Learning to Unlearn

Decolonial Reflections
from Eurasia and the Americas

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“Learning to unlearn” grew out of ten years of conversations and collaborations on issues of common interest. As an Uzbek-Cherkess living in Moscow and of an ethnically Muslim family, Madina was concerned with colonial questions in Central Asia and the Caucasus. As a son of Italian immigrants to Argentina and living in the U.S., Walter was concerned with the colonial question in the Americas. It was clear to us that the Russian/Soviet colonies and colonies in South and Central America and the Caribbean have parallel histories vis-à-vis colonial relations and with regards to imperial control and domination. At the same time, in South America, the history of imperial control is tied to the history of capitalism, in the West, while Central Asia and the Caucasus have a different pedigree, due to the subaltern and non-Western or not-quite-Western nature of the empires that controlled them in the past (the Ottoman Sultanate, Russia, the Soviet Union). From the sixteenth century to today, South America and the Caribbean and the Russian colonies (first, the Volga region, Siberia, the Baltic region, the Crimea; and from the late eighteenth to the nineteenth century on, the Caucasus and Central Asia), followed parallel histories vis-à-vis the Western imperial designs (Spain, Holland, France, England, the U.S.) and vis-à-vis the Russian Czardom, the Russian Empire (from Peter the Great onward), the Soviet Union
and the Russian Federation today. The U.S. started its advances toward South America at the beginning of the nineteenth century and has continued to advance until today, while the Russian Federation, its current remaining colonies and newly independent post-Soviet states, also have to confront the interests of the U.S. in Eurasia.

As the conversation and collaboration progressed, it began to turn around two key concepts: imperial and colonial differences and their modulations in the modern/colonial world order from 1500 to 2000. The first modulation was the external imperial difference between the Russian Czardom, and later Russian Empire, in relation to Western empires. Consequently, we asked ourselves, what would be the difference between imperial/colonial configurations in the West framed by Western Christianity, secular Liberalism and Marxism and imperial/colonial configurations in Russia and Eastern Christianity, and later on, in the Soviet Union. More concretely, the question turned to the colonial configurations of Central Asia and the Caucasus under the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and South America and the Caribbean first under the direct Spanish and Portuguese colonization and, after the formation of the “independent” republics, the indirect colonization by Britain and France in collaboration with the local Creole elites, on the other. Once we reached this point, we moved to the internal imperial difference among Western capitalist empires. For example, the so-called Black Legend that England launched against Spain in the second half of the seventeenth century and the making of the South of Europe through which Latin and Catholic countries leading during the Renaissance were demoted to a secondary role in the second modernity (i.e., the Enlightenment). We arrived at a conclusion that had been expressed historically before: the fact that Russia and Spain became two countries at the margins of enlightened modernity. The core of our argument evolves around this set of concepts. We are not “comparing” Central Asia and the Caucasus, on the one hand, with South America and the Caribbean, on the other, but rather analyzing the underlying colonial matrix of power maintaining the illusion that these “areas” are far apart from each other (and they are, as far as local histories are concerned), while in fact they are linked to Western hegemony by the logic of coloniality.

We are not comparing them, because Central Asia and the Caucasus, on the one hand, and South America and the Caribbean, on the other, are two complex “regions” located in the colonial matrix of power. They belong to the same universe. It is only from a modern and imperial epistemological assumption that they are seen as “two distinct areas to be compared.” They have local histories for sure. But their local histories are interconnected with
the local Western imperial history. This point is crucial in our argument. As both are regions within the colonial matrix, they are entangled with the West. The Central Asia and southern Caucasus entanglement is part of the history of Russia/Soviet Union up to the recent formation of the independent states after the collapse of the Soviet Union. South American and the Caribbean went through a similar process: Spain and Portugal were the imperial countries from which South America and the Caribbean first gained their independence; and later on, the processes continued in the British, Dutch, and French Caribbean. So, what we are looking at here is a complex network of imperial and colonial differences: external imperial differences between the Western empires and the Russian Empire/Soviet Union and internal imperial differences between the South of Europe and the Western post-Enlightenment empires (France, England, Germany), whose intellectuals were responsible for making the European Catholic South an inferior sector of Europe. Furthermore, we take into account the external colonial difference that Europe created in relation to the Indians and Africans. This relation was reproduced by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. We are not dealing in this book with the internal colonial difference, which worked in the classification of the European internal “others”: Jews and Romany, mainly.

It is necessary to make it clear from the start that, although the point of origination of the particular conceptual structure (modernity/coloniality/(de)coloniality) was located in South America, its scope is not limited to South America and the Caribbean. To think that way would be similar to believing that, if the concept of “biopolitics” originated in Europe, it is valid only for Europe. It is important to make this clarification, because there is an unconscious tendency to think that theories that originate in the Third World (or among Black or gay intellectuals) are valid only for the Third World (or Black and gay people), while theories that originate in the First World (and created by White and heterosexual people) have a global if not universal validity. This modern and imperial way of thinking is coming to its end. But we know that the belief that the Whites have knowledge and the Indians have Wisdom; the Blacks have experience and the Whites have philosophy; the Third World has culture and the First World has science unfortunately is still well and alive. And what we say is that it is time to start learning to unlearn this assumption among others in order to relearn.

The somewhat coeval imperial beginnings of Russia and Spain in the sixteenth century were followed up by Spain’s demise in the eighteenth century and the beginning of Russia’s doomed catching up race with the great empires of modernity. Russia and Spain “at the margin of the West” (the first
because it never got to the center no matter how much it yearned to, and the second because it lost its place there) was a metaphor shared by Spanish, Latin American, and Russian historians and philosophers alike (Ana María Schop Soler (1971), Leopoldo Zea (1958), or Vassily Klyuchevsky (2009)). Paradoxically, when Peter changed his title of the Czar to that of the Emperor (early eighteenth century), the “external imperial difference” between Western and non-Western civilizations was consolidated. Simultaneously, in the eighteenth century, Spain lost its former imperial clout, became the South of Europe, and originated the “internal imperial difference.” Both Russia and Spain lost the train of the second modernity, that of the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and the birth of the secular nation-states.

Consequently, the Russian colonies, on the one hand, and South America and the Caribbean, on the other, were recast according to the new world order dictated by the leadership of England, France, and Germany—the “heart or Europe” in Hegel’s metaphor, in politics, economy, philosophy, and sciences. As Russia was getting more and more tightly entangled in the net of intellectual and cultural dependency on Europe, bordering on self-colonization, its methods of conquering the new territories were becoming more and more similar to European ones, and the previous relative tolerance of other religions and ethnicities gave place to open genocide and racism. Ivan the Terrible, three hundred years earlier, was able to have as his second wife a daughter of Cherkess prince Temryuk or a Tatar deputy on the throne, but in the nineteenth century discourses, the inhabitants of the Caucasus or Central Asia were already unequivocally coded as inferior beings. The final conquering of these territories in the middle and the second half of the nineteenth century took place in the context of discourses on racism, Orientalism, and Eurocentrism, which were borrowed from Europe and subsequently distorted by the Russians—due to their own dubious status. The main rival of the Russian Empire then was the Ottoman Sultanate, which shared with Russia its second-rate status, while the Russian inferiority complex with respect to the unattainable Western empires of modernity was compensated in the conquering of the Caucasus and Central Asia, which were racialized in accordance with the notions of the post-Enlightenment Europe in this new colonial period of imperial management.

Meanwhile, in South America and the Caribbean, many countries gained independence from Spain and Portugal in the nineteenth century, just to enter in the first period of imperialism without colonies. England controlled the economy while France had strong political investments (e.g., the name of “Latin” America was a geopolitical move of French imperial expansion; it dominated the intellectual life as well as shaped the state universities). Like
Africa and Asia in the second half of the twentieth century, South American countries gained independence from the former empires, in order to remain dependent on new imperialism.

Thus, while Russia remained and Spain became a marginal empire in the eighteenth century and they were located in the external and internal imperial differences, respectively, the colonies of Central Asia and the Caucasus that were acquired by Russia in the post-Enlightenment phase of modernity were regarded differently from the colonies gained in the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries. The previously existing relations and ways of interpreting the indigenous populations of Central Asia and the Caucasus were completely erased from the Russian memories and replaced with the borrowed Western discourses. This was particularly clear in case of the Circassian genocide and Circassians’ subsequent exile to the Ottoman Sultanate in the mid-nineteenth century (Circassian Genocide 2008, Shenfield 2008). As for South America, these ex-colonies were relocated by updating the external colonial difference put in place in the sixteenth century. The colonial difference came into being in the process of debating the humanity of the inhabitants of Anahuac and Tawantinsuyu, renamed “Indias Occidentales” by Spaniards and “America” by a group of intellectuals in northern France and southern Germany, at the suggestion of Martin Waldseemüller. “Indian” as the name of the people and “Indias Occidentales,” as that of the place, are two anchors of the colonial difference. Not only was a name that was not theirs imposed onto the people, they were also cast as inferior to Christians and Spaniards. Enslaved Africans transported to the New World were the second group of renamed people: all enslaved Africans became “Black” disregarding their original kingdom of origin in Africa, respective languages, and sacred beliefs.

People of the Caucasus and later Central Asia were also reclassified by the Russian Empire within the frame of the racist logic imported from the West and superimposed onto the existing religious frame. From the “Busurman” of the first modernity (a term originating arguably in the word “Muslim”—Muslim), coming to gradually embrace all non–Orthodox Christian people, the Russian construction of otherness came to the concept of “inorodets” (usually translated as “alien” but literally meaning the one who was born an other), in the early nineteenth century, when the religious difference was replaced with a racial, ethnic, and civilizational one to be essentialized. Thus, in the second modernity, the Muslim confession of Central Asia and partly the Caucasus was turned into the color of skin. So that, on top of the legal term “inorodets” (which included the Pagan nomads, the Muslims, and the Jews alike), there was also the term “Tatar” in use to define all Muslims,
similarly to the West, where the Muslims were called Arabs or Turks regardless of their ethnicity. The topographic and ethnic renamings intensified and acquired a more planned strategic element in Soviet nation building in the remapped borders, invented ethnicities and languages, and erased histories. As a result of the Soviet modernization, the religious difference was completely translated into race and the Caucasus and Central Asian people acquired the common name of “Blacks” that they still carry. The Orthodox Christian commonality of Russians with Osetians (until the war with Georgia over South Osetia), Georgians, or Armenians has been systematically downplayed and replaced with racism and Orientalism from the nineteenth century until now.

All of this was taking place at the time when the European philologists and intellectuals were rebuilding and enacting the colonial difference in their definition of the Orientals and the creation of Orientalism. In this move, Muslims became Arabs and Turks and the original imperial difference between the Spanish Empire and the Ottoman Sultanate lost the religious underpinning, while secular ethnicity entered in the Western redrawing of the external colonial difference. It is precisely at this point that the Caucasus and Central Asia entered the imperial imaginary of Russia in the role of Russia’s own secondhand Orient. The internal colonial difference was also remapped during the same period: Jews, as a religious group, became secularized as ethnic Jews, a transformation that had its dramatic consequences in the holocaust.

We do not present a new version of historical grand narrative but rather revisit the local histories of different geopolitical spaces, and always within the colonial matrix of power. We do this not with the simple goal of adding certain crucial facts and notions to the existing historical interpretations, although in many cases this is in itself an important and still unaddressed task. Our goal instead is to look at these seemingly familiar historical events from the position of border thinking and border consciousness, sensitive to the colonial and imperial difference, and to do so necessarily in the context of the rhetoric of modernity based on the logic of global coloniality in its various manifestations (Western capitalism and liberalism, socialism, the discourses of subaltern empires, etc.). Border thinking is theorized in more detail later. Since there is no outside position from which the colonial matrix can be observed and described (we are all within it), border thinking emerges in the process of delinking from the colonial matrix and escaping from its control. Suffice it to say here that, by border thinking, we mean a specific epistemic response from the exteriority of Western modernity, a response from the outside created from the perspective of the inside (that is,
the exteriority in building its own identity as humanitas). This means that while we are all in the colonial matrix, not everyone belongs to its memories, feelings, and ways of sensing. Many of us have been “trapped” in the colonial matrix but do not “belong” to it. Therefore it becomes essential to delink, and border epistemology-cum-decolonial thinking is one way of doing it. Border thinking is the epistemology enacted in the variegated responses, around the globe, to the violence of the imperial territorial epistemology and the rhetoric of modernity with its familiar defects, from forced universal salvation to taking difference to sameness, from subject-object split to naturalization of Western epistemic privilege. Thus, we perform an act of demarcation or delimiting with the previous principles of interpretation of history and modernity, without which it is not possible to enact the decolonization of being, thinking, and knowledge—another crucial notion and goal that runs throughout the book and connects our otherwise divergent local histories, working for the open utopia of the global decolonial move. We, therefore, enact border thinking in building our argument, which means that we do not place ourselves as detached observers (the myth of modern epistemology) but as involved and embodied in the process we describe. We have this particular step in mind when we speak of the necessity of “learning to unlearn”—to forget what we have been taught, to break free from the thinking programs imposed on us by education, culture, and social environment, always marked by the Western imperial reason.

Therefore, when we say that we became interested in the colonial question, we do not mean that we became immersed in the meticulous diachronic study and detached detailed comparison of the conquest of the New World and the imperial march of Russia taking over Eurasia. Rather we felt that, under all their differences and incommensurability, these local histories that we have just sketchily presented, share some kind of common logic in the way coloniality (the logic under all forms of colonialism since 1500) affected the consciousness, subjectivity, economy, gender and sexual relations, thinking, social and political processes of peripheral Eurasia and South/Central America and the Caribbean. This commonality, as we discovered later and try to demonstrate in what follows, was not connected with the histories of concrete empires and their colonies regarded as isolated and well-formed entities to be compared within the Western comparative studies approach, but rather was a result of what can be called “global coloniality” and defined as a model of power relations that came into existence as a consequence of the Western imperial expansion but did not end with the official end of colonialism and colonial administrations. It survives in culture, labor, intersubjective relations, knowledge production, books, cultural patterns, and other
aspects of modern existence (Maldonado-Torres 2007: 243). The word “coloniality” has a specific theoretical and historical meaning for us as members of modernity/coloniality international collective (Escobar 2007, Yehia 2006). Historically, coloniality names the darker side of modernity. Conceptually, coloniality is the hidden side of modernity. By writing modernity/coloniality, we mean that coloniality is constitutive of modernity and there is no modernity without coloniality.

