan, Foucault and Derrida.” I have the impression that intellectuals of post-modern and Marxist bent take as an offense when the above mentioned author, and other similar, are not revered as believers do with sacred texts. *This is precisely why I am arguing here for the de-colonial option as epistemic disobedience.*

I.

No, I am not talking about “identity politics” but of “identity **in** politics.” No need, therefore, to argue that identity politics is predicated on the assumption that identities are essential aspects of individuals, that leads to intolerance and that in identity politics fundamentalists positions are always a danger. Because I partially agree with such a view of identity politics — of which none is exempt, as there is an identity politics predicated on Blackness as well as on Whiteness, on Womanhood as well as

on Manhood, on Homosexuality as well as Heterosexuality —, is that my argument is built on the extreme relevance of identity **in** politics. And identity in politics is relevant not only because identity politics is, as I just suggested, all over the spectrum of social identities, but because the control of identity politics lies, precisely, in the construction of an identity that doesn't look as such but as the "natural" appearance of the world. That is, Whiteness, Heterosexuality and Manhood are the main features of an identity politics that denounces similar but opposing identities as essentials and fundamentalists. However, the dominant identity politics doesn't manifest itself as such, but through abstract universals such as science, philosophy, Christianity, liberalism, Marxism, and the like.

I will argue that identity **in** politics is crucial for any de-colonial option, since without building political theories and organizing political actions that are grounded on identities that have been allocated (e.g., there were no Indians in the American continents until the arrival of the Spaniards; and there were no Blacks until the beginning of the massive slave trade in the Atlantic) by imperial discourses (in the six languages of European modernity — English, French and German after the enlightenment; and Italian, Spanish and Portuguese during the renaissance), it may not be possible to de-naturalize the imperial and racial construction of identity in the modern world under a capitalist economy. Identities constructed by European modern discourses were racial (that is, the colonial racial matrix) and patriarchal. Fausto Reinaga (the Aymara intellectual and activist) clearly stated in the late sixties: "I am not Indian, dammit, I'm Aymara. But you made me Indian and as Indian I will fight for liberation." Identity **in** politics, in summary, is the only way to think de-colonially (which means to think politically in de-colonial terms and projects). All other ways of thinking (that is, intervening in the organization of knowledge and understanding) and of acting politically, that is, ways that are not de-colonial, means to remain within the imperial reason; that is, within imperial identity politics.

The de-colonial option is epistemic, that is, it de-links from the very foundations of Western concepts and accumulation of knowledge. By epistemic de-linking I do not mean abandoning or ignoring what has been institutionalized all over the planet (e.g., look what is going on now in Chinese Universities and the institutionalization of knowledge). I mean to shift the geo-and body-politics of knowledge from its foundation in Western imperial history of the past five centuries, to the geo-and body-politics of people, languages, religions, political and economic conceptions, subjectivities, etc., that have been racialized (that is, denied their plain humanity). Thus, by "Western" I do not mean geography per say, but the geo-politics of knowledge.

Consequently, the de-colonial option means among other things, *learning to unlearn* (as it has been clearly articulated in the Amawtay Wasi high learning project, I will come back to it), since our (a vast number of people around the planet) brains have been programmed by the imperial/colonial reason. Thus by Western knowledge and imperial/colonial reason I mean the knowledge that has been built on the foundations of Greek and Latin and the six European imperial languages (also called vernaculars) and not Arabic, Mandarin, Aymara or Bengali, for example. You could argue that Western reason and rationality is not all imperial, but also critical like Las Casas, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, etc. Sure, but critical within the rules of the games imposed by imperial reasons in its Greek and Latin categorical foundations. There are many options beyond the bubble of *The Truman Show*. And it is from those options that de-colonial thinking emerged. De-colonial thinking means also de-colonial doing, since the modern distinction between theory and practice doesn't apply once you enter in the realm of border thinking and de-colonial projects; once you enter the realm of Quichua and Quechua, Aymara and Tojolabal, Arabic and Bengali, etc. categories of thought confronted, of course, with the relentless expansion of Western (that is Greek, Latin, etc.), foundation of knowledge, let's say, epistemology. One of the achievements of imperial reason was to affirm itself as a superior identity by constructing inferior constructs (racial, national, religious, sexual, gender), and expelling them to the outside of the normative sphere of "the real." I agree that today there is no outside of the system; but there are many *exteriorities*, that is, the *outside constructed from the inside in order to clean and maintain its imperial space*. It is from the exteriority, the pluri-versal exteriorities that surrounding Western imperial modernity (that is, Greek, Latin, etc.), that de-colonial options have been repositioned and emerged with force. The events in Ecuador in the past 10 years, as well as those in Bolivia that culminated in the election of Evo Morales as president of Bolivia, are some of the most visible signs today of the de-colonial option, although de-colonial forces and de-colonial thinking have been in the Andes and Southern Mexico for five hundred years.

¹ I use South America in a very general sense that includes Central America and the Caribbean, "south of Rio Grande" in the one sense; and the Caribbean that in spite of being English or French, has more in common with the South than with the North, that is, North America (U.S. and Canada). Briefly, the imperial/colonial history is what is at stake rather than European or North American text-books on geography.

In South¹, Central America and the Caribbean, de-colonial thinking has been dwelling in the minds and bodies of Indigenous as well as of those of Afro-descendent. The memories inscribed in their bodies through generation, and the socio-political marginalization to which they have been subjected by direct imperial institutions as well as by republican institutions controlled by the Creole population from European descent, nourished a shift in the geo-and body-politics of knowledge. "Maroon de-colonial thinking" built on the Palenques in the Andes and the

Kilombos in Brazil, for example, complemented “Indigenous de-colonial thinking” at work as immediate responses to the progressive invasion of European imperial nations (Spain, Portugal, England, France, Holland).² De-colonial options, and de-colonial thinking have a genealogy of thought not grounded in Greek and Latin but in Quechua and Aymara, in Nahuatl and Tojolabal, in the languages of enslaved African peoples that was subsumed in the imperial language of the region (cfr. Spanish, Portuguese, French, English, Dutch), and re-emerged in truly de-colonial thinking and doing: Candomblés, Santería, Vudú, Rastafarianism, Capoeira, etc. After the end of the eighteenth century, the de-colonial options extended to several locales in Asia (South, East, Central) as far as England and France, mainly, took over the leadership of Spain and Portugal from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

But, let’s come back to the Andes and to South America, dwelling in and thinking from the de-colonial option (or de-colonial options, if you prefer). There are a series of keywords explicit and implicit in my paper (development, inter-culturality, imaginary of the nation, de-colonial). These keywords are not in the same universe of discourse. Or better yet, in the same epistemic field. We have indeed two sets of key words here: development, difference and nation and inter-culturality and de-coloniality. The first set belongs to the imaginary of Western modernity (nation, development) and post-modernity (difference), while the second belongs to the de-colonial imaginary. Let me explain. “Development” was – as we all know – in South America and the Caribbean, the key word of the third wave of global designs after WWII when the U.S. took the lead over England and France, and replaced their civilizing mission with their own version of modernization and development. It became apparent by the late sixties and early seventies – with the crisis of the welfare State – that “development” was another term in the rhetoric of modernity to hide the re-organization of the logic of coloniality: the new forms of control and exploitation of the sector of the world labeled Third World and underdeveloped countries. The racial matrix of power is a mechanism by which not only people, but languages and religions, knowledge and regions of the planet are racialized. Being underdeveloped is it not like being Indigenous from the Americas, Australia and New Zealand? Or Black from Africa? Or Muslim from the Arab world? Being from the colonies of the Second World (e.g., Central Asia and Caucasus)³, was it not in a way being as invisible as colonies of a second-class empire, an imperial racialization hidden under the expression “Second World”?

