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Walter Mignolo: Towards A Decolonial Horizon of Pluriversality: A Dialogue with Walter Mignolo on and Around the Idea of Latin America

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## TOWARDS A DECOLONIAL HORIZON OF PLURIVERSALITY: A DIALOGUE WITH WALTER MIGNOLO ON AND AROUND *THE IDEA OF LATIN AMERICA*

BY MÓNICA GONZÁLEZ GARCÍA

INTERVIEW

At the end of 2005, Walter Mignolo published *The Idea of Latin America* as part of the “Blackwell Manifestos,” a selected series in which some of the most engaging contemporary thinkers address issues related to occidental culture. Mignolo introduces an important critique of the colonial genesis, foundation, and further development of *latinidad* in America, a frame in which he broadens the decolonial notion of a paradigm-other as a collaborative horizon of pluriversality.

*Latinidad*, a concept initially associated with the “imperial epistemology” –in Mignolo’s terms- cultivated in the Italic peninsula and propagated along with Theology and Latin, was politically and epistemically resignified in France during the first decades of the nineteenth century so as to create a transcontinental sense of community among the “linguistic heirs” of the Western Roman Empire. The initiative sought to modify the imperial history that was being written at the time in the New World, by both resisting the growth of the Anglo Saxon influence and increasing the French presence and power in the region. In view of the outcome of the Mexican-American War of 1846-1848, intellectuals from this side of the Atlantic, such as Francisco Bilbao and José María Torres Caicedo, echoed the French idea and coined in Spanish the term *América Latina* in order to link the newly independent South American republics to the tradition of Modernity evolved in concert with the epistemology of Latin. Among other appropriations of the term, after World War II *Latin America* would end up being incorporated to the United States’ Academia and Government as the label for one of the branches



of Area Studies, and the adjective would become a racial and racist noun that not only identifies the individuals of "Iberian-American" descent but also links us to a set of stereotyped elements that usually homogenize, exoticize, and/or discriminate against us.

*The Idea of Latin America*, a book already distinguished with the "Franz Fanon Prize" offered by the Caribbean Philosophical Association, situates the debate on *latinidad* in a historically and geographically extensive context that points to the origin of Modernity and proposes a frame of thought constituted by "the pluri-versal movements of de-colonial thinking and action around the globe." As part of Lucero's reflection on possible paths to remap our individual and collective American cartographies, Walter Mignolo gracefully accepted our invitation to respond to comments, questions, and provocations regarding his book, the decolonization of (Latin) America, and the (tense) place of our own identities in the process of thinking and verbalizing this decolonization.

**Lucero:** *The Idea of Latin America* is a groundbreaking book because it puts forward a necessary academic exercise: as you describe it, the decolonization of the "idea" of Latin America. Undoubtedly, this concept has been widely institutionalized, but not sufficiently questioned. In this context, I considered particularly appealing to begin with a reflection upon the limitations of Edward Said's "Orientalism" as a tool to critique Modernity, because, as we know, it is a construction that ignores the origin of the implicit idea of "Occidentalism," a notion based on the paradigm of the discovery of America. You have defined your epistemic location as the "colonial wound." However, is it still possible to describe this location also by critically addressing the origin of "Occidentalism"? Would you consider it useful to incorporate this notion into the critical paradigm of decolonization most recently developed by the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group (which according to Ileana Rodríguez formally ended in 2000)? On the other hand, is there any specific reason to dwell on "Latin America" in English and from Europe (since your book has been published in England)? With whom do you expect to sustain this debate?

**Walter Mignolo:** I would like to start with the last part of your question. If I understand it correctly you ask whether "I would consider it useful to incorporate this notion of the critical paradigm of de-colonization created by the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group." It seems to me that by "this notion" you mean "Occidentalism." But you also link Occidentalism to the notion of the "colonial wound," which is correct since Occidentalism as it was created in the sixteenth century articulated both the rhetoric of modernity (salvation by conversion) with the logic of coloniality (encomienda, appropriation of land, exploitation of labor, imposition of new form of government, economy and subjectivity). In either case, your question is about whether I consider this conceptualization useful for the Latin American Subaltern Studies project.

Well, I do not think that Latin American Subaltern Studies (LASS) ever advanced a program of de-colonization. Secondly, the modernity/coloniality/de-coloniality research project (as Arturo Escobar has described it) has nothing to do with the LASS. And if I may add, it (the modernity/coloniality/de-coloniality project) has a different genealogy than the South Asian Subaltern project. They are compatible, but the imperial/colonial history of the Americas is quite different from the imperial/colonial history of South Africa, although both cases are linked by the logic of coloniality.

The modernity/coloniality/de-coloniality research project doesn't come from Ranajit Guha and the experience of British imperialism, but from José Carlos Mariátegui and Aníbal Quijano and the experiences of Spanish colonial histories, continued by the indirect colonialism of France, England and the U.S. These are two totally, unmistakably, radically different projects, epistemically and politically. I supported LASS but always and from the beginning as a dissenting member. So, I have no intention or interest in even considering whether "Occidentalism" or the "colonial wound" could be "incorporated" in LASS. The "colonial wound" which was articulated as such by Gloria Anzaldúa and on her experience—I mean traces in the body, racial marks left by imperial racism and male normativity—(that in case you are among those who question the notion of experience) as lesbian and Chicana; and not from the experience of Ranajit Guha. I am not questioning here of course the legitimacy of Guha's own experience and traces in his body of British colonialism. I am just saying that both epistemic and political projects are articulated on different local



histories, memories, subjectivities, tastes, and wounds. It could be “incorporated” in LASS. I leave that task to those who enroll themselves in that project, which is a good one, but, again, has nothing to do with the de-colonial project in which I based *The Idea of Latin America* and which I describe in detail in the second paragraph of the book. As for “Occidentalism” this is just a current expression (coined by Fernando Coronil and used by myself) that comes—again—from the colonial memories in Latin America. It has been there, the notion, since the fifties at least and I talk about that in *Local Histories/Global Designs*. Don’t look at the books that are sold and promoted; look at the derogated archives and you will be enlightened by the silences produced by the coloniality of knowledge, from the right, the left and the center.

*Lucero: Of course, and that is exactly why I mentioned the notion of Occidentalism: because it was born within the context of the discovery of America (and probably “in Spanish” and/or “in Portuguese”)... Therefore, Said was disregarding what imperialism did before the Enlightenment, which is a fundamental dimension of the colonial side of Modernity...*

**W.M.:** In fact, Edward Said’s book was crucial in opening up the limitations of the social sciences and the humanities in the U.S. Academia. As such, it initiated an important line of research and thinking. The de-colonial project (of those enrolled in the paradigm of modernity/coloniality) has a different pedigree and different memories: not Egyptians and Palestinians, but that of marginal people from European descent (Spanish and Portuguese, mainly), mestizos and mestizas and Indians and Afro-Latins in South America and the Caribbean that I describe in the third chapter of the book.

But de-colonial projects don’t begin with Said!!! De-colonial projects were engendered by the formation of the colonial matrix of power in the sixteenth century. Not only do you have indigenous intellectuals like Waman Puma de Ayala in Tawantinsuyu or Ottobah Cugoano in the British Caribbean and in London, writing political de-colonial treatises, but you also have indigenous uprising and *cimarronaje*. Juan García and Edison León in Ecuador are seeing *cimarronaje* as an epistemic and political site; just as Aymara intellectuals in Bolivia are no longer Indigenous actions as political rebellions but again as epistemic sites. If you are aware and take seriously the history of Indians and

Africans in the Americas, you do not need Marx and the experience of the industrial proletariat in Europe to think and act in favor of your own emancipation. To imagine that you need Marx for liberation or Said for de-colonial thinking is just a limited vision of the history of the modern/colonial/de-colonial world.

As for writing in English (instead of in Spanish) a book on the idea of “Latin” America (that is, the image created and appropriated by the White Latins in South America, as I describe in the book), there is not much difference except that there, in the domain in which the book operates, I suspect there are more Spanish speakers who read English than the other way around. Furthermore, both Spanish and English are imperial languages. Certainly, Spanish is an imperial language in desuetude after French, English, and German took over the international intellectual arena. In the hypothetical case I was fluent in Aymara or Tojolabal, or in French Creole (like in Haiti), I would have a different option, but the option would be limited because the number of persons educated in Spanish or English literacy is larger than the amount of persons educated in Aymara or Tojolabal or French Creole literacy. It is then only for the White South American consciousness of European descent (that is “Latin”), for whom this question is relevant. If you consider the 40 million Latino/as in the U.S., your question about English or Spanish becomes still less relevant.