By using the concept of “global coloniality,” we want to avoid such terms as “alternative” or “peripheral modernities,” at the same time underlying the hidden agenda of modernity, alternative or peripheral. We also intend to go beyond the British colonial history on which postcolonial studies were largely built and attempt to reinscribe the forgotten colonial history of the Spanish empire and take into account the enormous significance of the surfacing of the Atlantic economy (the western coasts of Africa, the western coasts of Europe and the eastern coasts of the Americas), displacing the weight that the Mediterranean had for the Western confines of the world until 1500. Furthermore, we take into account the Russian colonial history, and the split of the Enlightenment project into two modernities (the liberal and the socialist) after 1917. Subsequently, with the fall of the Soviet Union, today’s neoliberalism is running wild, creating the conditions for the emergence of what we describe here as polycentric capitalism.

Whether the historical foundation of modernity is located in the sixteenth century, the “discovery” of America, and the European Renaissance or in the European Enlightenment and the French Revolution, modernity has been explicitly and implicitly linked with Western Christendom, secularization, Western types of imperialism (i.e., Spain, Portugal, Holland, France, England, the U.S.), and capitalist economy. In that Eurocentric version of modernity, fashioned from the very imperial history of Europe, coloniality had to remain silenced. But the triumphal march of modernity cannot be celebrated from the imperial perspective without bringing to the foreground that religious salvation implied the extirpation of idolatry; civilization meant the eradication of non-European modes of life, economy, and political organization; and a development within capitalist economy and market democracy in Western political theory. In that version of history, two major issues are left in the background that helps in enhancing the idea of modernity and hiding the logic of coloniality.

The first was the triumphal conceptualization of modernity and its hidden complicity with the spatial and temporal “differences” and with coloniality. Modernity, to be conceived as such, needed (and still needs) a break with the past within internal European history. Therefore, it colonized time
and invented the idea of the Middle Ages thus putting in place the historical foundation of modern time. Almost simultaneously, the very concept of “discovery of America” contributed to the historical foundation of modern space. It was a discovery of a continent that did not yet exist, as there was no such a thing as America when Columbus landed in the Caribbean islands. Furthermore, the Christian conceptualization of the “discovery” of a continent that has been inhabited for about thirty thousands years, according to current estimates, was marked by the efforts of Christian intellectuals in the sixteenth century to make the “new” continent and people fit biblical history and the Christian Tripartite geopolitical order. It was from and in Europe that the classification of the world emerged and not from Asia, Africa, or America. The Middle Ages were integrated into the history of Europe, while the histories of Asia, Africa, and America were denied as history. By the eighteenth century, when the “barbarians” in space where transformed (e.g., Lafitau 1724) into the “primitives” in time, the colonization of the world by the European Empire brought together and distinguished the time/space of modernity from the time/space of non-modern Europe and non-modern America, Asia, and Africa.2 “Modern” imperialism and, therefore, colonialism (as distinct from Roman, Islamic, and Ottoman) rests on two basic and interrelated pillars: the internal colonization of time in the internal history of Europe (i.e., the Middle Ages) and the external colonization of space in the external history of Europe (of the Americas first, by Spain and Portugal; of Africa and Asia since the nineteenth century by England and France; and of strategic places of the globe, mainly since the second half of the twentieth century by the U.S.).

Thus, we make the distinction here between imperialism/colonialism as singular, historical processes, on the one hand, and the rhetoric of modernity/the logic of coloniality, on the other. From the biblical macro-narrative, we inherited the idea that there is a linear history from the creation of the first man and the first woman by God until the final judgment. From Georg W. F. Hegel, we inherited the secular version of the sacred narrative: the idea that History is a linear process that began in the East many centuries ago, then moved West and, at the time Hegel was writing, History was dwelling in Germany, although its future was already destined to move further West to the United States of America (Hegel [1822] 1991). From Frances Fukuyama (1992), we inherited the idea that History has arrived at its end. Although these macro-narratives are Christian and Western, the expansion of the West all over the globe has made these narratives the points of reference (not necessarily of conviction) for the entire world—similar to the way Hollywood and Wall Street are also global reference points. The concepts of
colonial and imperial differences alter significantly the calm waters of a linear history that has arrived at its end with the collapse of the Soviet Union, as Fukuyama has it. The rhetoric of modernity (i.e., the Renaissance idea of “les ancients et les modernes”) was founded and expanded, in the internal history of Europe and the U.S., in the language of progress and newness. To be modern, people or countries had to be at the tip and the top of history, at the tip and the top of “human” evolution. With regards to the Muslims in the North of Africa, the Indians in America, the Africans in Africa and in the Americas, and the Ottomans, to be “modern” meant to be civilized and distinct from the barbarians (and after the Enlightenment, distinct from the primitives). Thus, the foundation of the rhetoric of modernity consisted of affirming the point of arrival of the societies in which the men who were telling the story and conceiving modernity were residing; it provided and still provides the justification for the continuing colonization of time and space: “bringing” modernity to the world (in terms of conversion to Christianity, to civilization, to market democracy), became a “mission” that, in the name of progress and development, has justified colonization, from the conquest of Mexico to the conquest of Iraq.

II.

Why did we decide to write this book? Several reasons motivated our decision. First and foremost, we did it as a contribution to shifting the geography of reasoning, in Lewis Gordon’s formulation (Gordon 2006) and to disengage from the assumption that certain “areas” (Central Asia and the Caucasus; South/Central America, the Caribbean), or certain “minorities” in a developed country (e.g., Latinos and Latinas in the U.S.) are “objects” to be studied. We ask first not what has to be studied but who is doing the study and for what? In other words, why has the world been divided into areas of investigation? Who benefits from such investigations? Argentinean philosopher Rodolfo Kusch devoted all his “thinking life” (as a thinker and a philosopher within and outside of the academy) to arguing that we can make no form of affirmation without being involved and transformed in our act of affirming (Kusch 1978).

The argument of our book consists in a sustained effort to shift the geography of reasoning from the enunciated (or object/area to be described and explained) to the enunciator (the subject doing the description and explanation). This is of fundamental importance because there is an ideological assumption in mainstream epistemology according to which subjects who
are not Euro-Americans are mere tokens of their own culture. This presupposition implies that knowledge is located in a given “area” (Western Europe and the U.S.) and controlled by certain people (the secular White quantitative minority). The second reason for writing this book is to disobey such taken-for-granted assumptions. We posit ourselves as epistemic subjects who take on the world from our own lived experiences and education. And rather than being tokens of our culture, we take “as our object of study” the Western imperial formations and the Western Christian and secular elites who created institutions of knowledge that became, imperially, the measure of all possible knowledges.

We just wrote “knowledge’s” in plural but it came out automatically (Microsoft Word did it) as a possessive case. Word’s thesaurus does not accept it. It does not admit the plural of “knowledge,” because knowledge is supposed to be singular: It is the singularity of agents and institutions who control and dictate what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. We disobey; we delink from all totalitarian epistemology and claim epistemic equity. Therefore, this book should not be read as a “comparative study” of Central Asia and the Caucasus, on the one hand, and South/Central America and the Caribbean, on the other, because both are located within the colonial matrix of power. How can one compare entities that belong to the same system? Comparing would mean to assume that the two regions are delimited by their local histories and ignore that they are interconnected by global designs: the very constitution of the modern/colonial world and the formation and transformation of the colonial matrix of power.

As we stated, we do not offer a comparative study of Central Asia, the Caucasus, South/Central America, and the Caribbean or Latinos as in the U.S.: We take our experience (not the disciplines) as an epistemic guide. Disciplinary apparati (concepts, narratives, debates, etc.) are tools to build our arguments, addressing problems and issues not framed in the disciplines. This does not mean that we want to represent (describe or speak for) the regions or the people. We just claim that we (Madina and Walter) belong to those regions and not to South Asia, France, or the U.S. Thus, our thinking is in-formed geo- and body politically. No essences are invoked. What is invoked is how we inhabit the colonial matrix and respond to it. Therefore we claim epistemic rights grounded in local histories and in the bodies instead of being grounded in disciplinary principles established in local histories and by body agents with whom we do not identify. A common dictum says that Native Americans have wisdom and Whites have science, that Blacks have experience and Whites have knowledge. We do not recognize such common assumptions. We disobey and delink from them. And we are
not claiming for recognition of the right to exist. Our claim is stronger: We claim that future epistemologies are being and will be constructed with their “back” toward the West, not competing with the West but delinking from it. For, if decolonial epistemology engages in competition with Western epistemology, the war is lost before the first battle: “Competing” means playing by the same rules of the epistemic game. We instead conceive the decolonial as an option. By so doing, all “competing” alternatives become merely options. Those options could be at the level of system of ideas (Christianity, Islamism, Judaism, Liberalism, Marxism) or disciplinary formations (Social Sciences and the Humanities, Professional Schools, Natural Sciences). When one looks at a system of ideas or disciplinary formations as options, one realizes that there is no single truth to be defended or imposed. There are only options to be engaged with. The road to pluriversality begins when we accept that there are options to be engaged and no universal truth to defend. The rules of the epistemic game are precisely what we are contesting and disengaging from. At the same time, we look for networking and building solidarity with projects moving in the same direction around the world. “Solidarity” should not be confused with “charity.” You can be “in solidarity” with people struggling for food in the world, meaning that you are sympathetic and justify their fight. But they would not care much about your “solidarity,” which is indeed a “paternalistic charity.” “Solidarity” in decolonial terms is reciprocal: If you are in solidarity, you have to be a partner and be considered as a partner by the institutions and agencies with which you are in solidarity. In sum, we are not claiming recognition, inclusion, or the right to exist—we know that we belong to global trajectories that do not pretend to compete with modern Western epistemology—rather we intend to move in a different direction, to delink, to shift the geography of reasoning.

The third reason for writing this book is in revolt against the organization of the world in boxes, in areas to be studied or their natural resources to be exploited. In such an obviously imperial order of knowledge, what has the Caucasus and Central Asia to do with South America and the Caribbean and with Latino/as in the U.S.? A lot, we sustain, because they all are connected through the logic of coloniality (or the colonial matrix of power) that has guided the world order and Euro-American leadership. What we are saying is that the mentioned areas and people are not linked as objects but through the logic of imperial enunciation.

“Learning to unlearn in order to relearn” is a crucial principle in the curriculum of Amawtay Wasi [The Intercultural University of the People and Nations of Ecuador], aimed at the development of reflective and intuitive practices of wise people rather than Western style professionals, by orga-
nizing various “learning environments where the building of knowledge is interrelated with research, dialogue and projects and services” (García 2004: 329). We need to make several clarifying points to explain why our book is titled after the Amawtay Wasi project of higher education and not after some model that Harvard, Cambridge, Le College the France, or Heidelberg (to mention just a few possibilities), may offer.⁴

Amawtay Wasi is a project lead by indigenous intellectuals and activists in collaboration with non-Indians (Ecuadoreans of European descent of mixed blood and mind). The project emerges after a long series of claims, from land claims in the 1970s, to bicultural education, from the right of political interventions argued through the concept of “interculturality” (which we explain later), to the right to create institutions of higher education under indigenous leadership. This leadership does not mean that it is an Indigenous university exclusively for indigenous people, as was the case with the national Ecuadorian university created by creoles of European descent and mestizos, which indeed, at the beginning, was meant only for high-class mestizos and European descent students. In 1987, the Constitution of Ecuador was reformed and one of the changes allowed Indians to register at national universities. It should be added that the creation of Amawtay Wasi is part of the political processes led by Indigenous Nations that forced numerous claims into the new Constitution of Ecuador, including reconceptualizing “nature” as life to which we, as humans, also belong, and having done with the four hundred years of Baconian principles according to which “nature” is outside of us to be exploited and dominated. However, Indigenous actors (epistemic and political) soon realized, on the one hand, the disadvantages they had in competing with students who were born and raised in the same spirit that the national university was reproducing. On the other hand, they realized that, whatever effort they make to fulfill the university requirements, they will be learning “how to be according to national expectations regarding the indigenous population” but not learning to “be themselves.” For this reason, Amawtay Wasi is open to all Ecuadorians, and not only to indigenous people. The concept of “interculturalidad” was created to highlight the emergence of political and epistemic rights that both the colonial and nation-state administration had denied to indigenous nations.

In addition to that, the institution was conceived as a pluriversity although the Minister of Education did not accept such a denomination. The concept of inter-culturalidad was connected with the indigenous project, working toward the constitution of a pluri-national state; a claim that is also made in Bolivia and has been reinforced by the government of Evo Morales. Clearly
then, an institution such as Amawtay Wasi has significant implications in higher education, public policy, and international relations.5

The philosophy and conceptual curricular structure is clearly delinking from the history of Western university as an institution, from its origins in the Middle Ages to the corporate university that dominates today in the U.S. and is gaining ground in Europe and other parts of the world (Tlostanova 2004b, Mignolo 2003). “Delinking” does not mean that the university will be driven by “Indian cosmology” or that its curriculum will be structured and based on some ideal perennial “Indian” knowledge modeled before the conquest and colonization, when there was no “Indian” as a concept and the territory of today’s Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia were a part of Tawantinsuyu [the world in four parts] and the major languages there were Aymara (mainly in what is today Bolivia), Quechua (mainly in what is today Peru), and Quichua (mainly in what is today Ecuador). “Delinking” means basically shifting the geography of reason6 and planning and organizing knowledge from the “Indigenous” American point of view instead of having only one option, that is, the university organized from the point of view of “Creoles and Mestizos,” who adopted the model created by the “Indigenous” Europeans of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Amawtay Wasi does not reject the existing knowledge (in science, technology, medicine, social sciences, etc.), but it subsumes it within the vision, needs, and life style of Indigenous nations. Amawtay Wasi is founded and grounded not in an authentic or essentialist concept of knowledge, but in border thinking or border gnosis. “Interculturality” is precisely an expression of that epistemic and hermeneutic foundation based on cross-cultural dialogue, a transdisciplinary approach, and an imperative philosophy (from the Latin imparare—to learn in a pluralistic environment) (Panikkar 2000).

