

# The de-colonial option and the meaning of identity *in* politics

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## 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 op-

posing 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), 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 abandon 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, and most likely former rector and current presidential candidate, Don Luis Macas, will expand on it), since our (a vast number of people around the planet) brains had 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 in 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 has been in the Andes and Southern Mexico for five hundred years.

In South America and the Caribbean, the 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).<sup>1</sup> 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: Candoblés, 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). All the key words in the title of the conference and of my own paper (development, inter-culturality, imaginary of the nation, de-colonial) 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;
- 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 by 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, knowledges and regions of the planets are racialized. Being underdeveloped is it not like being Indigenous from the Americas, Australia and New Zealand? Or Black from Africa? Or Muslims from the Arab world? Being from the colonies of the Second World (Central Asia and Caucasus, see Tlostanova in this volume), 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 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

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" (*New Left Review*, I/206, 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 (cfr., 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.



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 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.

Islamic Nations in the Middle East are taking their destiny in their own hands. The recent and tragic events in Lebanon showed at the same time, the limits of imperial designs. It took time, at least for many of us, to understand who and why Rafik Al-Hariri was brutally killed in Beirut in February of 2005. It was obvious however that his death was related to the justification to request that Syria removed his military troops from Lebanon. What was not obvious was that, a year and a half from then, the empty space left by Syria’s army will make possible Israel’s invasion and the installation of its army in Lebanon instead of Syria. “Development” is a complex word that encompasses the control of economy and the control of authority; and that goes together with the expansion of democracy all over the world—the good, the bad and the ugly.

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, Marxist, Jews, 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 (Organizacion Mundial del Comercio), 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 in-

stance—has its roots in Henri Bergson’s *Creative Evolution*, 1907) and its conception of the “*élan 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*. 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 Fanon’s terminology, that is, from the perspective of the majority of people on the planet whose lives were declared dispensable, whose dignity was humiliated, whose bodies were used as a working 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. This option—in the Andes—re-inscribe the legacies of the *ayllu* 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 way of thinking are be-

ing 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.<sup>3</sup>

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 the 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 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 op-

tion 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 at the same time building on the racialized identities that were constructed by the hegemony of Western categories of thought, 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 or-

ganization 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, lands and social organization. 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 bea-

ches 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). The Indigenous nations within the Creole/Mestizo nations is what is at stake today as indicated by Candido Mendes when he suggested, as in the title of my talk, “national recession and ethnic escalation.” 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 fac-

ing 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 the human sameness above human differences is always a claim made from the privileged position of identity politics in power.

### III

The Latin-ethnics (that is, people from 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 and 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 “re-turn to populism” (by neo-liberal aligned leaders like Fernando Henrique Cardoso (*Harvard International Review*, July 2006)). In the first camp the names of Ignacio Lula 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. “Left” means in this context that neo-liberal and ex-

treme 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 Bogotá 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 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 (<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0607/S00341.htm>).

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 (Fernando Arellano Ortiz, <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0607/S00341.htm>). “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 Ku Klux Klan (<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0511/S00064.htm>).

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 (e.g., Ernesto Laclau). 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 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 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 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 from 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 (see Cástro-Gomez and Grosfóguel, 2006; and Escobar, 2004).

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 of the political that I will describe as the de-colonial move. The awareness among the leaders and the participants in Indigenous claims a mobilization that power cannot be taken (as Enrique Dussel, *20 Tesis de Política*, 2006, reminds us) 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 made also clear the rift between different versions of Marxist left and Indigenous de-colonial projects. And that is basically what is at stake in the “levee 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 departs from Samir Amin's introduction of the term based on Marxist projects. 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.<sup>4</sup> La "levee ethnique" is, in the last analysis "a de-colonial epistemic break" that cannot be subsumed under Michel Foucault's narrative and even less under the "paradigmatic changes" of Thomas Khun. 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, be 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-descendent in South America and the Caribbean follow a similar path; when Islamic and Arabic intellectuals break 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 “flattening the world” (according to the enthusiastic expres-



sion coined by Thomas Friedman). The radical shift introduced by “la versant de-colonial” moves away, de-links from Western civilization 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 in the planet, including human organisms that have been “detached” from nature in the cosmology of European modernity; cfr. 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,” interculturality 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

Last but not least, let me advance a sketch, a blueprint of the de-colonial processes of knowledge and understanding and the horizons they opened toward a future beyond capital accumulation and military enforcements.

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 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 communal organization that is 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 mayores 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 reconstitución de los pueblos y territorios, así como en la reconstrucción de la memoria ancestral y colectiva para proyectarse en un futuro con inclusión 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” or “revueltas” en contra del abuso y del despojo promovido por la estructura del poder imperante. (Pacari, 2006, p. 9.)