Why then did I write the book in English instead of Spanish? For several reasons. One of them is that Andrew McNeillie asked me to write such a book and no one in Spanish America or Spain asked me to do so. Why? I do not know. But I suspect that the book industry in Spanish America and Spain is more interested in translating French, German, British, and U.S. authors. Another reason is that I have worked and analyzed the geopolitics of knowledge; I know that a book with a theoretical bent published in English will have a better chance of being translated into Spanish and Portuguese than the other way around. On the other hand, the idea of “Latin” America is not only valid and important for Spanish and Portuguese speaking people living in South America, but, as I explain in the book, is an imperial construction with the cooperation of “Latin” American intellectuals and officers of the state. Thus, struggling to unveil the logic of coloniality (which is a logic of control and oppression at different levels, from the civil society and the state to the economy), is—again—a de-colonial global project that involves the de-colonization of the idea of Asia,



Africa, and Europe itself, as I explain in chapter 1. In the last analysis, if you want to be purist, a book like this one should have been written in French, since the very idea of "Latinidad" is a French one, endorsed by South Americans from Europeans descent, in their diversity. And in their diversity, the Latins in America gave their back to the diversity of Indigenous and Afro-population, always looking towards France and England, and some to Germany.

### The Paradigm of Modernity/Coloniality and the Epistemic Location of the Colonial Difference

*Lucero:* By the preceding question, of course, I did not intend to suggest that decolonial projects began with Said, but rather to address the limitations of his critique. Also in this context, Coloniality is a necessary standpoint if we seek to discover the fractures in the project of Modernity as well as to unveil the characteristics of what you call (after Quijano) the "colonial matrix of power." And, certainly, a switch in the geopolitics of knowledge is an urgent task. Nonetheless, I wonder if the decolonial paradigm of Modernity/Coloniality tends to explain a variety of heterogeneous conflicts according to a binary and/or dyadic logic which may reduce the complexity of every particular struggle. You state in the first chapter of your book "In each of the particular imperial periods of colonialism... the same logic was maintained; only power changed hands." What is the significance of establishing such a strong continuity in the idea of America as a 500-year-old struggle between (one) coloniality of power and (one) modernity? Why does the paradigm of Modernity/Coloniality not further underline the distinctiveness of each spatial, time, cultural, and epistemic approach to the notion of modernity in America – be this approach critical or affirmative?

*W.M.:* Let me start here by your observation on binary logic. I suspect that this is a modern interpretation of a paradigm that displaces, fractures, and de-links from modernity. Like Columbus, since he did not have access to the Indigenous paradigm, he translated everything to the logic that was familiar to him. There is a reason why we (the people I record after the first sentence of the preface of the book in question) write "modernity/coloniality" and not modernity and coloniality or modernity versus coloniality. Modernity/coloniality is ONE monster with two faces: the rhetoric

of modernity that is the rhetoric of salvation hides, needs, and goes together with the logic of coloniality, which is the logic of domination and oppression. When we (those who speak the language of the project) say that "there is no, cannot be, modernity without coloniality" we mean just that, that there is one project with two faces. And that is the imperial project. For that reason, Aníbal Quijano introduced the concept of "heterogeneous structural-histories" and criticized the modern and Western idea of "totality" (<http://jwsr.ucr.edu/archive/vol6/number2/pdf/jwsr-v6n2-quijsano.pdf>). Heterogeneous structural-histories means, points toward the particular historical articulation of imperial/colonial structures (e.g., the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality) in different moments and regions of the world, and from different imperial/capitalist hands (Spain, Portugal, England, France, Germany, the U.S.). We are talking here, remember, about the complicities between Western imperial coloniality, capitalism and modernity (now globalization). It will require a different analysis to explain how, for instance, the Ottoman and the Russian/Soviet empires enter in this picture (<http://est.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/9/2/205>).

Why are we (those of us who speak the language of the project) interested in showing the continuity of the logic of coloniality from the Spanish to the British to the U.S. empires? Well, many reasons of which I will give just one. The rhetoric of modernity has been articulated in a changing narrative of salvation, and each change is based on the idea of progress or development: conversion to Christianity, civilizing mission, modernity and development, market democracy. Changes are celebrated within the rhetoric of modernity, in which history itself is written in an ascending order. By underlying the heterogeneous structural-nodes in which the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality (modernity/coloniality) have been enacted, we also locate the de-colonial responses: Waman Puma de Ayala, in the sixteenth century; Ottobah Cugoano in the eighteenth century; Mahatma Gandhi at the end of the nineteenth century; Frantz Fanon and Amílcar Cabral, Vine Deloria, Jr., and Gloria Anzaldúa in the twentieth century, have been forming a silenced genealogy of de-colonial thoughts and actions.

Secondly, the paradigm modernity/coloniality/de-coloniality is not a project that looks for a new abstract universal. We leave that to liberals and neo-liberals, to Christians (Protestants and Catholics), and to Marxists who envision the re-structuring of a global



left under the new global conditions. The paradigm and project I am dwelling in, is first and foremost, a project coming from dissenting "Latin" Americans (e.g., Mariátegui, Quijano), joined by immigrants from European descent (Dussel, Mignolo). As such, it is not, it cannot be, a project that "represents" Indigenous or Afro-Latinos/as and Latino/as in the U.S., dissenting and progressive Muslims; or de-colonial projects as it has been going on for a long time among Afro-Caribbeans in the French and British Islands (see for example the current articulation of the Caribbean Philosophical Association). De-colonial projects are multiple and diverse, in different local histories and languages, religions and subjectivities, social formations and economic structures. What we are trying to do is to advance a de-colonial project that can join forces with similar projects in other locals, including Europe and the U.S. This is another reason to detach ourselves from abstract universals (Christian, Liberals, Marxists) and to push for diversity as a universal project, or for diversity (or pluri, if you are afraid of binaries) instead of uni-versality. This is how we, speaking the language of modernity/coloniality "underline the distinctiveness of each spatial, time, cultural, and epistemic approach." We are not trying to represent or speak for anyone but ourselves. However, what different people in spatial and temporal locales have in common is the colonial wound, the dehumanizing rhetoric of imperial modernity, the racial matrix that arranged the world and people in a descending order, from Christian God to its surrogate, European men; from the first to the third worlds. We, the same as above, are in collaborative dialogue and actions with the project of the Caribbean Philosophical Association and in the point I just mentioned, we rely on the arguments advanced, for example, by radical intellectuals like Lewis Gordon in his *Frantz Fanon and the Crisis of the European Man* (1995). You see, we do not need to "do it all" to be uni-versal, because there are other similar projects with which to join forces--similarly now with the Indigenous projects that emerged in Ecuador and in Bolivia. For example, Félix Patzi Paco advanced a project devising a communal system as alternative to the liberal system (*Sistema comunal como alternativa al sistema liberal*, 2004). Patzi Paco is currently the Minister of Culture and Education of Evo Morales. He is conversant with modernity/coloniality, but he is writing within the frame of Indigenous projects. We, the same as above, are conversant with Indigenous projects, and our contributions are from the heart of white and

dissenting Latins (mestizos/as and immigrants) in Latin America. Once you learn to unlearn what modernity has put in our head, all these questions will have a clear and loud answer in "an other paradigm." That is why; again, we are trying to change the terms and not just the content of the conversation.

*Lucero: Thank you Walter for that clarification.*

*From what you just said, it is possible to understand why you chose to decolonize the "idea" of Latin America from the point of view of the people who were left outside this "paradigm." Yet, I would like to know why you did not opt for the standpoint of the actors directly involved in the birth of the notion of Latin America? In other words, why did you not look at the contradictions and limitations of this paradigm from within? My question points at the fact that your book does not explore very extensively one aspect that motivated the claim for latinité made by these creoles, that is, the War of 1846-1848 between the United States and Mexico. It is certainly important to stress that this claim was part and parcel of an "imperial rivalry" between France and the United States for the hegemony of North America. However, it is also true that, if we were to analyze this war from the point of view of the continental "subaltern" elite, the white "Latin"-Americans, we could eventually grasp another dimension of this ideological fight against imperialism and also another dimension of the problematic creole appropriation of the notion of Modernity in America. This war is important in terms of a decolonial project because it sets the pattern for future U.S. imperialist wars, initiated under completely questionable reasons and in which the other country loses not only the war but also huge portions of its natural resources and political sovereignty.*

*W.M.: I intended to base, for my de-colonizing, the idea of Latin America on the very work of dissidents from European descent (white, mestizos/as, and immigrants). Bilbao, Mariátegui, Quijano, Dussel, etc., they are not Indigenous or Afro. They provided from within the seed for de-colonial thought. You see, the very argument, the very de-colonial project is a continuation of Aníbal Quijano's ground-breaking article "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality" (1991). This essay is very well entrenched in the legacies of Mariátegui, of dependency theory and indirectly on the philosophy of liberation—nothing Indigenous and Afro- so far. That is, the critique in chapter 2 is from within, from the perspective of intellectuals from European descent. But, of course, in my case it*



is the Indigenous and Afro-perspectives that allow me to create a fracture from within. For, without that leading epistemic fracture, that de-linking, where could I have found the ground for my critique? In Bourdieu? In Žižek? In Habermas?! You see what is at stake here. The critique from within the intellectual history of people from European descent, in the entire spectrum of nation-builders who adopted the idea of *Latinidad* to the Latin American dissidents, should also be a critique to the Eurocentered paradigm embodied and enacted by the Bourdieus, the Žižeks, the Habermas, etc. So I did look for the limitations and contradictions of the paradigm, as you said, from within, in chapters I and mostly II. And I opened up, joining forces with Indigenous people, Afro-Latino/s and Afro-Caribbeans, and Latino/s in the U.S. Here we have four different projects, and the one I embody and enact is one of them, the one coming from within, from the history of people from European descent in South America and the Caribbean.