The rhetoric of modernity (from the Christian mission since the sixteenth century, to the secular Civilizing mission, to development and modernization after WWII) occluded – under

² Guamán Poma de Ayala, *Nueva Crónica y Buen Gobierno* (1516) is one of the first de-colonial Indigenous political treatise that remained in manuscript format until 1936. Quobna Otobah Cugoana, who was transported from Jamaica to England toward the second half of the eighteenth century, published another de-colonial political treatise in 1786, in London: *Thoughts and sentiments of the evil of slavery* (1786). More recently, Maori scholar and activist, Linda Tuhiwai Smith published a groundbreaking de-colonial proposal: *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples*. See the extensive three book reviews published by Heather Howard-Bobiwash; by John Ortley and by Monica Buttler et al., in *The American Indian Quarterly*, disponible on: <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/american_indian_quarterly/toc/aiq29.1.html> (v. 29, n. 1-2, 2005). The pioneering and ground breaking work of Fausto Reinaga is being re-considered today in Bolivia; Frantz Fanon is being re-read, beyond the post-colonial market, by de-colonial intellectuals and activists. In the U.S., Native Americans are re-evaluating the pioneering work of Sioux legal scholar, intellectual and activist Vine Deloria, Jr. See for example, Devon Abbot Mihesuah, *Indigenous American women: decolonization, empowerment and activism* (2003).

³ See Madina Tlostanova (2006).

its triumphant rhetoric of salvation and the good life for all – the perpetuation of the logic of coloniality, that is, of massive appropriation of land (and today of natural resources), massive exploitation of labor (from open slavery from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, to disguised slavery, up to the twenty first century), and the dispensability of human lives from the massive killing of people in the Inca and Aztec domains to the twenty million plus people from Saint Petersburg to the Ukraine during WWII killed in the so called Eastern Front.⁴ Unfortunately, not all the massive killings have been recorded with the same value and the same visibility. The unspoken criteria for the value of human lives is an obvious sign (from a de-colonial interpretation) of the hidden imperial identity politics: that is, the value of human lives to which the life of the enunciator belongs becomes the measuring stick to evaluate other human lives who do not have the intellectual option and institutional power to tell the story and to classify events according to a ranking of human lives; that is, according to a racist classification.⁵

It is true, as I mentioned before, as everybody knows, that within the same civilization of death and of fear, critical voices stood up to map the brutalities of a civilization built upon the rhetoric of salvation and well-being for all. Eric Hobsbawm wrote a powerful piece titled “Barbarism: A User’s Guide” (1994) in which he recognized, described and condemned the “barbarian” record of modern and Western civilization (as a good British intellectual Hobsbawm’s horizon was the enlightenment). And also with English humor, he clarified from the beginning that his article was not intended as a guide to practice barbarism but, rather, a guide of the barbarian moments of Western civilization (e.g., modernity and capitalism). He highlighted the Jewish Holocaust, but “forgot” the Holocaust of enslaved Africans before the enlightenment as well as the killing of non-Western lives, like the 25 million Slaves that died in the Eastern frontier of Europe, as I mentioned before, from Saint Petersburg to Belarusia and the Ukraine.

II.

But let’s come back to the concept of “development” during the Cold War that was the name of the global design of the US in its inaugural stage of global domination. In South America, the politics of development was denounced by the CEPAL (Comisión Económica para América Latina) itself (by its own chairman, the Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch), and by the more left-leaning sociologists and economists that advanced the well known “dependency theory.” “Development” was also critiqued in South America by the foundation of Liberation Theology and Liberation Philosophy.

⁴ The Eastern Front was unparalleled for its high intensity, ferocity, and brutality. The fighting involved millions of German and Soviet troops along a broad front. It was by far the deadliest single theatre of war in World War II, with over 5 million deaths on the Axis Forces, Soviet military deaths were about 10.6 million (out of which 2.6 million Soviets died in German captivity), and civilian deaths were about 14 to 17 million. If one adds to this the six millions Jews killed under Hitler’s regime (the Jewish Holocaust); and to Iraq and Lebanon, where the State of Israel is enacting on the population of Lebanon what happened to their own Jewish ancestors in Western and Central Europe half a century ago; from the commodity value to which enslaved Africans were subjected to the current traffic of women and children as well as human organs, the rhetoric of modernity remained strong.

⁵ The *maquila*, the commercialization of human organs and human bodies (e.g., young women in regions of Asia, Central Asia, Russia) “captured” and “sold” pretty much like enslaved African men in the sixteenth and the seventeenth century, are all examples of the same history of Western barbarism hidden under the rhetorical splendors of Western civilization. The world is flat, as Thomas Friedman celebrates, but it is also very, very thick!

If during the Cold War the liberal concept of “development” embodied a re-organization of the logic of coloniality as lead by the U.S., and encountered the Dependency Theory and Theology/Philosophy of Liberation as its opponents, after the end of the Cold War new developmental designs (this time in terms of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) of a different kind), encountered a fierce resistance by the political and economic projects emanating from Indigenous Nations, mainly in the Andean region of South America. Globally, Free Trade Agreements have been opposed by a number of social movements under the banner of “yes to life” as a response to the “projects of death” embodied in FTA.

Today the de-colonial option is at work around the world, beyond the critiques being advanced, daily, within the capitalist and neo-liberal civilization. In Israel and in the U.S., as well as in Europe, the opposition to the invasion of Iraq and of Lebanon has been growing. Internal critiques (liberals, Marxists, Jews and Christians) are necessary but hardly sufficient. De-colonial options are showing that the road to the future cannot be built from the ruins and the memories of Western civilization and its internal allies. A civilization that celebrates and enjoys life instead of making certain lives dispensable to accumulate wealth and to accumulate death, can hardly be constructed from the ruins of Western civilization, even in its “good” promises as Hobsbawm would like to have it. Recently, for example, Via Campesina, the Fishermen World Forum, International Friends of the Land, and other social movements, have been imposing themselves as leaders of a non-capitalist world, by forcing the collapse of the Doha Round. Pascal Lamy, the secretary of the OMC, officially announced the suspension of the Doha Round’s negotiation. Non-development projects, like projects for the reproduction of life and not for the reproduction of death (like Via Campesina, the Fishermen World Forum, the International Friends of Land, the Indigenous Nations of Ecuador, etc.), are gaining ground.

A cautionary note is in order. When I talk here about “reproduction of life” I am not aligning myself with Henry Bergson’s vitalism and its re-inscription in contemporary debates. Deleuze’s vitalism or philosophy of life, for instance, has its roots in Henri Bergson’s (1911) and its conception of the “elan vital” (vital force) and it is cast in the philosophy of evolution and development of organism. “Vital force” was a concept, an important concept, in Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*.⁶ If we were only to think within the limits of modern and imperial reason, then every reference to the reproduction of life will be interpreted in the trajectory from Bergson to Hitler. Fortunately, the de-colonial option allows for a conception of reproduction of life that comes from the *damnés*, in Frantz Fanon’s terminology, that is, from the

⁶ See for instance the edition in the web, <<http://www.crusader.net/texts/mk/>>; a site called The Occidental Pan-Aryan Crusade, where there is a list of “other white nationalist texts.”

perspective of the majority of people on the planet whose lives were declared dispensable, whose dignity was humiliated, whose bodies were used as a work force: reproduction of life here is a concept that emerges from the Indigenous and enslaved Afros in the formation of a capitalist economy, and that extends to the reproduction of death through Western imperial expansion and the growth of a capitalist economy. That is, the de-colonial option that nourishes de-colonial thinking in imagining a world in which many worlds can co-exist.