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 from 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 to 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 soul and became Indians with a European-type of spirit. And since histories and descrip-

tions of Indian Nations were written by people from 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 explains the persistence of a communal system that has been always 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—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, 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 and 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 vain, 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, *Sistema communal. Una propuesta alternativa al sistema liberal*, 2004, p. 172-91).

Nina Pacari describes the 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 that also 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-extinction of life in the planet shall be pluri-versality as a uni-versal pro-



ject. 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 administrate 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.<sup>5</sup>
- c) RECIPROCITY, it is expressed in the institution called “*minga*,” which means cooperative work for improvement (see interview with Nina Pacari and Luis

Gomez, <http://www.narconews.com/Issue26/article543.htm>). To give and to receive, the principle of reciprocity it is 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 (The House of Wisdom, o Universidad Intercultural Amawtay Wasi, <http://icci.nativeweb.org/boletin/65/editorial.html>). Under the leadership of Luis Macas, Amawtay Wasi is a uni-versity that in reality is a pluri-versity organized according to the cosmology and wisdom (epistemology) of the Indigenous people and nations. (<http://icci.nativeweb.org/boletin/60/walsh.html><sup>6</sup>) In that regard, it de-links and depart from the Renaissance university and the Kantian-Humboldtian which, directly or indirectly, contributed to the coloniality of knowledge and of being. “Learning to be” is one of the goals of Amawtay Wasi, that is, the de-coloniality of being. The method for such a goal is “learning to unlearn in order to re-learn.” Relearn what? I offered a highlight through the proposals advanced by Nina Pacari and Patzi Paco. Amaway Wasi complements the management of the economic and political spheres of the communal system, but working on de-colonizing subjectivities (e.g., the affirmation and empowerment of which Nina Pacari refers in her article quoted above).

I hope, finally, that this brief presentation is not only a report on de-coloniality, de-colonial projects and de-linking

from a neutral and scientific scholarly perspective, but that my own discourse, here, is part of the wide and global de-colonial orientation (versant) in thinking and acting. And I hope also to have made clear that the de-colonial option implies identity in politics and that identity in politics is not a question of affirmative action and multiculturalism in the U.S.—that, affirmative action and multiculturalism is identity politics which has its good and bad sides. The good side is that it contributes to make visible the identity politics hidden under the privileges of Whiteness ([http://www.lipmagazine.org/artiles/featbrasel\\_145.shtml](http://www.lipmagazine.org/artiles/featbrasel_145.shtml)) and the bad side is that it can lead to fundamentalist and essentialist arguments. In South America and the Caribbean, we know, the privileges of Whiteness is grounded in the histories and memories of people from European descent that carried with them the weight of certain ways of managing politics, economy and education. That privilege if it is not over, it is being unveiled. The road to the future is and will continue to be, the epistemic line, that is, de-colonial thinking as the option offered by communities that have been deprived of their “souls” that is of their way of thinking and of knowing. What we are witnessing in the Andes today is no longer a “turn to the left” within the Eurocentered ways of knowing, but a de-linking and the opening to de-colonial options.

## Notes

1. Waman Puma de Ayala, *Nueva Cronica y Buen Gobierno* (1516) is one of the first de-colonial Indigenous political treatise that re-

mained in manuscript format until 1936. Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, who was moved 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 ground-breaking de-colonial proposal: *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999). See the extensive book reviews published in *The American Indian Quarterly*, <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/americanindianquarterly/toc/aiq29.1.html> (29/1-2, 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*, Bison Books, 2003.

2. 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.
3. On border thinking or border epistemology (also gnosis), see Walter D. Mignolo and Madina V. Tlostanova, "Thinking From the

Borders; Shifting to the Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge.” *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9/2, 2006, p. 205-22.

4. Indigenous intellectual do not enjoy yet of wide circulation, because precisely the coloniality of knowledge, that non-indigenous intellectuals enjoys. Not being acknowledge 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 Indigenas 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 Félix 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 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.
5. 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, “Heterosexualism and the colonial/modern, gender system,” *Hypatia*, forthcoming; and Oyewumi, Oyeronke, *The Invention of Women. Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press. 1997.
  6. See “La proyección multicultural del Ecuador, comentarios del Dr. Luis Macas,” <http://www.mmrree.gov.ec/mre/documentos/ministerio/planex/comenãponenciasã6.pdfsearch=%22luis%20macas%20amawtay%20wasi%22>; Catherine Walsh, “Geopolíticas del conocimiento, interculturalidad y descolonización,” <http://icci.nativeweb.org/boletin/60/walsh.html>.