In the center of the cognitive and educational matrix of Amawtay Wasi stands a deeper fundamental principle (Kawsay) shared by the Indigenous people—the inextricable link between the “being,” the “existence,” and the “doing” (the human agency), or the principle of relational-experiential rationality and building knowledge not outside the essence and existence of being, not by presenting a problem outside of its context, but by practicing community learning as an ongoing and never-ending open process, based on complexity and relationism, complementarity and reciprocity, the shift from the subject-object relations to the subject-subject model instead of the dominant fragmentation, to the learning-unlearning-relearning path, and from accumulating knowledge to its critical and creative understanding and integration in wisdom.
The curriculum, very complex indeed, is basically structured—spatially—in the four spheres or spaces of learning and—chronologically—in five years of schooling. Spatially, it is framed in four corners or houses of learning and modeled on the Southern Cross, which in its turn was the spatial model for the territory of Tawantinsuyu (the “map” of the Incanate). At the center stands the house of Wisdom, wisdom being the ultimate goal of the university. In each corner, Western knowledge is detached from Western cosmology and “incorporated” and subsumed in Indigenous cosmology. Obviously, we cannot expect to find here genomic or nanotechnology institutes, not just at Amawtay Wasi but not even in South/Central America and in the Caribbean in general. What we should expect from a project such as Amawtay Wasi is to shift the geography of reasoning and the very goals of knowledge and understanding. Learning is related to doing and experience. From the viewpoint of Indigenous leaders, Western knowledge, both in the colonial and the national period, was an instrument of (epistemic) colonization. As a result, the aim of such a shift is not destruction but rather creation of another model of knowledge and understanding of the world and human beings.

If the spatial structure is organized in four corners or houses of knowledge and a center, the chronological process of learning has five levels. The center of space coincides with the present in time. The first level is devoted to “learning to think doing things as a community.” The second level aims at “learning to learn,” the third strives for “learning to unlearn and relearn,” and the fourth— for “learning to undertake.” The last, fifth level, which is also at the center (similarly to Cuzco, the capital of the Incanate, which was at the center of the world but also the present of four previous eras, or “Suns” as the Incas counted each era), is devoted to “Learning throughout life.” The university aims at decolonizing knowledge and being and promoting communities of “buen vivir,” or “the fullness of life.” “Sumak” is better translated into Spanish as “plenitude” or “fullness” in English. “Sumak Kawsay” would be better understood as precisely living the fullness of life rather than “buen vivir” or “living well,” where “buen” and “well” are too attached to the materiality of life, to living as possessing things, to surrounding oneself with objects transformed into commodities, and feeling “happy” when life allows us to buy. Living well rather than living better than the other or better than my neighbor means a life in fullness that cannot be achieved within a capitalist economy. This concept necessarily presupposes the assumption that humans, nature, and the entire cosmos are alive to the extent that they are fully related and ontologically existing in this relational dynamic. According to Amawtay
Wasi vision, “education is viewed as learning to achieve relationalism, symbolized experience, symbolic language as a way to advance towards wisdom and to approach an understanding of living well” (García 2004: 288–89).

Such a model of education and cognition is possible to imagine in other locales of the world that have retained the indigenous knowledges (be it India, China, or Central Asia). However, the question is not only to reorganize universities according to the principles similar to Ecuador University and based on local histories and cosmologies but also to go beyond the university and shift the geography of reasoning and the approach to the interpretation of reality, history, philosophy, or politics of intellectuals worldwide. The basic questions are these: What kind of knowledges are produced and transformed? Who produces and transforms them, why, and for whom? What knowledge contributes to management for the benefit of the few, and what knowledges contribute to the liberation of the many from the management of the few? We are not always capable of changing the dominant power machines that run the systems of education or disciplines, in the same way we do not always have simple access to and the invigorating link with the communities and their knowledge and learning practices as with Amawtay Wasi. However, this does not mean that we cannot create the volatile communities of critical decolonial thought, the global coalitions of thinkers who chose as their main principle the Abya Yala’s “learning to unlearn in order to relearn.”

We take “learning to unlearn in order to relearn” as a guiding principle of this book and assume the goals and consequences of the radical proposal of Amawtay Wasi. We are not Indigenous Americans, but that does not mean that we cannot learn from them in order to unlearn what we have learned through our education or cultural environment and to relearn from the point of view of knowledge and understanding generated by the people and communities that have been disavowed in their participation in education, in the state and public policy, and in international relations and whose view of economic administration has been cast as “traditional” and troublesome for “development” proper. We are not appropriating Indigenous categories to the benefit of non-Indigenous intellectuals and scholars employed by public or private universities. This caveat would have not been necessary, if instead of Indigenous thinkers, we relied on the Frankfurt School or French postmodernism. Would a trans-diasporic multiethnic scholar living in Moscow and an Argentinean living in the U.S. be accused of appropriating Adorno or Baudrillard? If that were the path we had followed, it would have seemed “natural” that a Caucasus-Central Asian scholar in Moscow and an Argentine in the U.S., who became a Hispanic or Latino, learned from critical
imperial scholarship. But, to learn from Indigenous thinkers could be rendered as “appropriation.” Such biased interpretations are a result of remaining within the limits and blindness of modern epistemology.

III.

What do we mean by “thinking decolonially”? And, how does it relate to the title, *Learning to Unlearn*? Is it an expression parallel to many already existing ones: thinking philosophically, thinking economically, or thinking politically, where invariably, an action is invoked (“thinking”) and a field in which the act of thinking is performed (economy, philosophy, politics)? There is a clear difference in the fields invoked here and in the way they can be used: economics, philosophy, politics can refer to academic disciplines; but they can also refer to a wider range of activities, not necessarily academic. The CEO of a corporation thinks economically and politically, too. The next presidential candidate thinks politically and economically as well, albeit not within the disciplines but within a larger field of social actions and discourses, the political field, and so forth.

“Decolonial thinking” is formulating the epistemic, political, and ethical basis for global decolonial options *in* the existing world order, which we all witness or take part in today. Where do “we” (scholars, intellectuals, journalists, activists) operate? Not in the sphere of the state or the market but in the public sphere, in the domain and terrain of the civil and political society, which we explain here. What is the “decolonial field” in relation to which “thinking decolonially” can have a meaning then? “Decolonial” presupposes first that there is another field, the field of coloniality (that is, the colonial matrix of power), from which it is assumed one should delink or disengage: This is the first meaning of decolonial, not anticolonial, but moving away from the colonial. The term “colonial” has a specific meaning in decolonial thinking. It refers not to the Roman Empire’s understanding of a colony as a polity built or ruled by imperial order but to the modern meaning of “colonial” as a “conquered and managed territory” linked to the process of European “colonization,” grounded in destroying the existing social order and imposing one responding to the needs and habitus of the conquerors. By “colonies,” we refer in this book to the type of imperial-colonial interconnections between the imperial core countries of Europe (Spain, Portugal, France, England, Holland, and to a lesser extent Italy and Germany) from approximately 1500 onward. This is a particular type of imperial-colonial relations, classified mainly by the emergence of “capitalism” (as defined by
Max Weber (1904/05) and “imperialism” (as defined by J. A. Hobson ([1902] 2002), later appropriated and altered by Marxist popularizes such as V. Lenin ([1917] 1963), R. Luxembourg (1913), and others). Hence, by the early twentieth century, the legacy of the term “imperium” was translated into modern English as “imperialism” and connected to the already flourishing new type of economy, “capitalism.” We ask, at the same time, what kind of imperial-colonial relations characterized the Russian Czardom/Empire and the Soviet Union? How did the colonial matrix “translate” from the Atlantic to Eurasia?

Decoloniality means projecting decolonial thinking over the colonial matrix of power. The latter is an analytic concept, but its very creation already implies decolonial thinking. Liberal and Marxist thinkers, political theorists, and economic experts all accept that the current global economy is capitalist. The only difference is that some of them are happy and want to maintain it (even during and after the crisis and legal corruption of Wall Street in 2007–2008) and others are unhappy and want to dismantle it. A decolonial thinker is with neither of them, and the reason is that “capitalist economy” is not the core analytic concept of decolonial thinking, whereas the “colonial matrix of power” is.

Polycentric capitalism made the modern idea of “revolution” obsolete for two reasons. One is that, in polycentric capitalism, in spite of the competition for control of authority (current conflicts between capital and state and between non-Western states embracing a capitalist economy, like China and Russia), there is no more room for an idea of revolution that consists in taking control of the state (like the bourgeoisie did in Europe over the monarchy; the Bolsheviks over the Russian Czars; like the Creole of European descent (except in Haiti) did in the Americas since the end of the eighteenth century; or the natives did in Asia and Africa, during the era of decolonization, after World War II). The second reason is that all the revolutions we have mentioned were revolutions within the same cosmology, within the same rules of the game. And the word “revolution” itself is meaningful only in the ideology of progress and development within the realm of sameness. At the moment when the colonial matrix of power reached a global scope, from the U.S. and European Union to China, India, and Brazil, one can argue that the very idea of revolution (a keyword in the vocabulary of modernity) lost its historical possibilities. Decolonial thinking offers an essentially different approach—the decolonial option. What is the grammar of decoloniality that could help advance transformative projects beyond the “revolutionary” language and expectations of modernity? Instead of digging into Western archives to find a Saint Paul or a Spinoza who would get us out of the impasse, we would like to dig into derogated archives, abased authors, concepts, and dissenting
initiatives, which grew out of dissenting energies and minds that thought the world otherwise, that is, on the basis of a non-Western or not-quite-Western genealogy of knowledge. However, since the West is all over and in all of us, non-Western does not mean outside. It means residing in exteriority, that is, the outside created by the inside, by the imperial reason of Western control of knowledge (i.e., coloniality of knowledge and of being). The historical and logical foundation of exteriority is a Western epistemic construction of racism and the patriarchal control of knowledge and understanding.

Decolonial thinking and decolonial options are projects led and created by the people whom Frantz Fanon called “les damnés de la terre” (1967): all those humiliated, devalued, disregarded, disavowed, and confronting the trauma of the “colonial wound,” a trauma that no modern psychoanalyst can cure, as Fanon himself experienced in Algeria (1967, Chapter V). “Damnés,” in the colonial matrix, is a scalar category pervading all spheres of the social and not only the dispossessed. We believe that Fanon (a professional educated in France) placed himself among the damnés. The damnés should not be understood in economic terms (poverty) but mainly in racial terms (inferior human beings). Living experience generates knowledge to deal with the very foundation of a system of knowledge and subjectivity that constructed the damnés. Decolonizing knowledge and being means to generate knowledge to solve the problems in which the damnés have been placed as damnés. “Ending poverty” means maintaining the colonial matrix of power that produced and reproduced the dispossessed damnés. The decolonial intellectual and the decolonial political society link epistemology, politics, and ethics in the process of decolonizing knowledge and being. Radical “social movements” like La Via Campesina and Food Sovereignty are good examples of transnational projects decolonizing knowledge and being (La Via Campesina 2008, Abergel 2005, Desmarias 2007). Still another case is the Indigenous projects across the Americas, which have lately congregated in the annual Americas Social Forum. The project of Evo Morales’s government has generated a significant and clear discourse about what it means to decolonize the state and the economy.

These are, in a nutshell, some of the questions that decolonial thinkers ask. By asking these kinds of questions, we start thinking decoloniaally and engage ourselves in a transdisciplinary analytic in which the problems precede the method. Our approach departs from the canonical scholarly assumptions in the humanities and social sciences and has implications for other areas of knowledge, in natural sciences as well as in professional schools. By switching the emphasis from method to problems, a scholar, intellectual, or researcher is thrown into the world rather than remaining
within the discipline. Instead of the study or analysis of the existing post-colonial and neocolonialist phenomena and processes, be it diaspora, exile, nationalism, biopolitics, etc., and maintaining the divide between the known object and the knowing subject, for the decolonial approach to study a phenomenon (idea, social event, art work) is only the first step toward a project, toward solving a problem, toward answering a question. The decolonial approach departs from the canonical distinction, in the humanities and social sciences, between explanation and understanding; between nomothetic and idiographic sciences. Studying and investigating are only preliminary steps in formulating decolonial arguments in public policy or education. The problems the decolonial thinkers explore are problems emerging from the modern-colonial matrix of power, that is, from the modern rhetoric of salvation hiding the colonial logic (coloniality) of oppression, control, and domination. Knowledge and understanding for decolonial thinkers overrule and overcome expert knowledge. While expertise is necessary, it is, at the same time, dangerous, for it forecloses dialogue, as the expert is the Deus absconditus, the observer who cannot be observed because, precisely, he or she is An Expert! While disciplinary knowledge in the social sciences and the humanities focuses on objects (culture, society, economy, politics), decolonial thinking shifts the politics of knowledge toward problems and questions that are hidden by the rhetoric of modernity.

To what problems do we refer and explore further later? They are problems emerging from the modern-colonial matrix of power, that is, from the modern rhetoric of salvation hiding the colonial logic (coloniality) of oppression, control, and domination. Thus, the analytic of coloniality is the necessary condition for prospective decolonial arguments—the decolonial option presupposes the analytic of the colonial matrix, in the same way as psychoanalysis presupposes the analytic of the unconscious or the international proletariat revolution presupposes the analytic of the logic of capital. Therefore, while disciplinary knowledge in the social sciences and the humanities focuses on objects (culture, society, economy, politics), decolonial thinking shifts the politics of knowledge toward problems and questions that are hidden by the rhetoric of modernity. For example, the general concern to fight poverty demands from the social sciences to study the conditions under which poverty could be eliminated, while decolonial thinking focuses on the hidden reasons that created and naturalized poverty. Decolonial public policy and education start from this premise.