What I describe here as the spectrum of Latino/as in the U.S. has, as you indicate, the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846-48 as a historical signpost. But we have to consider, also, 1898 and 1959, the three radical dates that articulated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the imperial/colonial relations between the U.S. and the South, continental and insular. Now there is a lot of things my book doesn't explore in detail. But it seems to me that I make clear that the very idea of "*Latinidad*," in the nineteenth century, was (a) a French invention to take a leading role among countries of Latin stock (Italy, Spain, and Portugal) to confront the growing Anglo-Saxon influence (England and Germany). That history is still present today in the constitution of the core of the European Union; (b) a French imperial design to stop the expansion of the U.S. to the South, and that fear emerged precisely with the U.S.-Mexican War!! That is the basic idea, imperial/colonial complicity between French state persons and intellectuals, and "Latin" American state persons and intellectuals. Certainly the U.S. needs to build and control the Panama Canal further expanding the divide between Jefferson's and Bolivar's Americas. There are many things I cannot analyze in detail, and not only this, because the Manifestos book series, in Blackwell, has a maximum of 60,000 words, and this is a political and philosophical Manifesto on how the idea of Latin America came about, and not a description of particular moments in that history. The doors are open now for those who are interested in expanding,

transforming, clarifying, etc.

The fact remains, and I see that concern in your question, that the white subaltern elite in "Latin" America that you mention is subaltern in relation to the U.S., but dominant in relation to Indigenous and people from African descent. I see in your question a common concern of "white" Latin Americans: the pain to recognize that a time has passed and that Evo Morales (and the indigenous movements in Bolivia, Ecuador, Southern Mexico) and the growing influence of Afro-Latinos (the legacy of the Haitian revolution) is unfolding history in ways that transcend the narrow paradigm of "*Latinidad*" in South America and the Caribbean.

*Lucero: I can see where your critique stems from, but please let me clarify the concern in my question. I do not share that "white" Latin American pain that you describe because I am part of the huge number of people in this continent that have not benefited from the hegemonic discourses that operate locally in every "Latin" American nation. First during a dictatorship and then during the neo-liberalist/democratic governments in the nineties, I struggled against being completely oppressed and silenced by these hegemonic discourses. Thus, I do share the necessity of decolonizing the idea of "Latin" America (and I do consider experience an important critical tool.) Nevertheless, my ideological concern has to do with the "imperial" level of the "colonial matrix of power." I consider important to refer to the war of 1846-1848 because latinité is also an idea appropriated by people like Bilbao with the aim of protesting against this war, which ended up being the first open manifestation of the U.S.'s hegemonic strategies. Therefore, this dissent could also be read as one of the first 'subaltern' critiques to U.S. imperialism. In this context, not mentioning this side of the emergence of the idea of "Latin America" might eventually contribute to render invisible the history of the U.S. appropriation of the hegemonic discourse of civilization.*

*On the other hand, would you consider it useful to acknowledge this "anti-imperialist" or "anti-colonial" aspect of the origin of the "Latin" American paradigm as a tool to evaluate the continental situation in a historical perspective? I am thinking about the subsequent attempt of Martí to open the concept by articulating another, more inclusive, notion of the continental identity, and also about what still can be done in terms of (critically) using this 'decolonial' experience as a basis to understand and improve the present. Lastly, and in relation to your previous response, what is the place of Francisco Bilbao in*



*your critique? I am asking you this because I understand Bilbao and José María Torres Caicedo were the first to use the term "Latin America" in relation to the U.S.'s war against Mexico in the mid-nineteenth century.*

W.M.: The main goal of the book was to place the emergence and crisis of the idea of "Latin" America in a particular moment of the constitution and unfolding of the modern/colonial world system, and to identify in it the de-colonial moments. The first chapter is about the emergence of the idea of America, where "latinidad" is implicit in the Theological frame that governed knowledge and belief, and classified human beings according to a model of Christian and Western European men. Moors, Jews, Indians, and Blacks were the basic categories of the Theological classification of barbarians, that is, beings less human than the model of humanity. That is, the first chapter is devoted to the constitution of the colonial matrix of power and the role the invention of America played in it. Chapter 3 is devoted to the growing intellectual and political projects coming from the history of Indigenous and Blacks, in South America and the Caribbean; in Spanish and Portuguese speaking countries in the continent, as well as French and English speaking countries mainly in the Caribbean (although also in the sub-continent). And, above all, the irretrievable presence of an enormous Latino/a population in the U.S. (40 million is a number more or less equivalent to the joint population of Chile, Bolivia and Peru; and it is larger than the total population of Colombia or Argentina), is a point of no return in the epistemic (I mean, the principles upon which knowledge is formed, transformed and implemented in de-colonial processes). The events we have witnessed in the U.S. since the last week of March 2006, are a powerful break-through and leadership that change the inherited image of a "Latin" American "Latinidad" created in the nineteenth century in complicity, as I said, with French imperialism. The government of Evo Morales in Bolivia, and the powerful epistemic and political presence of Indigenous people in Ecuador (I describe the relevance of Amawtay Wasi), as well as in the South of Colombia; and the growing political and epistemic presence of Afro-Caribbeans and Afro-Latinos, join forces with Latinos/as in the U.S. to transform the face of the earth that Christians labeled "Indias Occidentales," Northern Europeans "America," French and Creoles elites from European descent "Latin America." The significance of Abya-Yala, Tawantinsuyu,

and Anahuac is being re-inscribed; the Gran Comarca as a symbolic territory of Afro-Latinos is being drawn; the U.S. national anthem is being sung in Spanish. A *Pachakuti* is taking place in front of our own eyes and our bodies are being remapped in the middle of it.

You asked about people like Francisco Bilbao and José Martí and *latinité* and whether their critique to U.S. emerging imperialism in the nineteenth century has some relevance for us today. Sure, I have said many times ([http://www.ces.uc.pt/posgraduacoes/pccg\\_conf1.php](http://www.ces.uc.pt/posgraduacoes/pccg_conf1.php)) that there is no safe place and there is no homogeneous totality. Christianity could be liberating and oppressive; Marxism can be liberating and oppressive; Liberalism can be liberating and oppressive; Islamism can be liberating and oppressive. Being Black or Chicano/a is not warranty of anything. You can be Condoleezza Rice or Alberto González. What counts are the epistemic and political projects that spring from *identity in politics* (not to be confused with "identity politics"). Nothing prevents an Aymara India in Bolivia or an African-American to join the bourgeois project and exploit other Indians or Blacks. That happens, and we all know it. At the same time, you do not have to be Black, or Indian, or Latino/a, or gay or lesbian or woman of color to join, support, and participate in epistemic and political projects emerging from their experience (the colonial—racial and patriarchal—wound), transformed into conscientious projects of de-colonization (e.g., liberation). These projects are not coming from some abstract universal (Christian, Liberal, Marxist, Islamic) but from the identities created by imperial/colonial (and patriarchal) discourses to devaluate and control people who do not respond to the model of Humanity created by Christian European and heterosexual males. And you cannot expect, any more today, that to be a legit political project it shall come from the Western tradition, *from the tyranny of Western identity as the sole fountain of youth and the road to the future!!*. People, believe me, are able to think without studying Aristotle, Saint Thomas, Kant, Marx, or Schmitt. And when they do, they do it *from a different experience, the experience of the colonial wound and not from the experience of the colonial pride*. Changing the geo- and body-politics of knowledge means precisely to start from the *colonial difference*; and also from the *imperial difference* (1). Kant, Marx, Freud, Lacan, Schmitt, etc.!! Of course, among Christians there were people like Las Casas who defended the Indians, although apparently he never thought that Indians have their own opinion



and ways of doing things and that his, Las Casas, good intentions were limited in regard to what the Indians wanted to do. However, the role of Las Casas, although limited, was crucial to bring the internal critique of Christianity from within. And so we can say for Bilbao and Martí within the ideology of "Latinidad." Their contribution is crucial for the Creoles and Mestizos (joined by immigrants from European descent, as Dussel and myself, which I already mentioned), that has been already identified as modernity/coloniality/de-coloniality project or program (see Escobar). My own work is grounded in that genealogy (that is, recognizing it), which is clear in *Local Histories...* where I devote several pages to Bilbao. What I am doing is to bring to the foreground the limitations—as much as I can—we all have. *Latinidad* was a French invention that, among other things, had the purpose of stopping the march of the U.S. towards the South. *Latinidad* was a French response to the U.S.-Mexican War, to which all Latin American intellectuals of the time responded critically, thus Bilbao or Martí. At the same time, the invisibility of Indians and Afro, as well as women, was being reproduced. The modernity/coloniality/de-coloniality project takes all of that into account and, for that reason, sees itself as one de-colonial project in conversation and collaboration with similar and compatible projects grounded on the experiences of the colonial wound among Indians, Africans, Latino/as, etc.