Today, a de-colonial way of thinking that doesn't own allegiance to the Greek categories of thought, is already an existing option: re-inscribe in the legacies of the *ayllu* in the Andes and the *altepetl* in Mexico and Guatemala. We can imagine that similar de-colonial moves are taking place in the Islamic world, in India, in North and Sub-Saharan Africa. Re-inscription of marginalized and denigrated languages, religions and ways of thinking are being re-inscribed in confrontation with Western categories of thought. Border thinking or border epistemology is one of the consequences and the way out to avoid either Western or non-Western fundamentalisms.⁷

The reproduction of life that I am talking about (in the sense that the university Amawtay Wasi understands "buen vivir" instead of "professional excellence", the mantra of the modern, corporate university in the US and Europe, but also in other parts of the world due to the imperial dimension of learning—flattening the world, as Thomas Friedman would like to celebrate) then comes from the long memories of the *ayllu* and the *altepetl*, without which it would be difficult to understand the force of Indigenous nations in Ecuador, the election of Evo Morales in Bolivia, and the Zapatistas uprising in Southern Mexico. That is, the re-articulation of Indigenous Nations and the recession of mono-topic (that is, mono-linguistic and religious ethnicity of the creole-mestizo/a elite in South America, equivalent to the national white elite in Western Europe and the U.S.), is forcing a radical transformation of the equation of one Nation-one State. The pluri-national State that is already well advanced in Bolivia and Ecuador is one of the consequences of identity in politics fracturing the political theory on which the modern and mono-topic State was founded and perpetuated, under the illusion that it was a neutral, objective and "democratic" state detached from identity in politics. Whiteness and political theory, in other words, are transparent, neutral and objective, while Colors and political theory are essentialists and fundamentalists. The de-colonial option disqualifies this interpretation. By linking de-coloniality with identity in politics, the de-colonial option reveals the hidden identity under the pretense of universal democratic theories, while building on the racialized identities that were constructed by the hegemony of Western categories of thought,

⁷ On border thinking or border epistemology (also gnosis), see Walter D. Mignolo and Madina V. Tlostanova (2006, p. 205-222).

histories and experiences (again, Greek and Latin foundations of modern/imperial reason).

Thus, if in the modern/colonial world, philosophy since the European Renaissance was part of the formation and the transformation of European history by its indigenous population described as Western Christians, such a concept of philosophy (and theology) was the weapon that mutilated and silenced similar rationalities in Africa and in the Indigenous population of the New World. By philosophy here I mean not only the disciplinary and normative formation of a given practice, but the underlying cosmology that underlines it. What Greek thinkers called *philosophy* (love to wisdom) and Aymara thinkers *tlamachilia* (to think well), are local and particular expressions of a common tendency and energy in human beings. The fact that “philosophy” became global doesn’t mean that it is also “uni-versal.” It simply means that the Greek concept of philosophy was picked up by the intelligentsia linked to imperial/colonial expansion, the foundation of capitalism and Western modernity.

I bring up these examples because I am interested in three (among others) types of projects that confront neo-liberal globalization yet at the same time work toward a socio-political organization, on a global scale, based on the de-fetichization of political power and on an economic organization that aims at the reproduction of life instead of the reproduction of death; and aims at reciprocity and fair distribution of wealth among many rather than the accumulation of wealth among the few. It is this latest economic goal that needs exploitation and domination, corruption and self-serving labor. An economy oriented toward the reproduction of life and the well being of the many, embodies a politic of *representation* in which the power is in the community and not in the State or any other equivalent administrative institution.

A simplified version of four to five hundred years of history in South America and the Caribbean (depending on the location and the communities, Indigenous or Afro communities), would have these elements in common:

- a) An internal organization of the Indigenous and Afro communities (*intra-cultural*) as a matter of survival confronted with the invasion of Europeans (Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French and English imperial designs), in different locales of the Americas and the Caribbean;
- b) An external organization to fight against the imperial/colonial infiltration in their town, economic and social organization, cultures and lands. First, in confrontation with imperial/colonial authorities; secondly, after “independence” against the nation-state controlled by Creoles from European descent and Mestizos with European dreams; finally, and more recently, in confrontation with

the transnational corporations dilapidating the forests, the beaches and the areas rich in natural resources; and also in confrontation with the national-states defending Free Trade according to Washington designs.

The consequences of three hundred years (approximately) of direct colonial rule and of two hundred years (approximately) of internal colonialism (that is, the Creole/Mestizo elite after independence), was the growing force of nations (indigenous and afros) within the nation where *mestizaje* became the ideology of national homogeneity, an oxymoron that portrays the reality of colonial states in South America and the Caribbean. In the U.S. (like in England, Germany or France), *mestizaje* was not a problem until the recent flow of immigration. For centuries, modern/imperial Europe lived under a national ideology sustained by a white Christian population (either Catholic or Protestant). Indigenous nations within the Creole/Mestizo nation, is what is at stake today in the Andes, Southern Mexico and Guatemala. Indeed, what is in recession is the *ethnicity* upon which nation-states were imagined, from the early nineteenth century until recently. What is in recession is the *Latin ethnicity* and what is accelerating and rising is the variegated spectrum of Indigenous and Afro projects, in their epistemic and political dimension.

What is at stake then in *identity in politics and epistemology*? We are not just facing demands, from Indigenous and Afro-communities, to the national state and to the Latin ethnic group that control politics and economy. We are facing a radical shift in which Indigenous and Afro-communities are clear about two basic principles:

- (a) The epistemic rights of Indigenous and Afro communities upon which political and economic de-colonial projects are being built and a de-colonial subject affirmed as difference in the human sameness (e.g., because we are all equal we have the right to the difference, as the Zapatistas claimed) and
- (b) Without the control of the epistemic foundation of Afro and Indigenous epistemology, that is, of political theory and political economy, any claim made from the liberal or Marxist State will be limited to *offering liberty* and preventing Indigenous and Afros to *exercise their freedom*.

De-colonial thinking is the road to pluri-versality as a universal project. The pluri-national State that Indigenous and Afros claim in the Andes, is a particular manifestation of the larger horizon of pluri-versality and the collapse of any abstract universal that is presented as good for the entire humanity, its very *sameness*. This means that the defense of human sameness above human differences is always a claim made from the privileged position of identity politics in power.

III

I have been asked question as this: oh, so you mean that to shift the geo-geography of reason or to shift from ego-politics to geo-politics of knowledge you have to be Indian, and that only Indians can do it? So, what about me, who is not Indian but White, what can I do? Am I being left out of the game? Last time I have been asked such questions, not without anger, was by a young Spanish Marxist, during one of the summer seminars, organized by Universidad Complutense. This seminar was on "De-colonial thinking" and Nina Pacari was one of the speaker and participants during the week-long seminar. The question brought to the forefront the complicity between geo- and body-politics of knowledge disguised under "disciplinary identity." One of the arguments advanced during the debates, in that long week seminar, was that after all the talk about de-colonial thinking, cannot be taken seriously; that de-colonial arguments were not argument grounded in the social sciences (and I am not joking here). Another sociologist in the audience asked, with the assurance that being a sociologist gave him, "could you define de-colonial thinking? You gave a history, used it metaphorically, but you never gave a definition." They were asking for *epistemic obedience*. I did not offer him of course a definition because it would have meant playing according to the rules he was asking me to play to that was "disciplinary identity". And he was refusing to play according to the rules I was playing, which was the racialization of bodies and geo-historical locations. That is, I was not playing the game of disciplinary identity but of "geo-and body-identification" as formed and shaped, in the modern/colonial world, by the rhetoric of modernity justifying capitalist economy. In other words, I was offering the Marxist and sociologists interlocutors to **consider the de-colonial option**; and they refused of course, inviting me to play according to the social sciences disciplinary norms and marxist convictions. It was not easy for my interlocutors to see that they were playing an "identity politics game" and pretended, or believed, that their position occupied a location beyond identity; beyond geo- and body- political configurations. I was, in other words, de-linking from Eurocentrism in the particular sense that the concept of Eurocentrism has for us, in the project modernity/coloniality. Eurocentrism doesn't name a geographical place but the hegemony of a way of knowing grounded in Greek and Latin and in the six European and imperial languages of modernity; that is, modernity/coloniality.

And how do you de-link from Eurocentrism if you are, like me, an Argentinean of European descent and not an Indian of the Andean Region or an Ecuadorian, Barbadian or Martinican of African descent? Certainly, you can be of African descent

and embrace the tradition of White European thinkers, Jews or not; or you can be a White person from France or the U.S. and embrace the tradition of African and Afro-Caribbean radical thinkers, etc. I am uncoupling the formation and transmission of epistemic regions, linked to bodies and regions of the modern/colonial world and their movement through time and space. They move but they do not vanish: go tell a post-modern thinker or a conservative European philosopher that there is no such a thing as European philosophy or European history of ideas, and you may have the confirmation that fictional entities also exist; and that European thinkers have made clear that there is a correlation between certain ideas, certain regions of the world and certain types of persons. That is why still Indigenous and Afro intellectuals have difficulties in getting their ideas competitive with say some one like Martin Heidegger or Samuel Huntington, to give two different examples.