Decolonial thinking can and should work effectively at any level and sphere of education (schools, colleges, higher education), as is manifested in case of Amawtay Wasi; and it can be very effective in another area of educa-
tion: the media (particularly independent media, because mainstream media reproduces and perpetuates—in different scale and to a different degree—the coloniality of knowledge and of being) (Decolonizing the Digital 2009). Decolonial thinkers will not be listened to in Davos or among the G8; they will not be invited to a dialogue in the UN (and a wide range of similar subordinate institutions). But decolonial thinking works within the global political society, confronting the consequences of the colonial differences because “imperial international law and corporations are there” and “immigration is here.”

“Political society” is a concept introduced by Indian historian Partha Chatterjee (Chatterjee 2004). He refers to a wide range of collective activities that no longer belong to the sphere of the civil society that expresses itself mainly through voting every two, four, or six years. The liberal model of society then begins to crack and distinct spheres emerge between the civil society and the state and between the civil society and the market. Furthermore, the political society no longer keeps the relative homogeneity of the Europe-American civil society, but it is emerging in the non-West and transforming the West through massive migrations from the non-West. Briefly, political society is not a modern concept but a decolonial one. If, within the liberal model of social organization, we can imagine a triangle with “the state,” “the economy,” and the “civil society” as its angles, in the colonial matrix of power, we have to imagine a tetragon, consisting of the modern/colonial state, the imperial/colonial market, the civil colonial society formed by European migrants, and the political society emerging out of the imperial/colonial history in which these four domains are the sites of struggle for control, domination, and liberation. One of the basic components of the civil society, in the liberal model (modern and Euro-American), which feeds the state and the market, is “education.” Education, from a decolonial perspective, is located in the domain of “knowledge and subjectivity” and can be divided between “instruction” (skill, knowledge for practical purposes, as is clear today in the “universities” created in the corporate world) and “nurturing” (knowledge and understanding for personal and collective well-being).

In the liberal model, education and instruction communicate with “the state” and “the market” and are geared toward the instruction of experts, on the one hand, and the education of citizens (in which experts are included), on the other. Consumption is part of the educational process at the moment in which education itself becomes a commodity and sustains the corporate university (see Chapter 7). So we can imagine double arrows connecting the citizens in the civil society with the state and the market. However, the arrows connecting “the state” and “the market” confirm the domain of “the
untouchable;” to which members of the civil society have little access. The media plays precisely, the role of a “mediator”; in fact, more than a mediator, it is an agent of economic and authority control by the market and the state. In the colonial matrix of power, the liberal model is contested by the emergence of national and global political societies (often referred to as “social movements”). The coming into being of indymedia, filling the gaps and uncovering the silences of official TV channels and newspapers, becomes part of the political society. The role of the decolonial intellectual, in the academia and in the media, is then defined by his or her task in the process of decolonizing knowledge and being. Although the entire sphere of the political society could not be described as decolonial (e.g., the sphere of the political society that makes claims to improve living conditions without questioning the colonial matrix of power is not), we can define a growing sector of the political society as decolonial—the decolonial political society. “Learning to unlearn” describes the future of decolonial education and the problems it has to face. “Education” is not one and universal. It is always entangled with projects of regulation, assimilation, transformation, conservation. Learning to unlearn the imperial education is the starting point of decolonial education (Candau 2009).

Instruction and education, which went hand in hand in both the liberal model and the socialist version of modernity, have as their goal the training of the skillful professionals and the nurturing of either liberal or socialist subjects. In the corporate university, the role of education is the formation of “experts.” “Scientific communism” in the Soviet Union was no less compulsive than the presumable liberties in Western liberal societies. After the fall of the Soviet Union, neo-liberalism strengthened its philosophy of education by making the central role of education that of an “expert.” In so doing, neo-liberalism merged in the figure of the “expert,” both in instruction and in nurturing. Decolonial thinking, instead, follows the philosophical principle set by the planners of Amawtay Wasi described previously, where decolonization of knowledge and being, from an Amerindian perspective, does not mean inclusion in the existing social system, governed by the colonial matrix of power, but instead unlearning what imperial/colonial designs have naturalized as the only way to know and the only way to be. Decolonial thinking and decolonial option are akin and conversant with these transforming processes taking place in the sphere of the “civil society.” And, partly, they are an attempt to contribute to both—the conceptual formations for instruction and the transforming of subjectivities in nurturing. But the decolonial option projects itself as an intervention in the sphere of “political society” as well.

As the examples of Fanon and Amawtay Wasi suggest, there is a corridor
between the profession, the academy, and the decolonial political society. Decolonial thinking is then transdisciplinary (not interdisciplinary), in the sense of going beyond the existing disciplines, of rejecting the “disciplinary decadence” and aiming at undisciplining knowledge. Thinking decolonially in the academy means to assume the same or similar problems articulated in and by decolonial political society. This is a change of terrain, a shift in the geography of reason: Instead of an object of study determined by disciplinary and academic demands, we face problems identified by les damnés acting in the decolonial political society. Living experiences (which I. Kant identified as preconditions of abstract knowledge) cannot be universalized. The type of living experience that Kant underwent is not the same as those experienced by Fanon. That is why geo- and body politics of knowledge is of the essence in decolonial thinking. And this knowledge is generated in the process of transformation enacted in decolonial political society. Hence, decolonial thinking in the academy has a double role:

a. Its contribution to decolonize knowledge and being.
b. Its joining the processes initiated in and by the actors of the political society.

Decolonial projects in the mid-twentieth century were at first built into the existing system of two modernities. What we encounter in postcolonial countries, after the second wave of decolonization, is mostly neocolonialism. The collapse of the Soviet system, even if incomplete (as Russia retains several of its colonies and clings to the symbolic tokens of its former imperial grandeur), was the next act in this global show of the imposing of the new form of coloniality onto the world. In today’s conditions of the tectonic change from one power system, linked to the U.S. as its center, to a new polycentric one, it is crucial that the colonized or better, the damnés, the nodes of border thinking in the world, could establish a dialogue and create networks globally. What is crucial here is not to try to find a better place in the existing global coloniality but to destroy this coloniality and create an other world. It is an unavoidable process because coloniality carries in it the seeds of the decolonial agency.

Decolonial options orient the acts of delinking (at the same time being constituted by them) from the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality. Today’s global coloniality has slipped out of Western imperial hands. As a consequence, it becomes a terrain of disputes between Western and non-Western countries (and unions, such as the EU and UNASUR), disputes already at work between the G8 and the G5 (China, India, Brazil, Mexico,
and South Africa). The emerging decolonial political society, therefore, faces a situation that goes beyond each nation-state. In this regard, La Via Campesina and Indigenous projects across the Americas, associated with New Zealand and Australian aboriginals, as well as the World Social Forum, are creating conditions for delinking from the colonial matrix of power, at the moment when the colonial matrix of power is “uniting in conflict” the G8, G5, and BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China). If, then, these countries and unions are operating within the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality, the decolonial political society is working toward the mutation of the colonial matrix of power into different forms of communal (not communist) social organization, in which the role of the economy will not be that of accumulation and the economy will not be the site of competitiveness and exploitation but the site in which human beings work to live rather than live to work for others who accumulate.

The control of the economic sphere in the colonial matrix of power (referred to as “capitalism” in liberal and Marxist terminology), is now disputed by several countries (U.S., China, Japan, the formation of oil-based Middle East countries, etc.). As the control of the economy (and therefore the control of labor and natural resources) is disputed by several countries, the spheres of the control of authority (political and military) become contested and off-centered as well. Instead of liberalism versus socialism, the rivalry over the control of authority in a polycentric capitalism has multiple orientations and leads to the re-inscription in the political arena of the conceptions of society and life that have been pushed aside, disavowed, or marginalized by imperial expansion of Western Christianity and liberalism (South America, India, North and Sub-Saharan Africa) and by Orthodox Christianity and socialism (Central Asia, the Caucasus). The dispute for the control of knowledge is also at work: The geopolitics and body politics of knowledge are the emerging sites contesting the Western imperial hegemony of theo- and ego-politics of knowledge (we come back to these categories).

Networking across the globe, across languages and religions, and across institutions is one of the major tasks of decolonial thinkers and doers working toward global futures no longer controlled by the colonial matrix of power, once in the hands of Western empires but today being disputed by different centers grounded in a capitalist economy. Even though the government of Evo Morales, in Bolivia, introduced decolonial thinking in the sphere of the state and the economy, a series of events around the highway across the Amazon prompted a protest by the Indigenous communities living in the area. Such a heatedly debated march against Evo Morales as the “TIPNIS case” demonstrated the limits of decolonization in the sphere of the
State (Friedman-Rudovsky 2011). For the time being decoloniality remains exclusively a project of the political society. Recently, it authorized the creation of three universities led by indigenous leaders and geared toward an education that brings the needs and interests of indigenous people to the curriculum. These kinds of experience, added to Amawtay Wasi, are the prime examples of thinking decolonially, that is, delinking from the liberal model of education and the growing corporative values invading higher education.

We take the lead from these experiences and link “learning to unlearn” to “thinking decolonially.” Thinking decolonially means to feel and live beyond competition and hatred, which nourish each other. However, moving beyond both means delinking from the hegemonic vision of society grounded in corporate values with the support of state regulations. Competition and hatred prevents caring for each other. The Christian ideal of love (love yourself as you love your neighbor) and national state ideal of love (monolingual and monocultural) work in tandem with competition and its consequence, hatred (Mignolo 2000, Chapter 6). Learning to unlearn is basically pedagogical. And although learning to unlearn could be thought out and practiced in a non-decolonial project, there is already a genealogy of thought in which both are closely connected. It is in this genealogy of thought that we place our argument in the following chapters.10

IV.

The first part of the book opens with two jointly authored chapters. In the first chapter, “The Logic of Coloniality and the Limits of Postcoloniality: Colonial Studies, Postcoloniality, and Decoloniality,” we aim at demarcating decolonial thinking from postcolonial studies and theory. Acknowledging the contributions made by postcolonial studies and theories in bringing the “colonial” into critical debates, we depart from it in two points. We start from the modern/colonial formation, in the sixteenth century, of the colonial matrix of power (Quijano 1992, 2000). The experience of British India and Orientalism, in which postcolonial studies and theories are grounded, is only part of the picture, imbedded in the already existing colonial matrix. Occidentalism, which is the necessary condition for the emergence of Orientalism, is left out in postcolonial studies. And the Russian/Soviet Union history and their respective colonies are also not accounted for.

In the second chapter, “Theorizing from the Borders; Shifting to the Geo- and Body Politics of Knowledge,” we attempt to conceptualize border thinking as a manifestation of today’s epistemic shift from the theo- and
egopolitics of knowledge to the geo- and body politics of knowledge. The basic idea is that the gradual expansion of Western (Euro-American) concepts of knowledge and life has created borders with the so-called non-Western world at all levels of the colonial matrix. “Theorizing from the borders” is, in our view, a way of dwelling, being, and thinking in the borders. While it is not possible to do away with Western conceptual apparatus and its implementation, it is far from obvious that it should be adopted and adapted by the rest of the world. Hence comes the “double consciousness,” as the famous African-American sociologist W. E. B. Du Bois described his experience of being Black and American, a condition under which lives the majority of the world population.

Parts II and III are devoted to exploring these issues in further detail. In other words, our respective histories, languages, memories, sensibilities, academic training, and the like do not correspond to the imperial/colonial legacies of the British Empire and French colonialism in Asia and Africa. Russia and the Soviet Union, and the imperial Iberian histories in South America and the Caribbean (topped at a later date by British and French imperialism without colonies), depart from both European Marxism and postmodernity and the corresponding postcoloniality. In a nutshell, if postmodernity is the internal and imperial overcoming of modernity, postcoloniality is the corresponding version of overcoming modernity/coloniality translated into postmodernity/postcoloniality.

Part II opens with Madina’s chapter entitled “Transcultural Tricksters in between Empires: ‘Suspended’ Indigenous Agency in the Non-European Russian/Soviet (Ex-)Colonies and the Decolonial Option.” It starts with a brief critical assessment of the existing area studies research on Central Asia and the Caucasus, taking into account the coloniality of knowledge, with its persistent Orientalism and progressivism and the geo- and body politics of knowledge as the most important yet often neglected defining factors of delinking from Orientalism and progressivism. The chapter argues that a more promising positioning is to be found in research produced by the local scholars themselves, provided they delink from the rhetoric of modernity with its underlying logic of coloniality. One of the basic elements of this sensibility in the making is the vital link with the specific negotiating subjectivity of a trickster that is to be found in such border locales as the Caucasus and Central Asia—the cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious crossroads. Being multiply colonized in an epistemic as well as economic and political sense, these regions have developed their strategies of survival, resistance to various regimes, and re-existence through border, transcultural, and transmodern models, which can constitute a way out of the contemporary opposition of
the post-Christian West and Islam and find parallels in other instances of border epistemology unfolding in the world.

This chapter briefly traces the complex history of both locales in modernity, trying to understand, under the influence of which factors they turned into, the threatening images of paradigmatic antispaces, fallen out of time, for the West, and how the distorting influence of modernization and modernity endangers the transcultural continuum of Central Asia and the Caucasus. Further on, the chapter focuses on the specific position of Indigenous epistemic and political protest in the Caucasus and Central Asia, contemplating why such movements often remain unheard. It juxtaposes Indigenous movements and epistemologies in the Caucasus and Central Asia with those in South America, striving to understand the internal and global reasons for their failure in Eurasia. This failure is connected with the ways modernity has been manifested in these locales, with the specific influence of the subaltern empires and the imperial difference, with the multiple colonization, and with the brutal experience of the Soviet modernity.

Chapter 3 also touches on the nation-building processes in contemporary Central Asia and the Caucasus and the specific internal neocolonialism as an important agent of indigenous movements’ stagnation, repression, or commodification. A crucial complicating factor here is Islam, which has gradually moved into the center of indigenous movements, contrary to the South American indigenous agency. The complex relation of Islam and indigenous decolonial epistemologies is also touched on, as well as the importance of deconstructing developmentalist logic to make the renaissance of indigenous movements possible in the newly independent Eurasian states. Specific attention is paid to the aesthetic and creative ways of resistance and re-existence in various art forms in Central Asia and the Caucasus today as possible preliminary venues for the future political agency.