Finally, my reference to the colonial wound, as it is clear on the book, is taken from Gloria Anzaldúa, but its sense is also clear in the Frantz Fanon of *Black Skin, White Masks*. There is a question of scale in the colonial wound. The Creole, mestizo and immigrant population of European descent in South America and the Caribbean (properly those who will identify themselves as Latins), did not experience the colonial wounds with the intensity that Indians and Afro have suffered and endured. My observations are based on intellectual production, literature, and essays for example, where you can find multiple and extended expressions of a sense of marginality that forms the ethos of the population from European descent, that you can trace back to the eighteenth century in the context of what Antonello Gerbi described as "the dispute of the New World." In the book I take the case of H.A. Murena *El pecado original de América*. There you can find a common feeling (pervasive in the essays through the Americas from the beginning of the twentieth century to the sixties)--the desire to be European (and not of joining forces with Indians and Blacks), while at the

same time knowing and feeling that they were not. That they were second class Europeans in the margins in "el extremo occidente," as Canal Feijóo, an Argentinean intellectual, said in the 50s. Basically, while for almost two hundred years that "totality" was *latinidad* and "Latin" American people from European descent, now the panorama have changed radically: the diversity of indigenous population from the Mapuche to the Fourth Nations in Canada, Afro-Latinos in South America and the Caribbean, and Latinos/as in the U.S. are "provincializing" the "Latin" part of Latin America; are provincializing the French imperial project of *Latinidad*. De-colonial projects and forces are at work. Some come from a critical position vis-à-vis *latinidad* in South America. I do not deny that critical tradition, but at the same time, I cannot forget the imperial designs that put it in place.

### (Latin) America and the Decolonial Horizon of Pluriversality

*Lucero:* Thanks for responding to all my queries. Now I would like to ask you about the pluriversal standpoint from which you situate your critique. You said that The Idea of Latin America is a political and a philosophical manifesto. Recently your book received the "Franz Fanon Book Prize" offered by the Caribbean Philosophical Association. As you have said, two of the most important voices and concepts you use in order to break with the universal white idea of *latinidad* are Franz Fanon's skin and Gloria Anzaldúa's wound. They both represent a turning point in the twentieth century decolonial thinking. What is, in your opinion, their major contribution in terms of fracturing the (American) hegemonic discourse of Modernity? And, in relation to your own epistemic decolonial project, what is the philosophical and political importance of Fanon and Anzaldúa regarding their relation to the group of "American" dissenting thinkers to which you have been referring throughout the interview? In other words, how do you envision Fanon, Anzaldúa, Waman Puma, Bilbao, Mariátegui, etc., epistemically empowering each other so as to constitute a pluriversal "chorus" capable of decolonizing the imperial side that still remains behind or in front of the idea of Latin America?

*W.M.:* Thanks, Mónica, for this question about a pluri-versal de-colonial chorus. What is at stake here, and that I try to point toward in chapter III of



the book, is the question of connectors as hegemonic analogs. Connectors are not empty signifiers but the common ground of colonial and patriarchal wounds in different local histories. It is through the critical consciousness of connectors as hegemonic analogs that *identity in politics* supersedes *identity politics*. Identity politics is no doubt important, but, as subaltern identity politics, it remains in the same logic as hegemonic identity politics. The last book by Samuel Huntington articulates imperial identity politics at its best. Thus subaltern identity politics is no doubt important to avoid succumbing to the "Sam Huntington and Lou Dobbs" narrow and imperial frame of mind, but it doesn't go very far because it remains within the same logic; it proposes to change the content but not the terms of the conversation. Connectors and identity in politics offer the possibility of thinking and acting toward a paradigm-other; a conceptual and political de-linking moving toward a diversity of de-colonial projects linked by the diverse historical manifestations of the colonial and patriarchal wounds.

Now, what is this pluri-versal project? First of all, I would say that the Euro-American hegemonic discourse of modernity is *uni-versal*; in its diversity, of course. Christian and Marxists are not the same as Liberals, Spaniards are not Californians, and Germans are not Sicilians. Nevertheless, neither of them has much in common with Aymaras, Hindis, or Arab Muslims. Euro-, in this case, means France, Germany, and England, the imperial leaders of the secular modernity, that of the Enlightenment. The first was the modernity of the Renaissance. Both share their darker side, coloniality; the first hidden under Theology; the second under Philosophy and Science. How can we avoid seeing the European Union as a re-inscription of imperial designs and as an imperial project to confront not only the U.S.'s dominance but also the growing global influence of China and Vladimir Putin's attempt (although not openly advertised) of reconstituting something between the legacies of the Russian/Soviet empires? No, I am not saying that Putin is coming back to communism, but to something that is not neo-liberalism either.

Thus, pluri-versality shall not be limited to the Americas. In fact, if we come back to the first and third chapter of *The Idea of Latin America*, you will understand that my argument is not umbilical (that is, looking at our own Latin American belly), but it implies the configuration of global designs. The umbilical arguments were and still are limited to the

local history of (Latin) America as if it were something intrinsic and not something interdependent with global designs. That is why I devote several pages not only to the Christian imaginary of the T/O map but also to explore the *ideas* of Asia and Africa. In that context, what are Fanon's and Anzaldúa's contribution to fracture the idea of *latinidad* and by extension the dream (or the bubble, like in *The Truman Show*) of modernity that becomes a nightmare? This is a crucial point to understand what I have described as the "spatial epistemic break" in *Local Histories/Global Designs...* and further elaborated as "un paradigma otro" in the Spanish translation of the same book (Madrid: Akal 2003). That is, as an epistemic break irreducible to Michel Foucault's linear chronology and to Thomas Kuhn's paradigmatic changes in the sciences. The paradigm-other is not a new abstract universal, but the pluri-versal movements of de-colonial thinking and action around the globe. Certainly, China is making a strong move to capitalism, as it is reported in the middle of 2006, and it looks ludicrous to talk about de-colonial thinking in the middle of an increasing capitalist world with nodes in the U.S., Western Europe, China, and Japan, where there is no indication of emerging de-colonial thinking and acting, like we can see in the complex situation of the Middle East. However, who could have thought in the sixteenth century that marginal Western Christians in the coast of the Atlantic Sea would take over the world and give rise to a powerful class, the bourgeoisie that displaced the aristocracy and engendered a wealth of thinkers mapping new forms of socio-political organization (like John Locke) and tracing the links between moral sentiments and the new economy (like Adam Smith) or critical of it (like Karl Marx) and of the new subjects that it engendered (like Sigmund Freud). I would say that Fanon and Anzaldúa are, today, the equivalent of Marx and Freud as internal critics of the modern/colonial world. Fanon and Anzaldúa are thinking from the borders, from the experience of being left out, from the awareness that, according to imperial designs, thinking is supposed to be done for them. Between Marx and Freud, on the one hand, and Fanon and Anzaldúa (and DuBois, etc.), on the other, there is a rift, a fracture, the spatial epistemic break that opens up to "an-other-paradigm," irreducible to chronological epistemic breaks or paradigmatic changes in the monotopic history of Western thoughts (Greek and Latin, as classical languages; and the six imperial languages of Europe since the Renaissance).



Fanon and Anzaldúa (but also Waman Puma de Ayala, Ottobah Cugoano, Mahatma Gandhi, W.E.B. DuBois, as well as innumerable uprisings countering the ideology of modern/colonial designs in the past five hundred years, from Tupac Katari to the Zapatistas and the overwhelming election of Evo Morales in Bolivia) are radical players in the paradigmatic epistemic shift from Eurocentered theo- and ego-politics of knowledge toward the geo-body politics of knowledge that I describe and explain in *The Idea of Latin America*, but also elsewhere (2). If thinkers like Sepúlveda, Vitoria, and Las Casas were key players in the shift that engendered the European Renaissance and established theo-politics of knowledge as the master frame of all knowledge, from the role of the Church to the role of the university; and if Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, and Marx are key players in the turn from the theo- to the ego-politics of knowledge, Fanon and Anzaldúa are key players in the de-colonial shift, in the epistemic paradigmatic break toward an-other paradigm, that is, toward the geo- and body-politics of knowledge. Notice that this shift is the shift in which the *damnés*, in Fanon's terminology, and those inflicted by the colonial wound, in terms of Anzaldúa, are producing their own epistemology. On the contrary, within theo- and ego-politics of knowledge, both Las Casas and Marx took an important stance to defend the dispossessed, but they assumed that the dispossessed were not in conditions to defend themselves and generate knowledge that would empower them. Fanon and Anzaldúa are signposts in the shift from the theo- and ego-politics of knowledge (which is that of the Eurocentered modernity) toward the geo- and body-politics of knowledge that is that of de-colonial thinking and acting. De-colonial here means basically de-linking from racism and patriarchy, and that is Anzaldúa's enormous contribution to the de-colonial shift.