Now let's go back to the initial question of the previous paragraph and take the example of the Argentinean philosopher of German descent, Gunther Rodolfo Kusch (1922-1979), whose work was written and published between 1953 and 1980. Among Kusch's many original contributions, and his isolation precisely because of its originality, is the concept of "mestizo consciousness" that he introduced in the late fifties. "Mestizo consciousness" in the fifties, in Argentina and in the pen of a philosopher of German descent, was a concept not yet ready to be seen.⁸ Here we have, in the work of Rodolfo Kusch, *a sustained effort of twenty five years of epistemic disobedience*. He paid his dou, and he was isolated.

"Mestizo consciousness" for Kusch did not have anything to do with biology and mixed blood, which was the canonical understanding of mestizaje: mixed blood of Spaniard or Portuguese (generally the father) and Indian (generally the mother). We should remember also that Spaniard or Portuguese coupled with Africans were called "mulatos." Although Kusch refers only incidentally to Blacks in America, "mestizo consciousness" is a concept open enough to embody also the "mulato consciousness." What is then, for Kusch, "mestizo consciousness"?

It has been a concern of thinkers and philosophers of European descent, particularly in Argentina, there being displaced Europeans; that is, Europeans but not quite enough. The distinction in Castilian language between "ser" (to be) and "estar" (to be), acquired a philosophical dimension that explained the fractures and the existential feelings of displaced Europeans in the Americas.

Important: Kusch doesn't talk about Latin America, but about America. For a philosopher in America, a mestizo consciousness, it was difficult to think "Being", or "Existence", or "History" or "Economy" of "Humanity"...etc., etc. Those uni-

⁸ The work of Gunther Rodolfo Kusch extends from 1952 (*La seducción de la barbarie*) to 78 (*Geocultural del hombre Americano'1976'* and *Esbozo de una antropología Filosófica Americana*, 1978). In the meantime he published three major books: *América Profunda* (1963), *Pensamiento Indígena y Pensamiento Popular en América* (1973). What follows is a summary of ideas running through the work of Kusch, here as well as in articles and talks he delivered in Argentina and Bolivia, mainly.

versal entities could/can only be conceived, explored, unfolded, conceptualized from the perspective of a “pure consciousness”, from a consciousness where there is no difference between *ser* and *estar*; for a consciousness in which some one *es donde está* and *está donde es*. That is, for some one who can feel/be where she is and are where she should be. If you are not, if you do not feel you are a “pure consciousness,” you may feel that you do not belong to the sphere of Being, of History, of Economy, of Politics, etc. Instead, if you feel you belong to the “pure consciousness” category you may not even know it and do not ask such questions, because simply you feel you are and, naturally, everybody else should feel the same and if they don’t, well, it is not your fault; there must be something wrong with them. However, the category of “pure consciousness” is only conceivable from the perspective of “mestizo consciousness”, which is a way of shifting the geography of reason and unveiling the regionality of a consciousness without qualification because it is assumed to be uni-versal.

Thus, mestizo consciousness for an Argentine philosopher of German descent, very well versed in Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, the fracture between *ser* and *estar* is not a question of blood but a question of feeling; a feeling of being out of place, of feeling when he will theorize during the fifties as the natural force of America and in the sixties and seventies moving to an understanding of Aymara philosophy, of Aymara thought. But also bringing both together, the correlation between space and density of organic life (pampas, mountains, jungles, flora, rivers, etc.) with scattered cities and low demographic density. In other words, Greece and Rome (or Jerusalem for Levinas) are far, too far away, for a mestizo consciousness in America. Instead, the exuberant organic life (some would say “nature”) and the dense memory of Indigenous civilizations and cosmologies (instead of Greek, Roman or Hebrew) and languages (Aymara and Quechua, instead of Greek, Latin and Hebrew), offered in America the place and the memory of *who* one is (*ser*) and *where* one is (*estar*). Thus, mestizo consciousness is a philosophical and not a biological concept. A philosophical concept that is unthinkable in the history of European philosophy, from Tales of Mileto to Heidegger of the Black Forest in Messkirch.

Mestizo consciousness is a philosophical concept open to the pluri-versal, like double consciousness in Du Bois, mestiza consciousness in Anzaldua; mestizo/mulato consciousness in Colombian thinker, writer and medical doctor, Manuel Zapata Olivella. Concepts in the history of European philosophy are mono-topic and uni-versal not pluri-topic and pluriversal. And why are concepts that are elaborated in de-colonial projects and in the process of de-colonial thinking pluri-topic and pluri-versal? Because the colonial wound has been diversified, em-

ploying the language of Wall Street, around the world: Indians in America, Australia and New Zeland; Sub-Saharan African Blacks and in the Americas; Arabs and Berbers in North Africa and in the Middle East; Indians in post-partition India; and even Chinese, Japanese, and Russian and their colonies had to deal one way or another with the mono-topic cosmovision of Western civilization encapsulated in Greek and Latin, the six modern European imperial languages, and the corresponding subjectivity inscribed in and through artistic expression, popular culture, mass communication, etc. That is why mestizo consciousness is diverse and diversified. And that is why also any de-colonial project and any de-colonial option had to deal with border epistemology and border thinking and double translations as methodological path (sorry for the pleonasm, and the redundant expression "methodological path").

The dislocation of "mestizo consciousness" lived and experienced in the critical awareness of people of European descent has something in common with the dislocation of Indigenous and Afro dislocated consciousness also in America. If the awareness of being of European descent, and therefore not of African or of Original (that is Ab-Original) descent, is the awareness of a dislocation of a "mestizo consciousness", that consciousness has something in common with W.E. B. Du Bois double consciousness or Gloria Anzaldúa mestiza consciousness. What they have in common is the colonial wound; a sense of the modern/colonial fracture; of the modern/colonial racial displacement. Certainly, there is a question of scale, and the colonial wound in an Argentine of European descent is not the same as the colonial wound of an Aymara of ab-original descent. The three kinds of experiences, however, are felt in relation to the presence of the absence: the pure consciousness of European imperial/colonial expansion and forced invitation to assimilate or to feel the difference, the colonial difference.

Thus, the de-colonial option shall become clear in this context. De-colonial means thinking from the exteriority and in a subaltern epistemic position vis-à-vis the epistemic hegemon that creates, builds, constructs an outside in order to assure its interiority. Don't we hear that every day in President Bush's discourses, a discourse that was common among Western Christians in the sixteenth and seventeenth century; secular Liberals in the nineteenth and twentieth century; Neo-liberals and Marxists. The de-colonial implies to think from languages and categories of thoughts not-included in the fundamentals of Western thoughts. Again, Greek and Latin and (please repeat with me...!).

But the question here was, what can an Argentine of European descent do if his family language is German and the official language of the country, Argentina, is Spanish? He is not

Black or Indian, so how can he think from *Exteriority* (instead of Greek or Latin) categories of thoughts that are not imbedded in the imperial history of Western thoughts? There are a few ways to answer these questions. Be patient, please. We have to unknot the knot, learn to unlearn, and learn to relearn at every step.

Kusch engaged in three of his books, with both the colonial archive of Indigenous philosophy and the present philosophical thoughts among Aymara's. In the first dimension, he engaged with Waman Puma de Ayala and the Warochiri Manuscript, as well as the Quechua and Aymara dictionaries by González Holguin and Ludovico Bertonio. In the preface of one of his fundamental books, *El Pensamiento Indígena y Popular en América* (1963), Kusch observes, from the outset:

La búsqueda de un pensamiento indígena no se debe sólo al deseo de exhumarlo científicamente, sino a la necesidad de rescatar un estilo de pensar que, según creo, se da en el fondo de América y que mantiene cierta vigencia en las poblaciones criollas (Prologo).