Chapter 4, “Non-European Soviet Ex-Colonies and the Coloniality of Gender, or How to Unlearn Western Feminism in Eurasian Borderlands” continues to elaborate on the same problematic and epistemic locale but with yet another additional dimension—that of coloniality of gender. It starts and departs from the concept of the modern colonial gender system introduced by María Lugones and interprets racialization/genderization in the non-European former and present colonies of Russia based on the mutant forms of gender discourses. In the Caucasus and Central Asia a successful Soviet zombification of the political and social imaginary has continued until now and has been accompanied by the influence of neoliberal ideologies of globalization. In the focus of the chapter stand the contemporary gender discourses of the Caucasus and particularly Central Asia that have
been developing within the well-known frame of coloniality of knowledge and being and within the simplified opposition of modernity vs. tradition, which results in the tripartite scheme or vector of gender development presented in the majority of feminist works written in and about the Caucasus and Central Asia. This scheme moves from local traditionalism through the Soviet half-tradition and half-modernity to today’s ideal of Western gender emancipation as an epitome of modernity. Here, we can clearly see how the Eurocentric discourses of Western feminism and its Russian clones dominate in the gender studies of Eurasian borderlands. At the same time, the chapter concentrates on several examples of successful alternative gender discourses coming from China, South America, Africa, and so on. A dialogue with them could be fruitful for the Eurasian gender studies in the future.

Part III is composed of three chapters written by Walter. The first, “Who Speaks for the ‘Human’ in Human Rights? Dispensable and Bare Lives,” takes the questions of subalternity and humanity to the limits. In the last analysis, subalternity, knowledge, and humanity are connected by racial and class hierarchies in the modern world. And, both are hierarchically connected with values placed on knowledge and the question of who can produce legitimate and sustainable knowledge. “Learning to unlearn” is tantamount to thinking decolonially about these commonly held assumptions.

Chapter 6, “Thinking Decolonially: Citizenship, Knowledge, and the Limits of Humanity,” brings the question of subalternity to a more basic level: the concept of Human and Humanity in the modern/colonial world. Human and Humanity are linked to knowledge in very complex and ambiguous ways. In fact, there is a direct connection between racism and legitimate knowledge, and between citizenship and education, which, in their turn, impinge on the concept of Human and Rights. This is the topic of Chapter 7, “Globalization and the Geopolitics of Knowledge: The Role of the Humanities in the Corporate University.” This chapter connects with the previous two through the concepts of Human and Humanity and comes back to the main thesis of the book, i.e., learning to unlearn, as a basic process of delinking from imperial education and building decolonial knowledges. “Learning to unlearn” means here a double movement: decolonizing the Humanities as inherited from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment and delinking and shifting toward the making of decolonial Humanities the overarching horizon of knowledge under which science, technology, and professional schools should be conceived and enacted. Amawtay Wasi [the House of Wisdom], is the model that provides us with the need of learning to unlearn in order to relearn and to conceive of and enact the decolonial humanities.
IT IS TIME to return to our main line of argument: learning to unlearn in order to relearn, the decoloniality of knowledge and of being, and the decolonial option. How are these three concepts related and how do we relate to them?

First of all, the principle of learning to unlearn in order to relearn is, as explained in the Introduction, the starting point of Amawtay Wasi. Therefore, it is a proposition of Indigenous philosophical and decolonial thinking. As neither of us is an Indian in blood or in the way of life, philosophy, or education, what would the consequences be of taking this principle as the first step? We are not trying to appropriate and expropriate the proposition of learning to unlearn and by so doing contribute to reactionary forces that would be happier if such an institution (Amawtay Wasi) did not exist and the traditional imperial/colonial universities (e.g., state universities) or private and corporate ones were the only options. On the contrary, rather than appropriating the breakthrough, advanced by Amawtay Wasi, we submit to it, in the same way as other intellectuals prefer to submit to the Hegelian or Marxist options instead of submitting to Indian epistemology and wisdom. By so doing, we shift our own epistemic geography and contribute to shifting the geography of reasoning and the geopolitics of knowledge. As stated previously, by geopolitics of knowledge, we are spatializing epistemology and delinking from the idea that there is only one house of knowledge, that being
the one built on two classical and six modern Western European imperial languages.

Second, in which way does the argument advanced in this book contribute to learning to unlearn and to the decoloniality of knowledge and being? The first chapter introduced border thinking and border epistemology ingrained and embodied in colonial and imperial differences. It then framed the entire argument that was developed in two types of local histories responding to imperial local histories and Western locally based global designs. Central Asia and the Caucasus, on the one hand, and South America and the Caribbean, on the other, are not objects we studied, “applying” border epistemology, but are precisely the local histories from where border epistemologies emerge, very much like the local histories of Western Christendom transmuted into secular European philosophy and science. The difference is that border epistemologies around the world advance decolonizing projects while Western Christian and secular epistemologies advance national European formations and their imperial expansion. The concept of “humanity” was crucial in that endeavor, since it was a key concept to classify and rank the world according to races, gender, and sexuality. Chapters 3 and 4 describe, through the imperial and colonial differences, what needs to be unlearned and what the horizons are for relearning and, therefore, for decolonial education and agency. Chapters 5 to 7 focus on the concept of humanity within Western imperial histories and its complicity with the idea and practice of citizenship. Thus, our argument closes with a history of the Western modern and colonial university, on the one hand, and the breakthrough, the discontinuity introduced by Amawtay Wasi.

Border epistemologies, very much like Western hegemonic and territorial ones, emerge from political, epistemic, and ethical needs. Territorial epistemology directly and indirectly contributed to found and consolidate the modern/imperial world order, the diversity of local histories that had to deal with the encroachment of Western political, economic, epistemic, and subject (trans)formation, where the need to emancipate, liberate, and decolonize becomes a question of fighting for human dignity that Western imperial ambitions needed to negate to advance the project of one world united by one global design. Border epistemology should be distinguished from anti-Western and anticapitalist doing and thinking. Anti-Western options are forms of resistance, while border epistemologies, in and from different local histories confronting imperial Western designs, not only oppose but mainly think forward, imagining and building a pluriversal and nonimperial world order(s). Thus, learning to unlearn becomes the starting point of border epistemologies and border epistemologies are the origination for delink-
ing from what hegemonic education tells us (all of us) to learn and for what, instead of claiming for recognition and inclusion.

We have been working on the final version of this book during the financial and economic crisis that shook the world. We are not economists. But the crisis is not just an economic and financial problem to be solved by economists, bankers, and presidents of the G8 or the G20, or the G8 and the “emerging countries.” It is a civilizational crisis that affects all levels of life, and crisis is also a good time for initiating the rethinking and delinking from the neoliberal model that has demonstrated its complete failure. As the economy has become increasingly the guiding horizon of Western civilization, subjectivities were formed and transformed according to economic and financial values based on the belief that development (that is, increasing production) is the road to freedom because it offers more options to people, but these options are of the same kind and in the same sphere of belief and values: Happiness has been tied to consumption and accumulation. Development is supposed to put more money in the pockets of people, from the multimillion-dollar salary of the CEO to the working class and the middle class—the entire spectrum of society dancing in the happiness of an infinite growth.

Instead we have been arguing for decolonial options. While development argues for increasing economic options, decoloniality argues that development is the latest rhetoric of modernity and the new modulation of coloniality. The question then is not how to make development work for all, to defend globalization or save capitalism. The argument of the book focuses on particular cases in which the civilization model has been analyzed from the margin of developed countries before the crisis, to be sure but in retrospect, in instances that were already signs of a nonsustainable world order structured, over the past five hundred years, on the making and remaking of imperial and colonial differences. If the management and control of economy within the colonial matrix of power established hierarchies on the bases of material wealth manifested in buildings, banks, corporations, institutions, monuments, museums, universities, and above all, national reserves, the discourses naturalizing such a world order and forming subjectivities permeated all other spheres of the colonial matrix: management and control of knowledge, subjectivities (citizens and consumers), and gender/sexuality. The financial crisis that started in 2008, and in 2011 affected the core of the system (The European Union and the U.S.), is another indication that the West (meaning the core of the EU and the U.S.) can no longer control the colonial matrix of power. The international dispute of our time is, indeed, for liberation, be it at the level of the States (cf. the BRIC countries) who are disputing who controls the matrix; or be it at the level of the political soci-
ety (e.g., decolonial social movements and projects, like The Zapatistas and La Vía Campesina), which is aiming to delink from the colonial matrix of power.

What options are available to imagining a world beyond the colonial matrix of power? The world is linked today by a common conception of what the economy is and should be, let us call it “capitalism.” The struggle takes place at the interstate level and centers on the control of authority. Iran and Venezuela base their strength on oil and dispute the control of authority in the name of Islam and Socialism of the twenty-first century, respectively. Bolivia joins forces but with a different claim: indigenous concepts of life, and therefore of politics and economy to move toward nonindividualistic, non-self-serving model, not governed by success through competition and killing, which is ingrained in Western conceptions under the name of democracy. China and India, two countries that account for half the population of the world, have been moving toward political disobedience in relation to Washington, the European Union in the Doha Round, and joining other emerging countries (Brazil, Australia, Mexico, South Africa) in rejection of the G8 plan for emission control. However, beyond the interstate system and the transstate network of the corporations, the novelty in the past thirty or so years is the growing forces of the global political society (i.e., the social movements). While the civil society has remained dependent and obedient to the dictates of the states, the corporations, and the supporting international institutions (UN, IMF, World Bank), the political society began to delink, to disobey the uniform conception of life based on individual success, accumulation, gains, growth of the GNP (Gross National Product), securing consumers to buy commodities with the single function to increase gains for the makers of these commodities, who, to do so, need to exploit labor, destroy the natural balance of Pachamama/Gaia as a living organism, and invent, in a very creative manner, the financial structures based on subprime mortgages that generated the most dramatic expanded moment for the majority of about 30 percent of the global population who “benefit” from a philosophical conception of life based on overproduction and overconsumption. For the rest of the world population, about 70 percent, the changes are not significant: They have been living under the level of poverty, increasingly, since 1820, the symbolic date of the Industrial Revolution and the splendid takeoff of Western civilization and industrial production.

All of this is what needs to be unlearned in order to relearn and to imagine a world not driven by the survival of the fittest in a society created by a handful of people, who constructed a world for the fittest and defined fitness according to their own will to power. The fact is that the majority of the
population, who are not interested in the will to power, suffered the consequences of a world in which the will to power was naturalized. The time has come to build a world according to the needs and visions of those who are not driven by the will to power and the survival of the fittest.

The decolonial option proposes and promotes social organizations globally interconnected but not globally dominant or hegemonic, based on cooperation rather than competition, and on a horizon in which institutions are at the service of life rather than life at the service of institutions. Today, for example, the restructuring of the state and “saving” the capitalist economy are the two main concerns, at the expense of life in general, not only of human beings but of life of which human beings share in minimal proportion because life is much and very much larger than just human life.

It has been reported that, in industrialized countries, the crisis motivated people to go to church and find comfort in religion. Religious movements have been also instrumental in supporting people in stressful situations. However, religious options created by the need of the people do not necessarily match and correspond to the religious options promoted by the theologians (the Pope or theologians of liberation) in their will to help. If the papacy shares some features with liberal and democratic government and institutions concerned with “the end of poverty,” theologians of liberation share some features with NGOs: NGOs present themselves as saviors, but the vision of NGOs seldom coincides with the vision of the people and communities they want to help. NGOs are embedded in the rhetoric of modernity, while the communities they are helping are victims of the logic of coloniality.

Another option is Marxism. As we stated previously, in Russian and Soviet ex-colonies, Marxism has become a difficult and complex option—contrary to the West, where it still has some purchase. Because of lack of information and the continuing zombification by the rhetoric of modernity and its binary division into right and left, these people have not yet perceived the decolonial option as a viable alternative, as it is, for example, for the countries of South America, where colonial Marxism (i.e., Marxism transplanted into the history of countries in which Amerindians and peasants live at the margins of industrialization and the formation of an industrial working class) has been in crisis for at least three decades.

Learning to unlearn, delinking from the naturalized conception of life that has been increasingly dominant in the past five hundred years, is the starting point of decolonial agency and thinking. The decolonial option emerges from that horizon. But, contrary to existing options based on universal assumptions and the drive to collect adepts as members of the insti-
tution (Christianity in its various forms, liberalism in its many variants, Marxism in all its modulations, Islamism in its different manifestations), the decolonial option does not offer a readymade horizon, like the options just mentioned: The decolonial option starts from delinking, learning to unlearn that the objectivity and truth without parentheses in which universal options are grounded, have been exhausted. The decolonial option is not a new universal, a convenient project for the future but, on the contrary, a starting point where the future has to be made in the process of learning to unlearn. This is precisely what the Zapatistas meant in their dictum: a world in which many worlds will coexist.

We are not offering a blueprint of how to learn to unlearn, because learning to unlearn is the constant process of delinking rather than a revolutionary act. The modern concept of revolution is being displaced by the transmodern and decolonial process of delinking and rebuilding (to relearn). We are ourselves in the process of unlearning, conceptualizing new categories of analysis that would not be infected by the rhetoric of modernity, but it is a difficult task and an open field that we invite everyone to join. Our book was one of the first attempts at learning to unlearn.

Since our anchor has been Amawtay Wasi, we do not imply that learning to unlearn is a process limited to the academy and higher education. To start with, Amawtay Wasi, as we explained, is a different type of academy, an other university, which is not competing on the same level as the modern and corporate universities are competing with each other (to get more grants, to have more students, national and international, to promote development, etc). Rather it is moving in a different direction, shifting the history of the university toward the needs of people who do not partake of the idea that rewards and recognition should be based on money and political position. If the bourgeoisie was the ethno-class that emancipated itself from the monarchs (European monarchs) and the Christian European church, we are living at the time in which the global political society is no longer contained in one ethno-class governed predominantly by males, but in a world in which the human dignity of the damné is at stake. The main social actors in the present and pointed toward the future are the many decolonial projects designed and enacted by the global political society, whose members share more than gender or ethnicity—the commonality of the colonial wound that makes them/us less human or less able to take their/our destiny in their/our own hands.