And to the final point, how do I envision the political projects we identify with the names you mention, contributing to each other. That is the crucial point to imagine and enact pluri-versality. The dissenting projects, for example of the Creole/Mestizos (that is, the Latins in Latin America), have been nourished by a particular kind of colonial wound—their marginal status in relation to Europe and, later on, their response to U.S. ambitions toward the South. Political and epistemic projects emanating from Indigenous and Afro-histories have in common, with the Creole/Mestizos, the imperial designs of

Euro-American capitalism toward "Latin" America. And when I say capitalism I do not mean capital; rather, I mean subjectivity, culture, knowledge, etc. The first chapter of Enrique Dussel's *Philosophy of Liberation* (1977) is entitled "Geopolitics and Philosophy," and you can see there a map of a response that remains as a turning point in the geo-politics of knowledge. Frantz Fanon was doing something similar in the fifties and Anzaldúa in the eighties. In order to imagine collaboration without loosing the respective identities, it is necessary to think seriously about identity in politics and not about identity politics. Identity in politics allows for reaching out and linking, without pretending a new abstract uni-versal that will be good for all. Pluri-versality presupposes identity in politics and connectors as nodes, where the pluri-verse will not become a uni-verse.

*Lucero:* In the Preface to your book, you describe three "historico-structural moments that link the empires and the colonies (xiv)": "the entry of America into the European consciousness" during the Renaissance; "the entry of "Latinidad"... as a double identity" -imperial and colonial- during the Enlightenment; and the "radical shifts in the geography of knowledge" around the globe and in the Americas, that have been occurring since the end of the Cold War. As you argue, the first moment implied an intense exercise of mapping the world's lands and the individuals' bodies according to hierarchical and unilaterally-conceived ideologies and categories, which were thought to be universal. As we have discussed, the second moment gave birth to latinidad as a sub-region indebted to those universal categories. On the other hand, in the third moment, critical thinkers have been trying to unmap these universal designs by reinforcing and empowering the epistemic differences as a way to contest and de-authorize the universality of these designs. And here comes the question: in your opinion, is it possible to attain a point in this discussion in which the radical shift many dissenting thinkers are looking for does not always articulate itself in relation to the universal reference? You mentioned the curriculum of Ecuadorian "pluri-versity" Amawtay Wasi. Do you think the introduction of silenced knowledges could help create new "maps" or locations, which do not necessarily have to respond to hegemonic discourses? I am not talking about a "purist" notion of knowledge; I am just trying to imagine the possibility of thinking our own location independently from hegemonic designs. Lastly, what is the role of Waman Puma de Ayala's graphic vision of his world in relation to the universal view, which Europe



began to develop in the "T in O" map?

**W.M.:** Right. The concept of heterogeneous historico-structural moments or geo-historical nodes—introduced once again by Aníbal Quijano—is crucial to get out of the Christian historical narrative from the creation of the world on, and of Hegel's secularization of the same story inventing a new character in the novel, Mr. Spirit. In both those two Western versions of history (and I do not want to go here into the Big-Bang narrative), the protagonist is (the Christian) God and the (Secular) Spirit, and the colonies of God and the Spirit were there just out of history, behind the fence, so to speak, admiring the triumphal march of God's design and the Secular Spirit. That is the modern-Western version of universal history since the Renaissance. Well, what we (those of us who embrace and dwell in the principles of coloniality as the darker side of epistemic modernity) have been saying is that there could not have been such a triumphal march of Western history and of modernity without its darker side, coloniality. That is why the concept of heterogeneous historico-structural nodes displaces the idea of a linear, smooth, and homogeneous (and triumphal) march of history in which its darker side is left, precisely, out of history as the "bad things in spite of us" that we have to correct. Take SIDA and poverty as two specters of the beautiful life promised by modernity. Aren't they both, poverty and SIDA, a direct consequence of modernity (as discourse, value, and actions) that promises a triumphal march toward paradise? The concept of heterogeneous historico-structural nodes starts from the very assumptions that, on the one hand, the beautiful life of modernity you see on television is strictly linked with the specters of SIDA and poverty that the Salvationist rhetoric of modernity promises to end with; and, on the other, that because of the constitutive links between modernity and coloniality, these two specters cannot and will not be solved under the concept of progress, modernization, and development that totalizes the idea of capital accumulation both in the corporation and in the sphere of society at large.

Following that historical logic, the first moment of Latinidad (its affirmation) was the affirmation of Western Christianity as an institution, Theology as an episteme, and Latin as the imperial language that overtook Hebrew and Arabic. Latin then became the language of an emerging imperial epistemology. With secularization, Latin lost its clout over the vernacular languages of modern/imperial Europe

(Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, and English). At that moment, Latinidad, in the projects and designs of France as an emerging imperial power, became a Secular Spirit that embraced and linked a set of nations in the South of Europe (Italy, Spain, Portugal), of which France pretended to take the lead in its confrontation (until today) with Germany and England. But of course Latinidad was not only a question in the linear and internal history of Europe, but also a design historico-structurally linked with the colonies: France, who needed to stop the advance of the U.S. toward the South; and the Creole elites in South America, who opted to join French imperial designs to confront U.S. imperial designs. Afros and Indians were left out of the game in those heterogeneous historico-structural moments in the remaking of the modern/colonial world. And, alas, Haiti was left out of the Latin Spirit: they spoke French and French Creole, but they were Black and did not belong to the Domain of the Spirit. Silence fell over the Latinity of Haiti (3). In the third historico-structural moment, Latinos/as in the U.S. became a new social, political, and epistemic agency in which the Latinidad of Latin America was "degraded" both in the eyes of Latins in the South and Anglo in the North. What is crucial to understand here in this third heterogeneous historico-structural node is that Latinidad in the U.S. is cutting the imperial ties that the concept has with France and with the historical complicity of Spain: Hispanics and Latino/as are no longer linked to Spain (that is, they are no longer re-inscribing its imperial memories through capitals in Latin America and through education in the U.S.—by attending the many Cervantes Centers or the King Juan Carlos of Spain Center in NYU.) There is a radical fracture, a spatial epistemic break, the colonial difference that distinguishes Spanish Institution in the U.S. and Latino/as projects; and there is of course a similar epistemic break between Latin American Studies and Latino/as Studies and other projects. All these complexities cannot be understood within a linear and chronological framework of history, but need to be understood in the simultaneous complexities, complicities, and dissensions of modernity/coloniality/de-coloniality as the Forces of the modern/colonial world that theological and secular narratives disguised, obliterated, silenced, and reduced to collateral damages in the triumphal march of (my) History.

Now, the point with Amawtay Wasi is not "the introduction of silent knowledges"!! That is still the modern honest view that, like the reformed canon



at Stanford University, will "include or introduce" Rigobertha Menchú. No. Amawtay Wasi is a signpost of shifting the geography of reason; it is a de-colonial epistemic shift, a "taking over," and not a pledge to be included, recognized, accepted by the dominant White/Creole/Mestizo epistemology in complicity with the Latin, French, German, and English tradition of knowledge. De-linking means precisely that inclusion is no longer the rule of the game. De-linking is. The leaders of Amawtay Wasi were asked several times to "include" their project in State run universities and "adapt" their curriculum to the existing Kantian-Humboldtian or in some cases Christian Theological University, now both transformed by Corporate values. The response to the generous invitation was, no, thanks, but no. You should come to our places since Amawtay Wasi is not an institution of higher learning for Indians only but for the entire population of Ecuador, Creoles and Mestizos, men and women. If you keep on thinking in terms of "introduction and inclusion" you lose the game before it even starts. To be included in or introduced to what or where?!!! Would you like to be included in the bubble of the Truman's Show? If you introduce or include, you remain in the linear, monotopic, totalitarian, chronological logic of Christian narrative of the creation of the World and the totality of Hegel's Spirit. The radical break-through of Amawtay Wasi is that it de-links, breaks with the imperial tradition of Western uni-versities from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment and to the Corporate Universities of today. In that regard, the epistemological break enacted from Indian colonial histories in confrontation with the dominance of European/Creole imperial histories, is parallel with the epistemic (spatial) break that Latino/as are enacting (and if you wish "introducing" as a new radical agency) in the U.S. These are two moments of nodes that are taking us "beyond (Latin) America."