Certain words like “rescatar” (to recover) and “el fondo de America” (“deep America”) do not sound right forty years later. We would say “re-inscribe” and perhaps “in the ab-original memory in America”. But this is not the point. The point is the clarity of the project and the need to make it explicit from the very beginning, the first sentence of the prologue. A couple of good books have been written, more recently, in which a scientific analysis (philosophical one and anthropological the other; Josef Estermann and Fernando Martinez Enriquez) has been advanced. Kusch follows in the steps of Nahuatl historian Miguel Leon Portilla and attempts to take another step. And that step is to move from the analysis of Aymara thought, to take it seriously, to understand the socio-historical and subjective “problems” in America. Furthermore, a third step is to offer the sketch of an American way of thinking (*parallel, co-existing and overlapping*, and obviously differential with a Western way of thinking. The key concept here is *estar* instead of *ser*).

This is nothing less than the main goal of *El pensamiento indígena y popular en America*. Let me offer you a highlight of the Kusch enterprise from chapter 10, “Salvation and Economy”. I selected this chapter because it can be put into a dialogue with Felix Patzi and Nina Pacari that I mentioned before.

Kusch began the chapter, as he often does, with an anecdote that sets the stage of the issue to explore. In this case, he remembers that Toledo, a small city in Bolivia, a very well educated resident and self identified Indian, confessed to Kusch that for him Indians were illiterate and as such they couldn't get used to a cooperative system. A few weeks ago a fight among Indians themselves took place in the copper of Huanuni. The tragic case

of the past few weeks goes way back to the neoliberal privatization of the mining industry. The neo-liberal strategy was to create an Indian elite of cooperativistas who were the bosses of other waged Indians. That is, Indians exploiting other Indians. The same strategy took place before neo-liberalism, during the Cold War and US projects of modernization and development in South America. Kusch is reporting on one specific case that helps in understanding imperial global designs and their impact on social and personal relations. The case reported by Kusch is not an isolated one. As a matter of fact, Kusch shows the links of a long chain of events going back to the sixteenth century, the massive appropriation of land and the transformation of living to waged labor. Kusch now, in the chapter, goes into one of the stories told in the one of the many narratives of *Visitas* (Spanish administrative visits to different towns to gather information to be used by the Crown in its managerial designs).

The bottom line is this. Garci Diez, the Dominican father that reports on the Visit to the region of Lupaca, reports with indignation the fact that women will produce tejidos, fabric, weaving by the request of *Mallku* (the supreme authority of the region) and not receiving, to his eyes, anything more than some food and other small recognition. Garci Diez believes that the women should receive a salary for their work and that is what the Spaniards will give them, instead of just food and other small recognitions in species. But, alas, the women refused to deal with the Spaniards, they are not interested in the salary, and will only do the work for and when *Mallku* asks them to do so.

Obviously, what Garci Diez reports is what he sees according to the logic of an emerging capitalist economy. He wasn't able to see that the other logic, the *sistema de prestaciones*, that is, of communal reciprocity that govern an economy of which he was only able to see the object, the fabric; the workers and the time employed to produce the object; and finally the receiver of the object, the *Mallku*, who was not properly rewarding the time employed to produce the object. The *Mallku*, in Garci Diez's eyes was exploiting the women while he was trying to extract them from that inhuman system by offering them a salary for their work, so they will not be exploited. And yet, the women apparently preferred to be exploited by the *Mallku* rather than to be exploited by the Spaniards. Seriously speaking, they opted for a qualitative economy of communal reciprocity instead of a quantitative economy in which the product of labor is compensated by a salary; an economy in which the focus is on the object and the time of labor and not an economic system that functions according to other logic, that produces different subjectivities, and that focuses on the well being of the community instead of private and personal accumulation.

What happened in Huanuni is that Garci Diez view beca-

me naturalized and those particular Indigenous communities, cooperativistas and waged Indians, were both caught into Garci Diez's logic. And the resident of the small city of Toledo, who told Kusch that Indians who refused the co-operativista system were illiterate, was also already caught into the single logic of capitalist economy.

However, the fact that Indians and Indigenous communities were converted to the capitalist system doesn't mean that every single Indian in the Americas has been converted. And the other way around: the fact that Indians, in the government of Evo Morales, and those supporting him, as well as in Ecuador and the U.S., maintain a social organization based on communal reciprocity and qualitative economy, doesn't mean that every one who is or considers himself Indian, like the resident of Toledo, has to accept communal reciprocity as a way of living. We have to uncouple socio-economic organization from the essentialist qualities of the agents: a capitalist economy can be endorsed and embraced by Indians or Afros, by peasant or by waged industrial workers. Conversely, a communal reciprocity economy could be endorsed by Creole and Mestizo Bolivians and by white US or French members of the middle or high middle class (I doubt that any higher than that would endorse communal reciprocity economy).

But Kusch's doesn't stop at the descriptive and interpretive stage of two economic systems that, even if they infected each other through the centuries, there is still "something" that distinguishes them. It would be, for instances, like looking at Islam and Christianity in their mutual interaction throughout the centuries. You could say that it is too binary for your post-modern taste; or too simplistic and dichotomous, for the same post-modern taste. But, you see, we are already talking about two binary systems: capitalist and communal reciprocity economies, on the one hand, and Christianity and Islam on the other. So, dichotomies are not onto-logical but hermeneutical. In any case, this is not the point I want to make — just a preparation to it.

Kusch takes the next step by asking a question of surprising actuality, taking into account the situation in Venezuela and Bolivia, and the result of the election in Ecuador, two days ago. Kusch asks: does the indigenous system of prestaciones, reciprocity economy, have any incidence today in South America? What would be the impact of a qualitative economy over a quantitative economy? And he further asks, in 1963, "What is the true meaning of the current revolutionary agitation all over America. Will it be just a case of foreign infiltration?" (pp. 435). He was referring to the rumors that the revolutionary agitation was due to the Soviet and Cuban influence on Latin America, and he knew that that was not the case. However, intellectuals like Nina Pacari and Feliz Patzi Paco are following, from their

own Indigenous experience, a path that Kusch discovered as a philosopher out of place, by discovering the mestizo consciousness among displaced Europeans in the history of America.

So, that is the answer to the question I asked at the beginning of this section: how can a European for whom his or her language is not Aymara and whose skin is not Black and his ancestors from Africa, engage in de-colonial thinking and advance the de-colonial option? Well, Kusch offers a good example.

IV

The Latin-ethnics (that is, people of European descent in South America and the Caribbean) are caught within the epistemology of modernity. Dependency theory, as stated before, as well as the philosophy and theology of liberation, were strong statements to fracture the homogeneity of a political economy controlled by liberal ideologues and liberal institutions (I am talking about the 60s), that were either too naïve to believe in the development of the so termed underdeveloped (or Third World) or were perfect hypocrites that were selling the ticket of development and modernization knowing perfectly well that it was a legally organized way to continue the pillage of regions around the world, outside of Europe and the U.S., and that were not under the control of the Soviet Union.

Now, during the first decade of the 21st century, the roads to the future could be analyzed in four general directions:

One is what has been loosely called by some a “turn to the left” (by the extreme right and the enthusiastic left), or as a “return to populism” (by neo-liberal aligned leaders like Fernando Henrique Cardoso).⁹ In the first camp the names of Luiz Ignacio Lula da Silva in Brazil, Nestor Kirchner in Argentina and Michele Bachelet in Chile, could be loosely described as such, in spite of their differences and in spite of their loose (if any in some case), links with the “left,” in the Marxist meaning of the word. In general “left” means that these governments are not always enthusiastic and following the dictates of Washington as did Carlos Menem in Argentina, Sánchez de Losada in Bolivia and before them Augusto Pinochet in Chile. In this context, “Left” means that neo-liberal and extreme right dictate are not being followed by global designs emanating from Washington D.C.

The second is the “re-turn to the right.” The current talk about extending the Puebla-Panama corridor (initiated by Vicente Fox) to Bogota now that Alvaro Uribe has been confirmed for his second term in office:

From July onwards, Colombia will form part of the one-sided geopolitical mega-project that seeks to consolidate the neo-liberal model in western Latin America with the aim of privatizing highway infrastructure, public services and natural resources. This economic and political strategy is promoted by

⁹ More than ideology: the conflation of populism with the left in Latin America. *Harvard International Review*, Harvard, v. 28, n. 2, p. 14-18, July 2006.