Learning to unlearn is an activity and thinking processes taking place not merely in the sphere of higher learning but in all spheres of life. The Zapatistas have a lot to offer, in a different domain of the social, the same
way as Amawtay Wasi has in the sphere of higher education (Universidad de la Tierra). We made several passing references to the Zapatistas throughout the book. We would like to close by invoking the four domains in which the Zapatistas initiated, in their own movement, the process of learning to unlearn in order to relearn.

The first one, in random order, was initiated by the “urban intellectuals,” such as Rafael Guillen, a group of Mexican activists who went to the Lacandon Jungle in the mid-1980s. In that process, Rafael Guillen became subcomandante Marcos and understood (learning to unlearn) that the Marxist ideals of the urban intellectuals were of little significance to communities who have been in the struggle for five hundred years, much before, and in a different context from, the Industrial Revolution in Europe and the emergence of the ethno-class of proletarians. Learning to unlearn was followed by a long and creative process—for and by the urban intellectuals—of learning to relearn. The teachers or better yet the people of wisdom were Indians from the south of Mexico, of the Maya region and Mayan languages. In other words, the people who have been classified from the initial days of the conquest as humanly deficient and in need of “learning” what Christians had to teach them, became the teachers. ‘Governing by obeying at the same time” is simply a political treatise that is being unfolded in the very deeds of the Zapatistas.

From this political treatise, “Juntas de Buen Gobierno” or “Los Caracoles” emerged (González Casanova 2006). The name of this decolonial organization invokes the initial step taken by Guaman Poma de Ayala, in the Viceroyalty of Peru/Tawantinsuyu in his by now well-known historiographical and political treatise, Nueva Coronica y Buen Gobierno. “Los Caracoles” is just the enactment of the radical and decolonial political treatise in one sentence. Indians/Mexicans now have the option of managing their own life and destiny rather than casting votes for Mexican presidents who will ignore them and prevent them from taking their life into their own hands. That is they are learning to unlearn, delinking, in order to relearn, re-exist.

Correlative and complementary to the political principle and its enactment, is another well-known and powerful Zapatista’s statement: “Because we are all equal, we have the right to be different.” The dictum shifts the naturalized Western modern (Christian and secular) hegemonic idea that, since we are all equal and humans, we should forget the differences. Such principles go badly with the very practice of Christian and liberal deeds, where differences are always repressed, suppressed, disavowed in their support for a homogeneous world that guards the interest of the global bourgeois ethno-class.
Last but not least (and introduced in “La segunda campaña”) is the Zapatistas’ reversal of any missionary will of conversion into existing ideologies (Christianity, liberalism, Marxism, Islamism) and their emphasis on the open orientations of decolonial options. This principle was expressed as “Andar preguntando” rather than “andar predicando” (“walking while asking rather than walking and conversing”). It should be understood as bi- or pluridirectionally. In other words, it is not a privilege of the Zapatistas to ask questions while walking, focusing on what the Zapatistas are interested in and preventing other “walkers” (i.e., the actors of converging but different decolonial projects) to do the same. If the process of asking while walking was unidirectional, it would not be a contribution to learning to unlearn but, rather, an enactment of missionary principles, only giving a false impression of contesting them. Learning to unlearn in order to relearn is a difficult process due to the fact that Western modernity is inscribed in all of us (Westerners or non-Westerners). But it is already an ongoing process enacted by many of us, because while recognizing that modernity is in all of us, we also recognize that coloniality is constitutive of modernity. Western contributions to world history must be celebrated, but the self-appointed role of modern actors and institutions to demand that the rest of the world follow their example has been and will always be totally illegitimate. The emerging global political society is responding to this false demand in a variegated process of delinking, learning to unlearn, and engaging in relearning.
The Political Trajectory

The political process that eventually created UIAW (Universidad Intercultural Amawtay Wasi) goes back to the 70s when “los pueblos originarios” in the Américas, and in the world, began a new stage in their long-lasting struggles (500 years in the Américas, 300 years in New Zealand, Australia, Africa, and Asia) to survive under the increasing pressure of Western imperial Powers (Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, France, England, the U.S.). Amawtay Wasi emerged from specific local histories of the Andean regions that were conquered first by the Spaniards and that lately are engaged in political, military, and economic entanglement with the U.S. Above all, it depended on the Euro-centered categories of knowledge, institutions of learning, and social actors that, in Ecuador, provide the local continuity of global designs under the rhetoric of modernity, progress, and development.

1. The diagrams are here reproduced in black and white. In the original version, the colors are very important. Red invokes planet earth, orange—culture and society; yellow suggests energy and strength and sustains the moral principles of Andean runa (human being in the West); white points toward time becoming, the permanent transformation of the world (physical constitution) and society (politics, ethics, economy). Green appeals to the economy and the nurturing of life, the territory that includes the soil, the sky, and the air. The color blue calls for the cosmic space, and violet evokes the political and ideological spheres. Interested readers should consult the Amawtay Wasi web page.
In this most recent cycle of struggles, land claims acquired priorities in the 70s, followed by claims of linguistic and cultural rights. However, toward the end of the 70s, Indigenous intellectuals and political leaders understood that without claiming epistemic rights, the previous claims were subject to arguments based on epistemic principles of Western epistemologies. They understood that it was not possible to go very far thinking with the tools of the master, so to speak.

Thus Amawatay Wasi was born not from the idea that Indigenous people also shall have a university following the model of European institutions adopted and adapted by the Creole elite in Ecuador. On the contrary, it was born from the idea that they needed to have their own educational institutions, just as their ancestors had. For why would Indigenous societies have an education based on the education of the ancestors of Creole and Mestizos of European Origin? Only a Western prejudice that Greek and Roman ancestors are the universal model could deny the Indigenous the right to organize education responding to their needs and not to the needs of Creole and Mestizos, as it is the case today in the Andes, in all South America, in New Zealand and Australia, and in the U.S. and Canada. However, the creation of educational institutions was disrupted by the direct invasion of Spanish conquerors and, during the republic period, by French, German, British, and U.S. ideas mediated by the Creole elite that created the republic, the nation-state, and the university, emulating the Renaissance and the Kantian-Humboldtian model.

Amawtay Wasi emerged at the confluence and entanglement of political and cosmological ways of thinking and doing, of being in the world in the Andes and in Europe. Politically, the Andes (and the ancient Tawantinsuyu, which is somewhat analogous to ancient Greece), have been constantly disrupted in its social and economic organization by the social and economic organization of the Spaniards directly, and indirectly, with the emerging imperial states since the eighteenth century. All of them replaced Incas by incorporating Spanish institutions, concepts, and socio-economic organizations. However, what was replaced was indeed displaced, and it never died: it is alive and well in the Andes. Amawtay Wasi is a consequence of that long-lasting survival of the displaced, and that means that Amawtay Wasi is not a return to the past. Such return is impossible, and Indigenous peoples know that better than non-Indigenous peoples accusing the Indians of wanting to live in the past. That is not the point for most of Indigenous visions of the future, a future of which they will take control rather than waiting for a future made for them by new colonial programs (like development). In such case, Indigenous cosmologies must be articulated with Western cos-
mologies (the mixture of ideas coming from Greece and Rome, through the Renaissance and the Enlightenment), and Western cosmologies had to be subsumed within Indigenous ones. And that is precisely what Amawtay Wasi intends to do: to appropriate and subsume whatever can be appropriated and subsumed into their needs, vision, philosophy, and way of life, from the Western archive and contribution to human civilization. Subsuming does not mean replacing, and therefore inverting, what the Spaniards directly did and then what the French, British, and U.S. indirectly did. It means that the present articulation of Indigenous cosmologies in the future will coexist with the Euro–U.S. cosmology in their diversity. It means that now there are two types of options, whereas for 500 years only one was presented as diverse—the diversity of sameness. The mirage of diversity in the struggles remains the same: the struggles of secular against sacred forces, and the struggles between the left and the right within secular political parties. But all such belief was within Western cosmology adopted and adapted by Creoles and Mestizo elites.

Epistemically and philosophically, the process was similar and parallel to political processes. Amawtay Wasi is neither an adaptation of Western university structure nor a return to the education of the Incanate. It simply requires common sense to understand that for better or worse we are living in a world built and dominated by Western institutions, actors, and categories of thought. However, domination (and even hegemony) is not equivalent to the totalization of the totality. That is, domination and hegemony give only the impression that there is no way out. Amawtay Wasi is showing us that there are ways out by delinking from the entanglement and building an-other option. By building an-other option, we learn that the dominant or hegemonic is only an option that convinced us that it was not an option but the one and only truth. The academic structure of Amawtay Wasi was modeled on the idea of “centers or nodes of knowledge/wisdom” that comes from the ancestry of Andean civilizations: the center or node of political knowledge/wisdom, Atiy.

In the presentation of Amawtay Wasi, in the publication Boletín ICCIRimai (Publicacion del Instituto Cientifico de Culturas Indigenas), it is specified that:

The university was established to be a space of both reflection and action, and grew out of a project of the nationalities and peoples of Ecuador and of all Abya Yala (the Americas). Our university works towards the decolonization of knowledge and is committed to reconstructing the concept and meaning of intercultural knowledge. The UIAW is an intercultural project.
whose purpose is to serve as a foundation stone in construction of a plurinational state and an intercultural society. (http://www.amawtaywasi.edu.ec/web/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=23&Itemid=34&lang=en).

What was and is the Americas in the frame of Western knowledge was and is Abya Yala in the frame of Indigenous knowledge. They coexist. The need to decolonize knowledge, mentioned above, and the need to create intercultural knowledge, arise from the awareness that the mirage of epistemic universality since the European Renaissance was indeed imperial knowledge, a type of knowledge and subjectivity (way of being) that is becoming unsustainable by the minute as we have been witnessing in the years 2007–2011.

Amawtay Wasi was born in the frame of the history of Indigenous struggles for liberation since the sixteenth century. Currently, Amawtay Wasi is anchored in and supported by (jointly and separately) the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), the Scientific Institute of Indigenous Cultures (ICCI), and Amawta Runakunapak Yachay (ARY). The decision to create a House of Wisdom, higher education based on Indigenous cosmology instead of Western cosmology, emerged from the awareness that unless they controlled their own knowledge, Indigenous peoples would fail in claiming Indigenous rights. It became clear that the axis upon which Indigenous peoples work to liberate themselves from the chain of the Creole and Mestizo State is their own education, not a claim that they have the right to be educated by the State that oppresses them. The recovery of land and territories, the reconstitution of Indigenous nationalities and memories, are unthinkable without a structure of knowledge based on Indigenous epistemology that supports the advocacy to obtain Western knowledge. Anchored in the colonial State and University, Western knowledge prevents Indigenous peoples from reconstituting a fractured civilization, but the knowledge at the service of imperial/colonial expansion is reproduced through internal colonialism. Amawtay Wasi is showing us that it is necessary and possible to delink, epistemically, politically, and subjectively. And it is showing us how this can be done, not as a universal model, but as one of the roads to pluriversal futures.

The antecedents in the struggle to consolidate autonomous structure of education can be traced back to the 30s and 40s in Ecuador and Bolivia, but, more specifically, 12 November 1996 remains a key moment. That very day, the first meeting toward the organization of Amawtay Wasi took place at the office of Dr. Luis Macas, at that point holding the office of National Deputy of the Government of Ecuador. The process began. Committees were formed,
and a working project was structured during the subsequent months. Three workshops were held with the participation of Indigenous organizations, Indigenous and non-Indigenous ONGs, intellectuals, professionals, and officers of the State. By 1998, the first projects of Amawtay Wasi were laid out in six volumes, and it was agreed that the managers of such projects will be the CONAIE and the ICCI. The project was then presented to the National Parliament that very year. And the official process began.

**Ethics of Education, Epistemic Structure, and Political Orientation**

We will make several disclaimers before entering the epistemic foundation and the system of ideas that animates and structures Amawtay Wasi.

It is called “University.” As such, it is connected to the tradition of European universities at the same time delinking from them. Its foundation is neither Christianity (medieval and renaissance university), nor the Kantian-Humboldtian university inaugurated during the Enlightenment; even less the corporate university that, in the West, subsumes the Christian and the Kantian-Humboldtian legacies, a story we summarized in Chapter 7. Amawtay Wasi is a case of border thinking par excellence: revamping Indigenous cosmologies and ways of life by subsuming European contributions into their own models. Border thinking means that precisely—that the restitution of disavowed and broken knowledge had to be articulated in the idiom of the invaders (Spanish, French, Portuguese, English, Italian, German, as the case may be in the past 500 years), but no longer in their language, their epistemology, and their institution, even if the name is appropriated. Decoloniality needs border thinking. Both are necessary conditions for delinking from the mirage of imperial thinking and being. Amawatay Wasi is indeed a radical delinking from the history of the Renaissance/Kantian-Humboldtian/Corporate University of the Western world. That delinking is expressed in one of the processes through which students had to go: learning to unlearn in order to relearn.

What is the genealogy of Amawtay Wasi, if it is not Greco-Roman or coming from the Renaissance and the Enlightenment? This genealogy stems from the Southern Cross. As we explained in the introduction and chapter 7, there is a correlation between the Southern Cross, Tawantinsuyu, and the conceptual structure of Amawtay Wasi. Like Tawantinsuyu, Amawtay Wasi added a center to the four parts composing the structure. In Tawantinsuyu it was Cuzco, the belly of the world. For Amawtay Wasi it is Kawsay (wisdom,
life, plenitude, estar siendo). The very foundation of the Amawtay Wasi conceptual structure is a combination of the Chacana and the four elements of life: water, fire, air, land. At the center is life. But life is not an entity: it comes out of the relations between the four elements which, in their turn, find their distinctiveness not by their essence but by their mutual interrelations. For this reason, Indigenous ontology is relational, but it radically differs from the Western claim for relational ontology. Relational ontology is a Western response to Western essential ontology, the ontology of Being (Heidegger) that encountered its critique in Levinas (the ontology of relations, the face to face, the dialogue). Indigenous relational ontology comes from their own ancestral epistemology parallel but unrelated until the arrival of Spanish missionaries, who brought with them the ancestral Greek epistemology based on the essence of objects, ideas, and denotation; not of relation but of denotation.