It is called uni-versity because the political control is in the hands of "Latin epistemology," which is blind to the fact that there is an "Indian epistemology" at work here--Latinity and Indianity in epistemic confrontation and power differential; Spanish and Quichua. However, while the Latin-Spanish epistemic world-view and sensibility is territorial and totalitarian, the Indian epistemic worldview is based on border thinking: the curriculum of Amawtay Wasi is based on the structure of Tawantinsuyu while the colonial universities in Ecuador, Catholic or Secular, are based on the Renaissance-Enlightenment tradition.

The very curriculum of Amawtay Wasi follows the spatial structure of Tawantinsuyu and not the Greco-Roman model. So, what is the relevance of Waman Puma "Pontifical Mundo." Well, we realize now that Waman Puma understood and felt that it was no longer possible, after 50 years of Spanish invasion and colonization, to restore the Tawantinsuyu. And that the only way was border thinking, that is, the incorporation of Spanish categories within the overarching frame of Quechua's categories of thought. **There is no way, no possibility, of thinking that our own location (which ones? Latins, Indians, Afros, Lesbians, Feminists?) is independent of global designs. That is what I explained in *Local Histories/Global Designs*.** Local histories are imperial and colonial, but only imperial histories can imagine and implement global designs. Thus, here the question is not local histories and global designs, but the links between two kinds of local histories, imperial and colonial, linked together: thus, modernity/coloniality and border thinking as a de-colonial method. That is what Amawtay Wasi is re-inscribing for the future and in a different moment of history, when epistemic decolonization is a clear and loud project around the world. Thus, "Latin" America is one piece of a big puzzle in which global designs and local histories collide in particular ways.

*Lucero: I see that the selection of my previous words was unfortunate from your perspective, though it permitted a more exhaustive portrayal of Amawtay Wasi. However, the intention of my question was not related to the possibility of "silenced knowledges" being "included, recognized [or] accepted by the dominant White/Creole/Mestizo epistemology." Please allow me to clarify my position. It is my impression that the phase you describe as the third historico-structural moment has mainly articulated itself by contesting the intellectual and ideological patterns instituted by modernity. And, considering the "weight" of these global designs, it is possible that this type of strategy will still be required for a long time. Nonetheless, it would be significant to reach a more 'creative' moment, which does not depend exclusively on contesting the "big paradigm." So, in this regard, I prefer not to agree with what you said in *Local Histories/Global Designs*. Additionally, it is my belief that this moment should involve leaving behind traditional "subaltern" categories usually employed in critical thinking -such as "Latins," "Indians," "Afros" and so on-, not only because they are indebted to the racist classification of humans you describe in your book but also because they*



contribute to recycle it. Furthermore, my question about “including” is meant as a reflection on the possibility of an epistemic shift in a global scale. That is, “including” or “taking into account” silenced knowledges in the realm of the ‘official discourses’ that the rest of the society is “consuming” because, I imagine, the students from other Ecuadorian universities, as well as the rest of the non-academic society, are not participating in the paradigm proposed by the curriculum of Amawtay Wasi. Thus, my question refers to enabling heterogeneous knowledges to dialogue among each other –this is not saying that Amawtay Wasi should be legitimated by the canon of any Western University. Ultimately, what I am trying to imagine is a conversation between the different ‘identities’ living in a society where it can eventually be possible to disseminate traditionally silenced knowledges to those individuals who were born and raised within the frame of modernity because, maybe, this can help construct a way of thinking which is not ‘uni-lateral’ or ‘uni-versal,’ but pluri-; a way of thinking capable of circulating between different epistemes with the aim of understanding the diverse “others” that usually share a common space. And, since Amawtay Wasi is such an innovative and dialogical educational institution, I wonder why not share this knowledge with the rest of the society.

And also regarding identities, I would like to return to a point you mentioned earlier, that is, the importance of “identity in politics.” Neo-liberalism seems to be contributing to create new “subaltern” locations especially in the “peripheral” countries affected by this economic “global design” –such as in many “Latin American” countries that have had to adjust their economies to certain patterns that ultimately benefit ‘international’ private capital. My question is: do you consider that it is possible to articulate those unnamed identities when the weight of neo-liberalism does not allow people to reflect on their own epistemic locations? My concern is that politics is not being used as much as it could be as a tool to help people locate themselves and their concerns within a context, because most of them are just struggling to satisfy their basic needs –a task which, in the realm of this economic model, is particularly difficult. Consequently, there are many dissents that remain silenced.

W.M.: Thanks for the clarification, Mónica. In any case, even if it was not what you meant, it is common to think in terms of “inclusion” either when it comes to immigration politics from the State or when it comes to knowledges-others in relation to the totalizing epistemology built around the two classics and the

six modern/imperial languages I mentioned before. And you are right, we have to overcome the limits of resistance. When we talk about the de-colonial shift, we are talking about two simultaneous tasks. One is to unveil the imperial underpinning of the modernity/postmodernity macro-narratives (in all their homogeneous diversity, encapsulated as I said in Greek and Latin and in the six modern imperial European languages). The second is to de-link (to disengage as Quijano will have it), and to open up to the constructions of new forms of life. The Zapatistas have been doing that since 1994; Via Campesina has been doing that for a while now; the government of Evo Morales is pointing toward that direction; and there are countless small and large projects around the world doing that. So you do not have to imagine being creative, just looking around. On the other hand, the macro-narrative of modernity-post-modernity (Western) is in all of us and it is difficult to ignore. You cannot turn around and move toward something else without dealing (not just contesting) with it. For if you just contest within the same logic you are caught in the web, you change the contents but not the terms of the conversation. This is the limit of Marxism as the most radical form of contestation within the logic of modernity. The de-colonial shift (we, the participants in the modernity/coloniality/de-coloniality project, have been insisting) is a change in the terms of the conversation, it is a spatial epistemic break, is a paradigm other, and it is imagining forms of life that are not Christian, Liberal, or Marxist. *Amawtay Wasi* is an extra-ordinary example of how a collective enterprise can be at once critical of the big paradigm and creating new forms of life, of economy, of knowledge, of social organization, absorbing Western knowledges into Indigenous epistemology. Can you imagine that life is possible beyond these three major macro-narratives of modernity/post-modernity? This is my argument in *Local Histories/Global Designs*. That is precisely why I end the book talking about an other language, an other logic, an other thinking. But, of course, there are many ways to move in the same direction. There is not just one way. That is another of the limits of good Christians, good Liberals, and good Marxists: that they have “the way” good for everyone.

I do not understand what you mean by “sharing the knowledge of Amawtay Wasi with the rest of the society.” One way I can answer your question is by stressing that Amawtay Wasi is not just for indigenous people but for every body in Ecuador, Creoles, and



Mestizos. And the information about it is available on the web and also in a UNESCO publication. It is not a secret. Rather, it is the mainstream ideology that contributes to silencing and making it invisible. Universities at the service of the State and the Corporation are normally advertised, because they are also a source of money. But universities whose goals are learning to be, empowerment, and de-colonization, are not going to be promoted by the World Bank or the United Nations. Perhaps because such universities are not really, they think, at the level of Harvard. See, "excellence" is a tricky issue because it contributes to imperial domination and control by the elites reproducing themselves and preserving their privilege precisely on the principle of "excellence." In Ecuador, for example, theoretically, the Universidad Central or the Catholic University are not just for Creole and mestizos Ecuadorians but for Indigenous people too. But knowledge is controlled by Creoles/Mestizos, and follows modern/post-modern patterns. On the contrary, Amawtay Wasi invites Creoles and Mestizos (and post-modern French, German philosophers, English sociologists, and U.S. scientists) to move away, to de-link, to do something else. There is also the Universidad Salesiana, which is very socially oriented but, still, it is led by the Jesuits and not by the Indians (now, here we are moving into identity in politics when I said, for instance, that universities are led by Jesuits and Indians respectively).

Coming back to Amawtay Wasi, most likely Bill Gates may not be ready yet to submit to what Indigenous people want to do with technology. But that is Bill Gates' problem (assuming that that is the case) and not of Amawtay Wasi. See, the first step, the bottom line, is to accept that an-other subjectivity, epistemology, and politics and economy are possible, and then start thinking positively in that direction.