Washington via Mexico's President Vicente Fox and counts on the financial support of the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank, while various multinational companies are committed to its implementation. Nonetheless, the impact President Alvaro Uribe's announcement, that in his second period in office Colombia will join Plan Puebla Panama, will have in the country at every level in the immediate future has gone unnoticed by public opinion, probably through ignorance as to Plan Puebla Panama's causes and consequences.¹⁰

One could guess that if Bogotá joins the corridor Puebla-Panama, then the corridor could be extended to Santa Cruz, Bolivia, where it will be well received by the Nación Camba and the Unión Radical Nacional Socialista de Bolivia.

The aim of the plan is very clear: to help multinational companies privatize ports and airports, highways, electrical energy, water, gas, oil and, above all, to get unrestricted control of the huge resources of biodiversity of the Lacandona forest (2), and the Chimalapas in Oaxaca (3) in Mexico and of the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor that reaches all the way to Panama. It has a planned cost of US \$25 billion and seeks to open up Central America and Colombia to free trade.¹¹ "Nación Camba" is the name of a right-wing movement that took the name "Camba" from Indigenous and peasant populations. It is known as the Separatist Movement of Bolivia and is made up of rich, white people -the URNSB (Union Radical Nacional Socialista de Bolivia) and is one of the organizations that protect the desires of whites in Bolivia. Both groups, with different degrees of viciousness, use a language of liberation and sovereignty with direct and indirect references to Nazism and the Kux Klux Klan.¹²

The third orientation or direction has been traced with distinctive strokes by Hugo Chávez, in Venezuela. For many, Fernando Henrique Cardoso among them, Chávez is a populist; the return to the populism of the Cold War. It will require an extensive and detailed argument to show that this may not be the case. Just as a hypothesis consider the following: There is a significant, radical difference between Juan Domingo Perón and Hugo Chávez. Perón was "a populist" following the recent conceptualization of populism.¹³ However, being a "populist" is not necessarily all that bad as liberal and right wing intellectuals would like to portray it. For, was a "democratic" president like Alvaro Uribe or George W. Bush preferable to a populist like Perón? Yes and no. Since both options are within the system, that is the political-economic system of modernity/coloniality, neither of the options are clear-cut.

But the point here is not to discuss the pros-and-cons of populism. Rather it is to submit (without space for arguments) that Hugo Chávez is not only different from Perón, but quite the opposite. Perón operated on the fetichization of the State to

¹⁰ Fernando Orellano Ortiz. Plan Puebla Panamá. Disponible on: <<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0607/S00341.htm>>.

¹¹ See Fernando Aellano Ortiz, disponible on: <<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0607/S00341.htm>>.

¹² See report on Neo-Nazis, disponible on: <<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0511/S00064.htm>>.

¹³ See Ernesto Laclau (2005).

manipulate a crowd (the *populus*), to which he offered significant benefits (unionizing, vacations, shortening the length of working hours, health insurance, extra-month of salary every twelve months, etc.). All these compensations were based on clear-cut “social class politics.” That is, based on material benefits, which, of course, were very welcomed by the workers. Hugo Chávez operates on the basis of “identity in politics.” Chávez’s self-description as a mestizo shall not be taken lightly. He is building on the large population of mestizos/as and mulatos/as in Venezuela, which not by chance, happened to be the lower class. Identity politics operates on the assumption of essential identities among marginalized communities (for racial, gender and sexual reasons) that deserve recognition. In general, identity politics doesn’t engage in politics at the level of the State and remains within the sphere of the civil society. Identity in politics, instead, de-links from the iron cage of “political parties” as have been set up by modern/colonial political theory and Eurocentered at that. “La Revolución Bolivariana”, like MAS (Marcha hacia el Socialismo), are both political projects that de-link from the Eurocentered frame of political theory and political economy and, at the same time, that empower the de-colonization of colonized racial subjectivities. Both projects are of course different, but they also differ from Fidel Castro’s in Cuba. While Castro’s socialist project in Cuba remains within the rules of the game (that is, of changing the content but remaining within the same logic of Western modernity), Chávez brakes away by re-inscribing the struggle for independence carried on by Simón Bolívar. Although for many Bolívar is not the “ideal model”, in the sense that he contributed to the affirmation of a Creole elite of Spanish descent that turned their back on Indians, Afros, Mestizos/as and Mulata/s, it is a history with which Chávez and Venezuela have more in common than that with Vladimir Lenin and the Soviet Revolution. In that sense, the connections that Chávez is looking for with the *populus* that supports him and with the slogan of “Bolivarian Revolution”, is not based on class-improvements without a common subjectivity to work at (like in the case of Perón). Granted, there is not yet a clear formulation of the project, but there is enough signs to believe that what Chávez is looking for runs parallel to the de-colonial epistemic and political project that had been advanced, in the past 10 years, by a community of scholars, intellectuals and activists.¹⁴

While one can see in Chávez’s political and economic management (both in internal politics and international relations) the remains of the fetichization of State power, Evo Morales provides still a different path. The fourth path I am describing here. The history of Bolivia in the past fifteen years, the growing strength of the Indigenous nation (in its diversity or, if you wish, the Indigenous nations), established a distinct mode and model

¹⁴ See Arturo Escobar (2004).

¹⁵ Enrique Dussel (2006).

¹⁶ See Samir Amin (1990); Sayyid Qutb (2001); Ali Shariati (1980).

¹⁷ Indigenous intellectual do not enjoy yet of wide circulation, because precisely the coloniality of knowledge, that non-indigenous intellectuals enjoys. Not being acknowledged by the media or the university, it doesn't mean that their work and intellectual production is less meaningful in the social fabric. It is less recognized – certainly – by the elite that control the market of intellectual production. My comments here are based on the intellectual and political trajectory of Luis Macas and his leadership in the creation of Amawtay Wasi (Aprender en la sabiduría y el buen vivir; Learning wisdom and the good way of life); on the intellectual and political trajectory of Nina Pacari. Recently she has clearly expressed the epistemic and political historical foundations of Indigenous de-colonial projects in Ecuador (La incidencia de la participación política de los pueblos Indígenas: uno camino irreversible. Paper presented and discussed widely during one day section of the summer school, organized by the Universidad Complutense de Madrid; The one week workshop was titled: pensamiento descolonial y la emergencia de los indígenas en América Latina. Nina Pacari questioned head on the title of the workshop: “En estos últimos tiempos se habla de la emergencia indígena. De unos seres anclados en los museos para el gusto colonial de muchos, hemos pasado a ser unos actores que les provocamos miedo, incertidumbres o desconfianza.” and in

of the political that I will describe as the de-colonial move. The awareness among the leaders and the participants in Indigenous claims is that power cannot be taken (as Enrique Dussel reminds us)¹⁵ because power is not in the State but in the people politically organized, it is loud and clear in Bolivia. By that I mean that in Bolivia, like in any place else today in South America and the Caribbean, the possibility that Evo Morales may not end his period as president, will not change at all the political organization and mobilization of the Indigenous population. What counts is not that Evo Morales was elected president (although, of course, important), as the international media celebrated still anchored in the old model of fetichization of power, but the radical shift that is taking place by the *inscription of identity in politics*.

Identity in politics, in Bolivia, has also made clear the rift between different versions of Marxist left and Indigenous de-colonial projects. And that is basically what is at stake in the “levée ethnique”: de-colonization (a word that is of current use in the Andes) doesn't mean anymore that the State will be in the hands of the local elite (which ended in “internal colonialism” in South America during the nineteenth century, and in Asia and Africa after WWII). De-colonization, or rather de-coloniality, means at once: a) unveiling the logic of coloniality and the reproduction of the colonial matrix of power (which of course, means a capitalist economy); and b) de-linking from the totalitarian effects of Western categories of thoughts and subjectivity (e.g., the successful and progressive subject and blind prisoner of consumerism). By de-linking as de-coloniality I start and departs from Samir Amin's introduction of the term within a Marxist vision of a polycentric world. However, the attention and homage that Amin paid to the work and vision of Sayyid Qutb is a signpost that alerts us to the divergent and sovereign projects of Marxism and Islamism, as Iranian philosopher Ali Shariati had clearly articulated it before the Iranian Revolution.¹⁶ But Marxism cannot de-link in the sense of de-coloniality because either will no longer be Marxism or it will be a new imperial project that absorbs, swallows, silences and represses categories of thoughts articulated in languages and cosmologies that are not Greek and Latin, translated into the six European and imperial languages of Western modernity (Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, German, English and French).