The Amawtay Wasi conceptual structure consists in layers of the same basic structure shown in figure 1. What changes in each case are the four components and the characteristics that the center acquires in relation to those specific components. Thus one can imagine that “on top” of the “four elements of life” the basic categorial structure of Amatay Wasi consists in the four nodes of learning.

The overall structure thus consists in these four nodes of institutes (see figure 2):

Yachay: wisdom, knowledge, epistemic training
Munay: love, passion, intuition
Ruray: doing, experiencing, and building
Ushuay: potency, energy, power

The four nodes organize ancestral knowledge of Indian, not Western, cosmology. Greeks and Romans have nothing to add here, or, in any case, not as a model or influence but as inconvenience: Amawtay Wasi has no choice but to define itself, and redefine indigenous ancestral knowledge, in relation to the Western ancestral knowledge. The reverse is not true: Europe does not have to respond to Indigenous knowledge to re-invent itself. Or, if it does, it is to dismiss any epistemology that is alien to Western epistemology. Thus, modeled on the Southern Cross, we have the node of political knowledge, or Ushay; the node of spiritual knowledge, or Munay; the node of practical knowledge, or Ruray; and the node of technical/technological knowledge, or Yachay. At the center of the four nodes, or the Center of the centers, is Kawsay—wisdom, life, humanity, and culture.
FIGURE 1

Los cuatro elementos de la vida

Aire

Agua

Vida

Fuego

Tierra

FIGURE 2

Amawtay Wasi

YACHAY
Saber / Conocer / Manejar epistemología

USHAY
Potencia / Energía
Poder

MUNAY
Amor / Pasión
Intuición

RURAY
Hacer / Vivenciar / Construir
Now, crucial to academic and scholarly organization is the principle of vincularidad. This principle is vital for understanding the Indigenous relational epistemology. How to translate this term? Sometimes it appears as “relational,” but that translation is confusing, for “relational ontology” is already a concept that moves away from both ontology and dialogism and focuses on relational ontology as the foundation of complex structures. But that definition is still within Western debates. “Vincularidad” shall then be translated as co-relationality—connections between the four nodes and, above all, connections with the center upon which each and all of the nodes depend. The expression “vincularidad como ser,” which appears in figure 3, is indeed a difficult expression to translate. It means that being is constituted by and in vincularidad. The concept of “being” is maintained and is at the same time radically transformed when transplanted from Western to Indigenous ways of thinking and of “being.” Thus, as the figure makes clear, “vincularidad como ser” (at the center) emerges from the correlations between “complementarity,” “reciprocity,” “correspondence,” and “proportionality.” A phenomenology of Being, as found in Continental philosophy, is unthinkable in any Indigenous languages and structures of thought. Seen in this light, the diagram is still abstract. But when we project “vincularidad” on the four nodes and the respective center, it acquires all its epistemic potential. Thus each node is interrelated with the agro-ecological, and vitally and organizationally with the four elements of Pachamama—air, fire, land, and water—and, furthermore, with the four basic symbolic colors of Tawantinsuyu—red, yellow, green, and blue. The four basic colors correspond to the four “suyus” of Tawantinsuyu. Qollasuyu, on the West and the Pacific, is blue (water); Antisuyu, in the Northeast, the jungle, is green; Chinchaysuyo, in the North, the desert region with strong sunlight, is yellow; and Collasuyu, in the Southeast, the region of argillaceous earth or land, is red.

When it comes to the four nodes of knowledge, the interconnections create pairing on each side of the nodes. And so we have in the node of Yachay/Widsom/Knowledge the challenge of Interculturality that interconnects Yachay with Ushay. On the other hand, we have the challenge of the Cosmocogno that interrelates Yachay with Munay. At its turn, Munay interrelated with Ruray take us to the ecological challenge: to make the habitat livable. In correspondence, Ruray and Ushay present the challenge of technoscience. Now, Ushay (and any of the four nodes) is interrelated with the nodes next to it; for example, Ushay interrelated with Yushay presents the challenge of interculturality, whereas when interrelated with Ruray, it takes us to the challenge of technoscience. Thus we enter a house of knowledge where neither the sense of being in one single domain nor the sense of Western holism
obtains. In this house, the wholes and the parts belong to one specific epistemology. We enter a house of wisdom whose components come from a non-Western cosmovision, knowledge, wisdom, and way of life, but always in forced relation with it (which is another dimension of Indigenous relational epistemology that was not in place or needed before the Spanish invasion and, in other part of the world, before the French, British or U.S. invasion and intervention. That both systems have been entangled for 500 years, and that one dominates over the other, does not mean that Indigenous cosmologies should continue to surrender to something that is not their own. Why would Indigenous or any other non-Western peoples have to live as others want them to live? To understand the ethical dimension of this observation, it is suffice to remember many situations in which a Western person would say “I do not want to live as the communists want me to live!” Well, the reverse is also true. There is no reason to pretend that it is the true and the preferable. Furthermore, the curricular structures and the five-year program
make sure that students also understand the relations between Ruray and Yashay (complementarity between knowing and doing), Ushay and Munay (correspondence between power and love), Proportionality between Interculturality, and Reciprocity between Cosmovision and Technology.

Let us come back to Amawtay Wasi. Each node in itself has its own goal, beyond the interrelation that each node has with the other nodes (e.g., Yushay–Ushay and Yushay–Munay). Thus the main goal of Yushay–Munay (Wisdom, Knowledge, Cosmovision), in complementarity, is to strengthen the identity (linguistic, cultural, spiritual, memory) of Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas. Training is offered in Cultural Knowledge, History, Psycho-pedagogy, Health, and Intercultural Medicine. The training personnel of this center is composed of Uwishining, Yachaks, Shamans, Midwives, and Cultural Trainers.

Ruray–Munay (to do, to experience, and to build) is the economic node. The goal of this node is the organization of the economic structure of indigenous communities and the formation of micro-organizations run by the families and the communities. Students are trained in agro-ecology, sustainable tourism, economic principles, and economic administration. This node is governed by a Council of Amawtas and formed by personnel from the communities in charge of the administration and organization of communal economy.

Ushay–Yushay (Energy, Potency, Power, Interculturality) is in charge of education dedicated to the political strengthening of Nacionalidad y Pueblos Indígenas in their respective and relevant organizations. The goals are the advancement of plurinational societies; the conformation of cultural autonomies; the consolidation of territorialities; counseling to local governments; and the conceptualization and unfolding of Indigenous Law and Indigenous Legal Administration.

Ruray–Ushay (experiencing, doing, potency, energy) is oriented toward the expansion of technological learning in the communities. It is related to the organization of the territories and the construction and building of infrastructures, with training in architecture and engineering. It is governed by a Council of Amawtas formed by Indigenous builders, textile makers, goldsmiths, and communication–technology experts.

**IN SUMMARY**, Amawtay Wasi focuses on the following basic needs for decolonization of knowledge and generation of decolonial knowledge. The center of the entire project is life and “learning to be,” a term that refers to the long experience in which Indigenous peoples have been treated as inferior and
of inferior knowledge. Amawtay Wasi has begun a long process to redress what was unjustly disregarded and how the people were mistreated. Thus decolonization of knowledge and of being goes through wisdom/knowledge (science); knowing to do (technology); knowing to be/ser (individual and the community); knowing to be/estar (service, society, community); and harmony and balance (with nature) to live in plenitude (buen vivir). All four trajectories centered on Kawsay (plenitude, life, wisdom). Decolonization of knowledge and of being, to which Amawtay Wasi is contributing, consists in delinking from Western epistemology (essential ontology and relational ontology) and rebuilding an Indigenous, relational ontology that puts life above institutions and above the myth that development and growth lead to freedom and happiness.

Figure 4 summarizes the Strategies and the four formative levels. The Strategies consist of Challenges (Desafíos), Competences (Capacidades), and Approaches (Enfoques). The three of them constitute the General Proposal of Amawtay Wasi. The four formative levels are:

- Learning to think by communal doing
- Learning to learn
- Learning to unlearn in order to relearn
- Learning to undertake

Amaway Wasi is today (January of 2012) well and running. It has become an important point of reference contributing to numerous new beginnings: higher education is in the hands of the people who have had until now to submit to the higher education managed by actors and institutions that denied them the right to think on their own. Memories are local and cannot be controlled by global designs. When global designs attempt to control memories that are not the memories of the actors and institutions upon which global designs are imagined and enacted, they become imperial modes of domination; designs to induce or force people to live according to the desires and designs based on the memories that are not theirs. Learning to unlearn in order to relearn is precisely this kind of project: the project of the people who become epistemically and politically disobedient, who realize that knowledge cannot be framed and packaged in the bags of Greece, Rome, France, Germany, England, and the U.S. This is of course a very important genealogy of thought and memories for Euro-American citizens. But not for 80% of the world now close to 7 billion people. Learning to unlearn is of the essence to build democratic, non-imperial, non-violent, non-legally delinquent futures. Amawtay Wasi is a small star in the universe of new beginnings.
La estrategia

Desafíos:
- Lograr Solidaridad
- Construir Cosmosvisión
- Construir un Mundo vivo
- Técnicas para la vida
- Lograr Interculturalidad

Capacidades:
- Centro Yachay Muyay
- Centro Munay Huray
- Centro Runay Ushay
- Centro Usay Yachay
- Centro Kawsay

Enfoques:
- Relacionalidad
- Construir Cosmosvisión
- Antropo -eco-socio-cultural
- Multicultural
- Transdisciplinario
- Pedagogía del aprendizaje

Amawtay Wasi

Propuesta A.W.

El camino complejo está estructurada en base al desarrollo y adquisición de competencias de aprendizaje:

Niveles de formación

Nivel 1
Aprender a pensar haciendo comunitariamente

Nivel 4
Aprender a emprender

Nivel 5
Aprender a Ser

Nivel 2
Aprender a aprender

Nivel 3
Aprender a desaprender y reaprender

FIGURE 4
Introduction

1. We mean here the parallel march of the—better known in the West—colonization of South America and the first Russian colonies in Volga region and Western Siberia. Moscow was declared the Third Rome in the early sixteenth century, inheriting from the Byzantine empire a specific providential theocratic imperial consciousness, with the state viewed as a metaphysical principle of sacred cosmology. The sixteenth century also brought the ascension of Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible) as Tsar of all Russia in 1547 and the succeeding colonization of territories that almost equaled Europe in their size. Hernan Cortés managed to control the Aztec Tlatoanate in 1520, and Francisco Pizarro did the same in the Andes, taking over and dismantling the Incanate. When Philip II replaced his father, Charles I, as King of Castile, he initiated a well-thought-out managerial project to organize the Spanish possessions in Indias Occidentales. In the meantime, Portugal was following suit in managing its Brazilian possessions.

2. For the colonization of time and the invention of the Middle Ages, see Dagenais and Greer (2000). For the transformation of barbarians in space into primitives in time, see Walter D. Mignolo, “Coloniality at Large: Time and the Colonial Difference” in Time in the Making and Possible Futures. (Rio de Janeiro, Unesco—ISSC—Educam, 2000), 237–73.

3. For the complete cycle of learning and a summary of the political process that led to the foundation of Amawtay Wasi and its overall philosophy, see the appendix in this volume. Information on Amawtay Wasi can be found in the Internet. There is a publication by UNESCO, in Quichua, Spanish, and English, (Amawtay Wasi. Sumak Yachaypi, Alli Kawsaypipash Yachakuna: Aprender En La Sabiduría Y El Buen Vivir = Learning Wisdom and the Good Way to Live. UNESCO, Universidad Intercultural Amawtay Wasi, 2004; Catherine Walsh, 2005).

4. The reader not familiar with Amawtay Wasi can find a more detailed description in the appendix of this volume.

5. For the relevance of the concept, in Ecuador and Bolivia, related to the state and the rewriting of the constitution, see Catherine Walsh (2008).

6. Along with the general meaning of shifting the geography of reason from its established European place to other locales, what is important in Lewis Gordon’s idea is the
constructive criticism of the disciplinary decadence with the claims of the disciplines at
their closed, absolute, and deontological nature, as well as the teleological suspension of
the disciplines as the ends in themselves (Gordon 2006: 183). As a result, the thinker who
attempts to shift the geography of reason takes a position objectively close to the philo-
sophy of education and knowledge practiced in Amawtay Wasi, which we share. It is to see
the issues, the crucial problems to pursue, whose solving is more important than the loy-
alty to one’s discipline, method, school, or a system of knowledge. Instead of studying an
object from the position and with the help of the instruments of different disciplines, we
attempt to build a dialogue between different knowledges on what is knowledge as such.
Hence, the object in the understanding of Western philosophy disappears, giving place to
problems discussed from various positions and the question of what kind of knowledge
we need to make the world a more fair and just place for us all.

7. There is one institute of nanotechnology in Monterrey, Mexico, and another one
in Brazil, but they are ancillary of similar institutes in the U.S.

8. Chicana intellectual and activist Gloria Anzaldúa described the borders between
Mexico and the U.S., as “una herida abierta.” We see in this metaphor, an expression of the
global “colonial wound” inflicted by georacial classification of regions and people through
five hundred years of Western theological and egological politics of knowledge: Racism
is a politics of humiliation, of wounding people by making them feel inferior, both as hu-
man beings (ontological colonial difference) and as rational beings (epistemic colonial
difference). Geo- and body politics of knowledge emerge from the colonial wound and

9. See, for example, decolonial arguments in business schools and in the area of
management in South America by Eduardo Ibarra Colado (2007), in Australia by Subhab-
rata Bobby Banerjee (2008); in the area of health, between Morocco and southern Spain
by Isabel Jiménez-Lucena (2008).