As for the last part of your question, it doesn't matter what I think. It is happening in Bolivia, in Ecuador, the Zapatistas movements, and I will venture to say in the Islamic world, among Latino/as in the U.S. But let's simplify matters. Let's take Bolivia. As you know, Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada, former president of Bolivia in the early to mid nineties, together with Augusto Pinochet in Chile and Carlos Menem in Argentina, was one of the three powerful legs of neo-liberalism in Latin America. Who do you think knocked down Sánchez de Losada and a few years later its vice-president Carlos Mesa? Do you think the honest liberals debunked neo-liberalism

in Bolivia? Do you think it was a movement led by mestizos and Creole Marxists? Do you think it was the socialist sector of the Church? Do you think there was a workers movement, the "sindicato," led by well-trained socialist leaders? No, it was the de-colonial force of Indian subjectivity and identity, not by seeking recognition from the State (as in the case of identity politics), but by asserting themselves as social actors in the construction of the *res pública*. This was not the formation of a new social party within the system, but it was and it is a process of *de-linking*. Identity in politics (in complex ways I cannot analyze here but the material is available in Bolivia and some on the web), is what nourished the MAS (Movimiento hacia el Socialismo) that installed Evo Morales in the presidency. So, it doesn't matter what I think; identity in politics is re-directing thinking and doing politics. It is a form of *de-linking*, a series of de-colonial moves that are happening in front of our eyes, but our eyes are occupied with TV and CNN to see what is going on beyond the imperial noise of the media.

### A Paradigm of Co-Existence: Working Towards Possible Futures

*Lucero: Amawtay Wasi is a good point from which to talk about present tendencies in politics and possible futures for the continental/American population. The question related to "sharing the knowledge" of Amawtay Wasi was intended to twist a little the idea by Luis Macas which you quote at the beginning of your third chapter, concerning "the socialization of the indigenous knowledge." My question has to do with an old concern: the possibility of creating a dialogue between academic and non-academic segments of society so as to divulge the reflections produced within the space of Academia to the rest of the population and, ideally, to hear their feedback.*

*Regarding another movement linked to what you call "identity in politics," you highlight the decolonizing role of the 40 million Latinos/as who live in the United States because they, as well as other American "minorities," "have already begun to brush the imperial memories out of their/our bodies." You say that Latinos/as are "turning Latinidad into a decolonizing project." Could you go more deeply into this subject? At the same time, considering the recent mobilizations led by Latinos/as in the U.S., what is your reading of what has been described as "demands for civil rights"? From a certain perspective, those demands*



could be interpreted as a desire to embrace the U.S.'s "American dream." Do you think this intention may involve an attempt for assimilation? And, if that is the case, what would be the implications of this current movement in terms of 'imperial memories'?

W.M.: I share your concern, of course; a concern that is becoming more pressing in our time. Why? On the one hand, Academia has been invaded in the past twenty or so years (in the U.S., in Europe, South America, India, China, the Middle East, etc) by corporate values: that is, the myth of excellence goes hand in hand with the myth of progress and development as the mantra for a good life. Universities, in other words, are more and more either producing knowledges for the corporations or reframing knowledge in the social and human sciences in terms of corporate values. Production of knowledge for the State and to tame the civil society (which was prevalent in the Kantian-Humboldtian University) since the eighteenth century, is being displaced but also complemented by production of knowledge to train experts and to shape consumers. What is remarkable in Amawtay Wasi's experience is that it is a Pluri-versity in which knowledge is at the "service" of liberation, of learning to be, of the empowerment of the segments of the population that get marginalized by the State, the Market, and the Civil Society that benefits from the State and the Market. Well, the question you ask could be rephrased as follows: what could be done in U.S. Academia that would be equivalent to Amawtay Wasi? And I think the possibilities are there and on the move: Native Americans are already talking about "indigenizing and de-colonizing the university"

(<http://209.200.101.189/publications/csq/csq-article.cfm?id=1810>); Nelson Maldonado-Torres is working at Berkeley on a project that complements Amawtay Wasi in the U.S. described as "Latino/as Academy of Science." In a way, departments of Ethnic, Gay and Lesbian, African-American, Latino/as, Women Studies in the U.S., since the Civil Rights movement, have been re-directing the production of knowledge from serving the state to serving the liberation of the subaltern subjectivities. So, in a nutshell, I would suggest that to move in the direction of your concern we should start by re-directing the values and the function of the knowledge we produce, re-directing it from the benefits of the State and the Corporation (and from the formation of experts and successful citizens who will accumulate wealth based

on their expertise), to the benefits of the sectors of the population in different parts of the world that suffer the consequences of the complicity between the State, the Market, and the Civil Society needed by the State and the Market (e.g., the State needs citizens to vote and the Market consumers to buy). However, what is very important is that knowledge for liberation is being produced and enacted outside Academia, not only by the creation of a parallel and divergent pluri-versity like Amawtay Wasi, but also by social organizations that link production of knowledge to politics and economy and de-link from the State and the capitalist Market. La Via Campesina is one of such example ([http://viacampesina.org/main\\_en/index.php](http://viacampesina.org/main_en/index.php)); as well as the exemplar case of Libia Grueso, in Colombia, scholar and activist ([http://artsandscience.concordia.ca/cmll/spanish/ACH/Congreso\\_05/Programa\\_PlenariasGrueso.htm](http://artsandscience.concordia.ca/cmll/spanish/ACH/Congreso_05/Programa_PlenariasGrueso.htm)).

By de-linking and re-directing, let me stress once again, I do not mean going to the mountains and living a hippy-life; I mean epistemic and political projects, full awareness of when to use the capitalist Market devoted to exploitation and accumulation as a reciprocity market (and political economy) oriented to knowledge for liberation and well being, for learning to be and not to be exploited and humiliated; knowledge and understanding unveiling the myth of excellence and expertise into which Academia is falling today. The struggle for individual success, the belief that competence brings out the best of human beings in their drive to success, is seen more and more in the Academia that has modeled itself (Arts and Sciences and Liberal Education) upon the model of the Business, and in the Law Schools that provide the academic training for experts in Market economy and the business of the State. Immanuel Kant knew that Law, Medicine, and Theology were the three basic sciences for the organization of society. At his time Business was not yet in the picture. Today is the leading exemplar of values in knowledge production.

As for the second part of your question, I talk about "identity IN politics," which is very different from "identity politics." Identity politics is based on the belief in a "natural" identity and the privilege of minorities in playing identity politics. Which, of course, is not necessarily bad especially when confronted with the hidden identity politics of—in the U.S.—the Anglo elite in power. The identity politics of the quantitative minority and managerial "majority," came to the open with Huntington's *Who are we?* Huntington's book



shows identity politics at its best.

As for identity in politics, I explain it in the second chapter of my book when I draw on Wallerstein's chart of the three main macro-narratives after the European enlightenment: conservatism, liberalism, and socialism/Marxism. I unveil a fourth and hidden one that is common to conservatism, liberalism, and socialism/Marxism: colonialism. I trace these ideologies back to the sixteenth century and distinguish between historical manifestations of imperialism/colonialism (in the modern capitalist world) and modernity/coloniality, which is the basic structure of an ideology that changes the surface from the conquest of Mexico to the conquest of India to the conquest of Iraq. As I explained already, modernity is a rhetoric of salvation while coloniality is what the rhetoric of salvation hides: the logic of control, appropriation, exploitation, humiliation, and the dispensability of human lives, from the slave trade to the 25 millions Soviet-Russians that died during WWII, to the 6 million Jews in the Holocaust. One of the consequences of the logic of coloniality was racism, the ranking of Human beings according to the degree of Humanity, which is directly related to human lives that are expendable. Among the almost-humans there were not only Indians and Blacks, Moors and Jews, Orientals and Communists, but there were also Women and Homosexuals. Thus, the logic of coloniality "created" the Black and the Indians and the Moors and the Jews as sub-human in relation to White Christians, and Women and Homosexuals as sub-human in relation to Heterosexual Males. Once you realize that these categories were constructed by the rhetoric of modernity in order to enact, in a justified way, the logic of coloniality, you say, ok, I assume what you have made me and as such I will enact the epistemic and political energy you took from me because, in my ranking as human being, I do not have the right to think, and I do not have the right to think and act politically. You made me inferior and gave to yourself the right to take care of me, to clean the world from barbarians, uncivilized, guerrilleros, terrorists, sexually dirty people, and the like. You should realize by now that your self-privileged position is getting to an end and that new forms of knowledge and politics are emerging in the border, de-linking and re-directing, that you can no longer control. You gave me an identity, historically, within the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality, and it is in the assumption of that inferior identity you bestowed upon me that I now think and act: I AM WHERE I THINK is the turning

point of the Cartesian Ego, I THINK, THEREFORE I AM, and the key to identity in politics. Identity politics, instead, is still caught in the Cartesian subject and subjectivity. Identity politics changes the content but not the terms of the conversation. Identity in politics, instead, de-links and re-directs; it changes the terms and not only the content of the conversation.