There is today a strong Indigenous intellectual community that among many other aspects of life and politics has something very clear: their epistemic rights and not just their right to make economic, political and cultural claims.¹⁷ La “levée ethnique” is, in the last analysis “a de-colonial epistemic break” that cannot be subsumed under Michel Foucault's narrative (*Les mots et les choses*, 1966) and even less under the “paradigmatic changes” of Thomas Khun (*The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 1970). The de-

colonial epistemic break is literally, something else. True, there is not much written and documented for the social scientist of the First World to “study.” Epistemic fractures are taking place around the world and not among the Indigenous communities in the Americas, Australia or New Zealand; it is happening also among Afro-Andean and Afro-Caribbean activists and intellectuals. And it is most certainly also taking place, although shaped by different local histories, among progressive Islamic intellectuals and activists. And as far as that epistemic break is concerned, the consequence is the retreat of “nationalism”, that is, the ideology of the bourgeois State that managed to identify the State with one ethnicity and, therefore, able to succeed in the fetichization of power: if the State is identified with one nation, then there is no difference between the power of the people and the power in the hands of the people of the same nation in the hands of those who represent the State. Furthermore, the people and the State that the people and its representatives created all operated under the same cosmology: Western political theory from Plato and Aristotles to Machiavelli, Hobbes and Locke. But things began to change when Indigenous people around the world claimed their own cosmology in the organization of the economic and the social, of education and subjectivity; when Afro-descendants in South America and the Caribbean followed a similar path; when Islamic and Arabic intellectuals broke away from the magic bubble of Western religion, politics and ethics.

This is, in a nutshell, “la versant de-colonial” (or the de-colonial option) that is taking place at the global scale for the simple reason that the logic of coloniality (that is, capitalism, State formation, Uni-versity education, media and information as commodity, etc.) has been and continues to be “flattening the world” (according to the enthusiastic expression coined by Thomas Friedman, 2006). The radical shift introduced by “la versant de-colonial” moves away, de-links from Western civilization’s expendability of human lives and civilization of death (massive slave trade, famines, wars, genocides and elimination of the difference at all cost, as we have been witnessing in Iraq and Lebanon), toward a civilization that encourages and celebrates the reproduction of life (not of course, in terms of having or not having rights to abortion, which I do not have time to analyze here), but the celebration of life on the planet, including human organisms that have been “detached” from nature in the cosmology of European modernity; cf Francis Bacon, *Novum Organum*, 1605).

Inter-culturality shall be understood in the context of de-colonial thinking and projects. Contrary to multi-culturalism, that was an invention of the national-State in the US to concede “culture” while maintaining “epistemology”, inter-culturality

Continuação nota 17: Patzi-Paco (aymara sociologist and current Ministro de Cultura y Educación) and his proposal Sistema Comunal: una propuesta alternativa al sistema liberal. La Paz: CEA, 2004. To this core of Andean indigenous intellectuals, we could add the influential work Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous people by Linda Tuhiwai Smith. She is Associate Professor of Maori Education and Director of the International Research Institute for Maori and Indigenous Studies at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. Also, the well know work in the U.S. of Vine Deloria, Jr., Devon Abbot Mihesuah and Carvender Wilson. As for the contribution of Afro-Caribbean see Padget Henry. Caliban’s reason: introducing caribbean philosoph. London: Routledge, 2003 and Catherine Walsh and Juan García for the contribution of Afro-Andean intellectuals and activists.

in the Andes is a concept introduced by Indigenous intellectuals to claim epistemic rights. Inter-culture, indeed, means inter-epistemology, a tense dialogue that is the dialogue of the future between non-Western (Aymara, Afros, Arabo-Islamic, Hindi, Bambara, etc) and Western (Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, French, German, English, Portuguese) cosmology. Here you find precisely the reason why Western cosmology is uni-versal (in its difference) and imperial while de-colonial thinking and epistemologies had to be pluri-versal: what non-Western languages and cosmologies had in common is to have been forced to deal with Western cosmology (once again, Greek, Latin and modern imperial European languages and epistemology).

IV.

Let me advance a blue-print of the de-colonial processes and epistemic disobedience and suggest the horizons these acts of epistemic disobedience are opening up toward a future beyond capital accumulation and military enforcements; beyond post-modern and post-structuralist recasting of Eurocentered cosmology of modernity. Notice that in my view modernity is not a historical period of which we cannot escape, but the narrative (e.g., the cosmology) of a historical period written by those who felt they were their protagonist. "Modernity" was the term in which they cast the heroic and triumphant view of the history they were making. And that history was the history of imperial capitalism (there were other empires which were not capitalist) and modernity/coloniality (which is the cosmology of the modern, imperial and capitalist empires from Spain to England and the U.S.).

Aymara sociologist and current Minister of Culture and Education in Bolivia, Félix Patzi Paco, advanced before his appointment by President Evo Morales, the outline of a "communal system" in counter-distinction with the dominant "(neo) liberal system." I am offering here a modified version of his proposal. Patzi starts from the assumption that socio-economic systems with a certain degree of complexity are formed by a nucleus and a context; or a center and a periphery, if you wish. The nucleus or center consisted of various types of managements, economic and political. That is, management of resources and labor, on the one hand, and management of social distribution of resources and labor. In the current (neo) liberal system, management of resources and labor and management of social distribution, we know, is geared toward accumulation of wealth, individual (quantitative minority) appropriation of natural resources and exploitation of labor. The nucleus is constituted, for him, by the economic and political management. My modification here is to include management of education in the nucleus, since education is basic for both the formation of subjectivity and the formation

and management of economic and political organization of society.

Patzi Paco's proposal should be understood in diachronic as well as synchronic dimensions. The economic and political systems implanted by European imperial/colonial expansions (Spanish, Portuguese, French, British, Dutch) fractured and mutilated exiting economic and political systems in the continent and in the Caribbean Islands. However, indigenous systems co-existed, marginalized and fractured, with the imperial cores. Although Patzi Paco is basically thinking from the experience of Aymara Ayllus, it is possible to include Palenques and Kilombos formed by runaway enslaved Africans, as still another co-existing economic and political system. Education (in the family, schooling and advanced training), economy and politics are different aspects of communal organization, called *ayllu* in Aymara, *oikos* in Greek and *state* in modern European vernacular and imperial languages. Thus, the analytic and the projection toward the future follow a dialogic or pluri-logic movement.

In the first place, and historically, the communal system of Andean economy was displaced and fractured, by the installation of an emerging system, mercantile and colonial capitalism, consisting on the appropriation of land and the massive exploitation of labor (Indigenous and Afro-enslaved). The *ayllu* survived, however, and entered in a double historical register. Quichua lawyer, politician and activist, Nina Pacari, puts it in this way:

nuestros mayors salvaguardaron y fortalecieron nuestras identidades e instituciones *por dos vías simultáneas*: 1) **la interna**, radicada en la Fortaleza de los usos y costumbres, en la recreación de los mitos y los ritos, en la reconstrucción de los pueblos y territorios, así como en la reconstrucción de la memoria ancestral y colectiva para proyectarse en un futuro con inclusion social que no es otra cosa que el posicionamiento del principio de la **diversidad**; 2) **la externa**, que permitió utilizar los mecanismos como los "alzamientos", "levantamientos indígenas" o "revueltas" en contra del abuso y del despojo promovido por la estructura del poder imperante (PACARI, 2006).