Thus, the expression un paradigma otro as paradigm of co-existence means several things at once. First, that it is not claiming to be a new abstract universal that will replace the existing ones (the imperial bents of Christianity, Liberalism, Marxism, Islamism), but rather that it proposes to think and act on connectors as hegemonic analogs connecting precisely the diversities and similarities of the colonial and patriarchal wound. Co-existence, in second place, thus means pacific co-existence and the affirmation of its (un paradigma otro) emergence. And third, its role toward the future is to displace abstract universals and to bring Christians, Marxists, Liberals, and Islamists out of their abstract universal and imperial bent to a non-imperial future where co-existence will mean something else: the co-existence of de-colonial projects that emerged from the diversity of local histories and the commonality of the colonial and patriarchal wound. Thus, *conflictive* co-existence that currently involves the hegemony of capitalism, market, corruption, and the invocation of democracy ([http://www.opednews.com/toenjes\\_101504\\_Bush\\_DeLay.htm](http://www.opednews.com/toenjes_101504_Bush_DeLay.htm)), will be superseded by the moment of *pacific coexistence* of the pluri-versal; the critical cosmopolitan moment superseding the imperial designs of a Kantian universal peace and a uni-fied and uni-form world.

What we witnessed in the U.S. from the last week of March to the first week of May, the massive manifestation against immigration laws—led by Latinos/as but supported by a wide array of the population, including whites, Asian Americans, and Afro Americans, is one clear evidence of identity IN politics on the rise. I was in Quito the last week of March, coming back to the U.S. At that point, the Indigenous movement led by the CONAIE (Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador) and its President, Luis Macas, against the Free Trade Agreement that the President of Ecuador was ready to sign, was in its third or fourth week of mobilization. At the airport, I grabbed a newspaper, I do not remember if it was *El Mundo* or *La Hora*. In the front page I saw the well-known picture of the manifestations in Los Angeles, estimated in 500



thousands. In the back of the front page was a picture of the CONAIE manifestation in Ecuador. The two pictures made evident to me the connections between the two manifestations, linked by identity in politics grounded in the historicity of the colonial difference. What Indigenous people achieve in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Guatemala and the South of Mexico (e.g., the Zapatistas), is similar to the process that began in the U.S. in the 1970's (with the Chicanos/as) and that now had a turning point in 2006. Capital moves to South America "protected" by the rhetoric of modernity and enacting the logic of coloniality. The responses are de-colonial moves in knowledge and politics. Capitals moving to the South produce marginalization, and immigrants coming to the North are automatically marginalized. The rhetoric of modernity plagues the official discourse against immigration, while the logic of coloniality is enacted, silently, in the labor exploitation of immigrants. In the same way, the enacting of the logic of coloniality in South America, hidden by the rhetoric of modernity, engenders de-colonial movements. Of course, neither the Indigenous nor the Latino/as mobilizations are homogeneous movements "representing" all the Indians and Latino/as. That will be identity politics. And, of course, it may be the case of those who look for "integration and assimilation." Nevertheless, we should not lose sight of the fact that the seed of de-linking and re-directing is there, in the history of Indigenous and Latino/as, and that is what counts to understand identity in politics. Now, identity in politics means that it is not necessary to be Latino/as or Indigenous to embrace their project; in the same way that it is not necessary to be white to embrace their project. Condoleezza Rice and Alberto González are two clear examples. That seed, that it is in the subjectivity and histories of Indigenous and Latino/as, is the seed of colonial accumulated memories and scars of the colonial wounds; it is the colonial difference created by imperial discourses (e.g., the rhetoric of modernity) that cannot be assimilated to imperial memories except as the differential and negation. That is why identity in politics is crucial in de-linking and re-directing, while identity politics claims for recognition and assimilation.

*Lucero: I really appreciate this provocative dialogue and your willingness to comment on all of the issues proposed during this interview. The last question I would like to ask you is related to the subject of this specific volume of Lucero, which we metaphorically entitled "Remapping*

*the idea of America." It was a happy coincidence that The Idea of Latin America also deals with this subject, so that we could sustain this fertile conversation. You say in the Postface of your book, regarding the paradigm of co-existence, that "the idea of America can be a terrain for the organization of conflicts." You also suggest that a switch in the geo-politics of knowledge may originate from an "Intracultural dialogue among subaltern projects and communities" because it could generate "intercultural struggles with the state and institutions managing the spheres of the social." This statement reminds me of one of the main thesis of Mapuche oralitor Elicura Chihuailaf in his Recado confidencial a los chilenos (1999), in which he claims for the necessity of a dialogue among the sectors excluded by the homogeneous (white and modern) idea of Chileanness constructed at the beginning of the XIX century. Is this the path you envisage for the re-articulation of America as a terrain for the organization of conflicts? How can we remap our body-, epistemic- and power-cartographies so as to effectively move towards a paradigm of co-existence?*

**W.M.:** Moving forward and dwelling in the paradigm of co-existence, as it is explained above, means to de-link from the bubble of modern epistemology and subjectivity; from the universal model of the modern subject. De-linking doesn't mean to dwell in a territory without memory, "outside" of modernity. No. It means to assume, to dwell, to think, to act in the border, in the border between the reproduction of imperial designs and the subjectivities formed by the colonial and patriarchal wounds infringed by those designs. That is what border thinking as the method for de-colonial projects (epistemic and political) means. That is what border thinking and de-coloniality mean in terms of ethics and also in terms of aesthetics. Aesthesis, you know, meant formerly sensing, feeling, and not just sensing and feeling the beautiful and the sublime. That subjectivity, the transcultural subjectivity of local colonial histories de-linking from imperial global designs, not only is at work but it is also being theorized (<http://urss.ru/cgi-bin/db.pl?cp=&page=Book&id=28985&lang=en&lang=en&list=>).

I am eager to read the next issue of *Lucero* and learn about your re-mapping of the idea of America. Elicura Chihuailaf's project seems coincidental with that of Libia Grueso, the Afro-Ecuadorian leader and activist I mentioned above. What they both propose is the need of intra-cultural collaboration among communities that



share the experience of the colonial wound, as racism, patriarchy, and sexual normativity, and not just in the Americas but around the world. If an other world is possible, that world cannot be mapped by what within the bubble of *The Truman Show* (that is, the belief that totality is constituted by what the three macro-narratives I mentioned above establish (conservatism, liberalism, socialism/Marxism and Christianity (Catholic and Protestant)) is the only game in town. Implying, therefore that visions for future societies and global interconnections shall be found within and among those narratives. De-linking and re-directing imply an-other paradigm, an-other logic, an-other political economy and political theory. My argument in the third chapter and in the post-face is an effort to identify the contributions in the Americas (in the non-Latin and non-Anglo America) toward de-colonial processes leading us toward a future in which the civilization of death (which is where neo-liberalism has taken us) will be succeeded by a civilization of life, that is, where no human life will be dispensable.

*Lucero: Agradecemos sinceramente la oportunidad de contar con su invaluable presencia e interlocución en este número de Lucero.*

**W.M.:** Gracias a ti y a *Lucero* por la oportunidad que me brindaron de reflexionar conjuntamente y compartir con ustedes ideas y proyectos de-coloniales y de la identidad en la política (esto es, marcando los límites de la asimilación y de la política identitaria).

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Regarding the first aspect, Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez just published a signpost book (*La Hybris del Punto Cero. Ciencia, raza e ilustración en la Nueva Granada*. Bogotá: Instituto Pensar, 2005) showing the creative, liberating and also oppressive, of the Creole of Nueva Granada (1750-1816). Madina Tlostanova (*A Janus-Faced Empire: Note on the Russian Empire in Modernity Written from the Border*. Moscow: Block, 2003), a Cherkess scholar residing in Moscow, has published several articles and a monograph showing the second-class role of the Russian and Soviet empires, vis-à-vis the capitalist empires of the West (imperial wound), while through Western imperial discourses it was and it is the imperial pride that

sustains the sense of being in the right track of history and having the model for a good life and a good economy for the entire world. Manuela Boatca, a Rumanian scholar residing in Germany, has also published several articles on the colonial wound in semi-peripheral countries (Rumania) at the cross-roads of the Ottoman and the Soviet empires and the European Union (a benevolent new imperial project?) of today. See for instance, "Knocking of Europe's Door: Romanian Academia between Communist Censorship and Western Neglect." In *Double Critique: Knowledge and Scholars at Risk in the Post-Socialist World*. Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova, editors. *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 105: 3, Summer 2006. All of this is also related to your question 5, on "the de-colonial horizon of pluriversality."

<sup>2</sup> "Theorizing FROM the borders; Shifting TO Geo- and Body-politics of knowledge," co-authored with Madina Tlostanova. In *European Journal of Social Theory*; an special issue on "Theorizing Borders," edited by Chris Rumford, volume 9/2, May 2006; and in "Citizenship, Knowledge, and the Limits of Humanity," *American Literary History* 18, 2006, 312-331, particularly section 3.

<sup>3</sup> I developed this idea in "Latinity, Africanity, Indianity." Proceedings of the International Conference of L'Académie de la Latinité (UNESCO-Universidad Candido Mendes). Port-au-Prince, Sept 2005. Textes de Référence, edited by Candido Mendes, 2005.