Pacari mentions two simultaneous ways in which the history of Indigenous nations had survived in co-existence and power differentials for five hundred years. The internal and the external, of which, only the external is more or less known by anybody who is not Indian him or herself. The reason is simple: the internal way is supposed to have ceased to exist since the arrival of Christians and monarchic people and institutions, in the sixteenth century, and by its transformation in the nineteenth century, when internal colonialism in the hands of the Creole elite of European descent displaced the imperial elite from

Spain and Portugal. In different shapes and shades, England and France took over the leading role left by Spain and Portugal and worked closely with the managerial Creole elite ruling the new “independent” countries. The *internal way* in the life and survival of Indian Nations became invisible because Indians were supposed to have lost their souls and become Indians with a European-type of spirit. And since histories and descriptions of Indian Nations were written by people of European descent, the internal way constantly escaped them. Indians in other ways were not supposed to have a soul and that was the reason for Christianizing, civilizing and more recently developing them.

Patzi Paco offers one of the first written descriptions and arguments that explain the persistence of a communal system that has always been there, but invisible, and that is coming up in full force in Bolivia and Ecuador. The visible part was always there; uprisings were always registered by the ruling elite because they create a problem for them; but official discourse described it as the Indian problem. Nina Pacari, in the previous quotation, offers a synopsis of the historical survival and struggle of Indian Nations, a historical synopsis in which Indian political theory, economy and epistemology are of the essence. Gone are the days in which the beliefs that Indians have cultures and White or Mestizo/as have theories were prevalent and looked like the only game in town. Today, and for the foreseeable future, the struggle is for epistemic rights, the struggle for the principles upon which economy, politics and education will be organized, ruled, enacted.

The communal system described by Patzi Paco is a way toward the future, and not for Indigenous people only, but as a blue-print for a global organization, for a world in which many worlds will co-exist, and shall not be ruled out in the name of simplicity and the reproduction of binary opposition. The communal system offers an alternative to both liberal and socialist-communist systems since these last two are both Western (that is, conceived from the experience of imperial expansion and capital accumulation, and the corresponding political theory and political economy, be it their liberal or Marxist-communist versions). The communal system described by Patzi is instead based on the historical experience of the *ayllu*, coexisting with Western imperial/colonial institutions since the moment in which the Spaniards invaded the Andes. Similar observations could be made about the *altepetl* in the Anahuac region. To make a long story short, let's stress that a communal economic management is not a matter of an all-powerful State (like the communist system) or the invisible hand (like in the liberal free trade economy). Land, cannot be owned, but only used by the community. In the same vein, factories and technologies to facilitate communal-social life, cannot be possessed by one or a

few individuals who will exploit other individuals for their own personal benefit and accumulation of wealth. In the communal system, power is not located in the State or in the Individual (or corporate) Proprietor but in the community. When the Zapatistas say “to rule and to obey at the same time” they are enouncing a basic principle of political and economic communal management (PATZI PACO, 2004, p. 172-191).

Nina Pacari describes communal political and economic management succinctly. The Indian philosophical concept of Power is sustained in a basic number of vital (in the sense of communal life) elements:

- a) YACHAY, which means *wisdom*, the know-how and know-that that allows Indigenous Nations to maintain-in-transformation the *internal way* (that is, in the same way that the West operates maintaining-in-transformation its way of life, forms of knowledge and economic and political management);
- b) RICSINA, means *knowledge*, and refers to knowledge of the complex geography of human beings in order to help harmonious co-existence, that is, conviviality (and, I shall say, no Derrida is needed here--for conviviality is not a private property of French intellectuals but a common sense of human existence);
- c) USHAI, means management or planning and refers to the know-how presupposed in every consistent execution in the management of politics, economy and education; that is, in socio-communal organization;
- d) PACTA-PACTA, means the exercise of “democracy” not in the bourgeois sense of the word or in its socialist meaning, but in the sense of conviviality, equal to equal relationship, with collective participation and social management as it is inscribed in the memories and experiences of the *ayllu* (or the *altepetl* in the case of Mexico) and not in the memories and experiences of the *oykos*;
- e) MUSKUI, which could be translated as the ideal horizon of the future, that is, *utopia*; a necessary concept to be active in the process of social transformation instead of waiting for the liberal economy or the communist State to find a solution for the Indian Nations!

I understand the communal system and the Indian philosophical concept of Power as an alternative TO (neo) liberal and Marxists or neo-Marxists models of society. It could, with proper time and space, be considered in relation to Islamic and Chinese, for example, concept of power, of political and economic management and of education (both in the sense of subject formation and individuals trained to fulfill particular roles in the management of politics, education and economy). Although there is no time to go in this direction, it is important to keep in mind that

neither Patzi Paco nor Pacari or myself, are thinking in binary terms. It could be that a Western trained reader may see binary opposition for lack of experience in “seeing” the *internal ways* of many nations and religious communities around the world. A second caveat is also that a modern or postmodern sensible reader could think that the communal system is a totalitarian dream that is intended to *re-place* the dominant neo-liberal model and the utopian dominant alternative, the communist-socialist system. If that were the case, the communal system will not be a de-colonial proposal, but another modern proposal disguised under de-colonial thinking. De-colonial thinking rejects, from the very beginning, any possibility of new abstract uni-versals that will replace existing ones (liberals and its neos, Marxist and its neos, Christians and its neos or Islamic and its neos). The era of abstract uni-versal is over. The future that will prevent the self-extermination of life on the planet shall be pluri-versality as a uni-versal project. And to that MUSKUI is that the very conception of the communal system and the Indian philosophy of power is pointing.

Nina Pacari offers a blue-print to think and act in that direction, that is, a blue-print of de-colonial thinking. Recognizing the actual moment of affirmation of Indian identities, that is, the consolidation of the *internal way*, she mentions four general principles upon which political empowerment is being enacted and moving forward:

- a) **Proportionality-Solidarity**, is the principle that guides the political (e.g., political thinking) toward the benefit of those who have less. The political impinges here in the *oyko-nomy* (or, to invent a neologism, on *ayllu-nomy*), that is, in a political economy that administrates scarcity rather than celebrating accumulation;
- b) **Complementarity**, refers to production and distribution that contemplate the well-being of the community and not the accumulation and well-being of an elite. It means, in other words, conviviality in the harmonious complementarity of opposing elements. For instance, Sun and Moon (masculine and feminine) are not opposed by power relations, but two halves of a unit; a unit without which the generation of life is not possible;¹⁸
- c) **Reciprocity**, it is expressed in the institution called “*minga*”, which means cooperative work for improvement.¹⁹ To give and to receive, the principle of reciprocity is the both rights and obligations of every one;
- d) **Correspondence**, simply means the sharing of responsibilities (Pacari, 2006, p. 9-10);

Management of the economic and political spheres, as summarized above, goes hand in hand with the management of education *Amawtay Wasi*.²⁰ Under the leadership of Luis Macas,

¹⁸ This is not the place to go into an analysis of the category “woman” as an invention of Western gender system, based on opposition and power differential, that mutilated and marginalized the complementarity masculine-feminine in societies and knowledge system that were alien to Christianity and its Greek foundations (see María Lugones and Oyewumi, Oyeronke (1997)

¹⁹ See also interview of Nina Pacari, by Luis Gomez, disponible on: <<http://www.narco-news.com/Issue26/article543.html>>.

²⁰ Universidad Intercultural Amawtay Wasi, disponible on: <<http://icci.nativeweb.org/boletin/65/editorial.html>>.

Abstract

Two interrelated theses sustain the argument. First, identity IN politics (rather than identity politics) is a necessary course of thought and action in view of the iron cage of modern (e.g., European from Machiavelli on) political theory. Insofar as modern political theory is – knowingly or not – racist and patriarchal by denying political agency to people classified as inferior (in terms of race, gender, sexuality, etc.), and insofar as they have been denied epistemic agency for the same reason (the second thesis), all de-colonial political moves (non-racist and non-heterosexually patriarchal) must engage in epistemic and political disobedience. “Civil disobedience,” as predicated by Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King, Jr. were great moves indeed. But, civil without epistemic disobedience will remain caught in games ruled by Eurocentric political economy and political theory. Both theses are pillars of the de-colonial option. Thus, the de-colonial option allows us to think in terms of the variegated spectrum of the Marxist left and – on the other hand – of the variegated spectrum of the de-colonial left.

Keywords: de-colonial option; epistemic disobedience; political disobedience

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