10. There is an obvious line connecting Paulo Freyre’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Chapter 1

11. The bibliography on the concept of coloniality is extensive by now, including: a
summary in Anibal Quijano (2000); on coloniality of knowledge, Edgardo Lander (2000);
on coloniality of being, Enrique Dussel (1977); and on being and geopolitics of knowl-
edge, Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008). “Coloniality” contributed to the move from Eu-
rocentered works on the sociology of knowledge toward the geopolitics of knowledge as
decolonization. On this, see Walter Mignolo at www.incommunicado.info/node/view/18.

12. As far as we (Madina and Walter) carried within us the memories of being born
and raised in Moscow (with ties with Uzbekistan and Caucasus) and Argentina (with ties
with Northern Italy), respectively, the postcolonial academic talk in the United States
remained somewhat—and for different reasons—outside the realms of our imperial/
colonial experiences and our sociohistorical formation of subjectivity. Interestingly
enough, we found in Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and Frantz Fanon (1952) (who are nei-
ther Erurasian nor of European descent) a guide for our thoughts and reflection of our
subjectivities.

13. The idea that “globalization,” as understood today, is a process that starts with
the “discovery” of America is shared by European political theorists such as Carl Schmitt
who, in Schmitt 2003 [1952] makes a clear distinction between the “preglobal” and the “global” age. “Globalization” in this view is not a human phenomenon from time immemorial but a historical qualitative turn in appropriation of land, massive exploitation of labor, and international law that is concentrated both in the hands of European and capitalist imperial countries.

14. The concept of body politics of knowledge is radically different from Michel Foucault’s biopolitics. While, in Foucault, biopolitics is conceived in terms of management of power (and is still anchored in the modern—and imperial—conception of knowledge), the body politics of knowledge displaces epistemology from its Eurocentric location to the places (geopolitics) and racialized bodies of the colonies (men and women of color, gays and lesbians of color, indigenous people and Muslims, Arabic and Aymara languages instead of Greek and Latin, etc.). “Body politics of knowledges” refers to epistemic and philosophical creativities in places, bodies, languages, and memories that have been disqualified as thinkers and philosophers, and in this regard, shall not be confused with the imperial body politics of knowledge that—in seventeenth-century political theory in England—conceived the social structure as an analogy of the human body. “Border thinking” refers precisely to the articulation of the displaced appropriating the global expansion of Western categories of thinking and principles of knowledge. Decolonal thinking emerges from all of this, which does not mean that all Blacks and Indians, Muslims and Aymaras, women and men of color endorse it. Assimilation is the alternative to decolonal thinking and decolonal option. See the next chapter “Theorizing from the Borders,” for a more detailed elaboration of this concept.

15. There is already a significant bibliography addressing such issues. For example, “Double Critique: Knowledges and Scholars at Risk in Post-Soviet Societies,” edited by Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova, South Atlantic Quarterly, 105/3, 2006; Globalization and the Decolonial Option, special issue of Cultural Studies (21/2–3, 2007). A recent volume edited by Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, and Carlos A. Jáuregui, Coloniality at Large: Latin America and the Postcolonial Debates, which clearly shows that epistemic universality is no longer viable in a decolonal world. In contrast, Madina Tlostanova has shown the differences between South America on the one hand and Central Asia and the Caucasus on the other (“Imperial Discourse and Post-Utopian Peripheries: Suspended Indigenous Epistemologies in the Soviet Non-European Ex-Colonies” 2006).

16. For more details about these basic and important distinctions, see the special issue of Cultural Studies, Globalization and the Decolonial Option, edited by Walter Mignolo in collaboration with Aruro Escobar, 21/2/3, March 2007.

17. Intellectuals such as Malek Bennabi (Algeria) and Abdelkhebir Khatibi (Morocco) devoted their works to the problems of decolonization in the sphere of knowledge and being (Bennabi 2003a, 2003b and Khatibi 1983). Even if French poststructuralist thinkers developed some of their ideas in France as a consequence of the war in Algeria, their problems were not the same as those of Bennabi or Khatibi, but rather problems emerging from the regional history of Western thought. When Robert Young suggests in White Mythologies (1990) the links between French poststructuralism and decolonizing processes in Algeria and Tunisia, he does so with still another (third) set of problems at hand: the problems set by postcolonial agendas approximately since the mid 1980s. Thus, the geopolitics of knowledge allows us to see three regional projects, each characterized by a set of specific issues and questions. From a decolonial perspective (which is the fourth project in this scenario, emerging from historical process in South America and the Caribbean), none of them can be reduced to another.
18. We write “capital/modernity” instead of “capitalism” because the latter is a term of Marxist discourse while the former belongs to decolonial discourse. We make a distinction between capitalism and the colonial matrix of power. In this particular case, “capital/modernity” links the sphere of control of an economy with the sphere of knowledge and subjectivity. A distinctive feature of capital/modernity is the dispensability of human lives disguised under the discourses of progress, development, and modernization. Capitalism, instead, focuses on the economic aspects and leaves aside the “cultural” dimension that we translate into the control of knowledge and subjectivity in the colonial matrix of power.

19. David Chioni Moore suggested that we locate the post-Soviet world within the postcolonial realm (Moore 2001). He is quite right to point out that postcolonial scholars usually do not include the ex-Socialist block into the sphere of their interests and there are no postcolonial studies in ex-Soviet Union or former Socialist countries. But Moore lumps together eastern and southeastern European countries and the USSR, which have had distinctly different histories and imperial and colonial discourses. It might have been a good idea to explore the hidden reasons of why postcolonial discourses do not exist in the ex–Second World. To do that, it might have been important to get better acquainted with the actual contemporary situation in this quite diverse area. Probably, then, he would not put together, in a purely rhetorical way, Algeria and Ukraine or Hungary and Philippines, which have very different colonial histories. What is lacking in this article, written from the distinctly outsider’s perspective, not at all familiar with internal cultural, linguistic, religious differences, and nuances of this locale, as well as contemporary artistic/cultural/linguistic expressions of postcolonial, postimperial, transcultural sensibilities, is a strong universalizing bent in trying to use the umbrella term “postcolonial,” regardless of possible differences (Moore 2001).

20. What we mean by “second-class” empire can be seen today in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine. President Mikhail Saakashvili denounces Russia’s imperial ambitions, but he himself has no quarrel with joining the Western imperial designs, even if in the capacity of a groveler. A similar case is Ukraine. In the South American and Caribbean countries, the situation is radically different, because from their independence in the nineteenth century, they all wanted to join France and England, and now the United States, which form the history of Christian and liberal capitalist empires of the West.

21. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, “Latin America” did not exist and there was no such a thing as “Latin American” countries. We refer here mainly to the Spanish (and indirectly to the Portuguese) colonies in the New World. The Spanish colonies extended to today’s California and Colorado, including Texas, New Mexico, and to a certain point, Louisiana and Florida. It is common, however, to repeat the mistake of labeling the period between 1500 and 1800 “colonial Latin America.” What we have are “Spanish colonies in the Indias Occidentales,” sometimes also called New World and America.

22. Within the socialist modernity was an internal and external civilizing and modernizing rhetoric as well. The first was intended for the Soviet non-European colonies and was expressed in the reinvention of the old Lenin myth that had typically Eurocentric origins of the heroic civilizing efforts of the great Russian people in backward Central Asia. In the 1960–1980s, it was used to divert attention from the deteriorating living standards by looking for an imagined enemy—the Muslim colonies that the poor Russians presumably had to feed. In the external rendering, the same mythology referred to the Third World countries who were the objects of the continuous Western and Soviet rivalry.
23. For more details available in English, see an interesting though ambivalent discussion on racial politics in the USSR in *Slavic Review*, vol. 61, no 1, spring 2002, and Kalpana Sahni’s book on Russian Orientalism (Sahni 1997).

24. We could think here also of transnational corporations in a transnational unified economy (capital/modernity) in which contending states are moving toward a polycentric capital/modernity (or capitalism in Marxist terminology). Therefore, transnational corporations are not undermining the state but forcing its transformation. The European Union is a case in point; the emerging UNASUR (the projected union of Latin American countries to defend their interests in front of U.S. and the European Union) is another. Therefore, the argument that opposes transnational corporations to national states should be revised in the light of the international and competitive relations between the states (G8, G5). This scenario may not be clear enough if we think in terms of “capitalism,” but it becomes clear if we think in terms of “capital/modernity”—the emerging states are no longer willing to follow the dictates of U.S. or the European Union to modernize but, rather, follow the dictates of their own experiences and needs. It is in this new scenario that a global political society is emerging, calling for decolonial thinking and decolonial political and epistemic options.

25. Brazil most likely will take the leadership in the constitution of UNASUR (Unión Suramericana), which would only resemble the European Union, with its dominating “heart of Europe” (in Hegel’s metaphor), “integrating” the periphery. UNASUR would be like a Central or Eastern European Union in confrontation with England, France, and Germany, as UNASUR is being created basically to avoid the U.S. (as well as other intrusions) into the region.

26. Capital (from the Online Etymology Dictionary) c.1225, from L. capitalis “of the head,” from caput (gen. capitis) “head” (see head). A capital crime (1526) is one that affects the life, or the “head.” The noun for “chief town” is first recorded 1667 (the O.E. word was heafodstol). The financial sense (1630) is from L.L. capitale “stock, property,” neut. of capitalis. Of ships, “first-rate, of the line,” attested from 1652. Capital letters (c.1391) are at the “head” of a sentence or word. Capitalism first recorded 1854; originally “the condition of having capital;” as a political/economic system, 1877. Capitalist is 1791, from Fr. capitaliste, a coinage of the Revolution and a term of reproach.


28. This story told by Nebrija himself in the prologue to his grammar of Castilian languages (printed in 1492) is well known. In connection with this argument, it is analyzed in Walter D. Mignolo, 1995, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization*, Chapter 1.


30. A system of charges in the Spanish colonies, by means of which a group of individuals owed retributions to other groups (the colonizer) in terms of labor or other means.

31. It is perhaps worthwhile to state that we limit the meaning of “imperial differences” to the formation of the modern/colonial world sustained and structured by the colonial matrix of power. In this regard, “imperial differences” do not apply, for example, to the relations between the Ottoman and the Mughal Sultanates, in the same way that “colonial difference” does not apply to their internal organization. By “imperial” and
“colonial difference,” we mean a racial (ontological and epistemic) difference that began to be construed by Christian theology in the sixteenth century, then extended itself, and transformed into secular philosophy. “Imperial difference” implies, for instance, to describe the relations between Western imperial formations and the Ottoman Sultanate (or today between the West and China, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other), but not the other way round.

Chapter 2

32. Any dictionary would have something like this as a definition of epistemology: a branch of philosophy that investigates the origin, nature, methods, and limits of human knowledge. But, who were the philosophers who contributed to that definition; what were the sociohistorical conditions in which their thought unfolded; and what were the needs to which their thought responded? Border thinking and epistemology emerges from bodies and subjects that “human knowledge” cast as to be not human enough to have knowledge. Border thinking is always thinking in conflictive dialogue with imperial epistemology, “the dominant branch of human knowledge.” Border thinking emerges from bodies dwelling in the border between an epistemology that was not theirs, which they cannot avoid, and an epistemology that was theirs, which was disqualified. Border thinking thinks from the awareness of disqualification.

33. For example, John Milbank’s (1993) theological critique of the social sciences reverts the order of the secular and the sacred in epistemology, but the geohistorical location of his thought as well as the unspoken male, white, and Christian identity of his discourse are grounded in Greek and Latin categories of thought and articulated in the English language. On the other hand, when W. E. B. Du Bois asked “how can one be American and Black at the same time?” he established the foundation of a “double consciousness” as an epistemic foundation grounded on the racial colonial difference ([1904] 1995).

34. “Third World nationalism” (e.g., India or Algeria) reproduced in the ex-colonies the model of “Imperial nationalism” (e.g., England or France), and all ended up in the impasse we all know about. “Internal colonialism” was the result, since the first-colonial nation-states, in the modern/colonial world, which emerged in the Americas at the end of the eighteenth and first decades of the nineteenth centuries. Bolivia now is going through an interesting process of border thinking and constitutional decolonization. And, we may see a similar experience in Iraq. “Third World nationalism” furthermore remained within the monotopic and exclusionary imperial logic, just in the hands of the “locals or natives.” Frantz Fanon, instead, opened up the possibility and the need of a double consciousness and border thinking of and from the experience of the damnés de la terre. His thoughts were far removed from national fundamentalisms.

35. For example, Deng Zhenglai (http://cuscps.sfsu.edu/Events/deng_zhenglai.htm) also claims, in Development of Chinese Social Sciences in the Era of Globalization, that Chinese social sciences should keep the open-minded or global orientation as its strategy of development and enhance the dialogue with the West. But at the same time, social scientists should also recognize that China is now a country of global significance and no longer a country secluded from the dominant/Western discourse. Therefore, globalization is a chance for China and Chinese academe to challenge the overtowering Western discourse and promote the Chinese interpretation of Chinese history and experience
and envision Chinese ideals and world ideals. Problematization and exploration of new methods and theory in Chinese social sciences should stem from Chinese history, Chinese modernity, and Chinese transformation. We owe this information to Chunjie Zhang (Duke University). See also the robust arguments advanced by Kishore Mahbubani, 2009.

36. In his ironic travelog, *Five Rivers of Life*, contemporary Russian postmodernist writer Victor Yerofeyev points out: “A Russian in Europe is like a cockroach. He is running, moving his whiskers, nervously smelling. He is scandalous for Europe’s clean surface. Europe can contemplate with interest the exotic insects, it would like some kind of poisonous tarantula or a caterpillar, ladybirds are a touching site for it, but there are no good cockroaches” (Yerofeyev 2000).

37. A Turkish ironist Orhan Pamuk, in *The Black Book*, says: “The customer,—one of the shop-keepers said,—does not want to put on an overcoat that he sees every day in the street on the shoulders of mustached, bow-legged and emaciated compatriots. He wants to put on a jacket that arrived from a distant unknown country, and that is worn by new and beautiful people. He wants to believe that once he puts on this jacket he will transform himself, he will become a different person . . . It is for this reason that they invented revolution in dress, shaved off the beards and even changed the alphabet . . . The customers in fact are buying not clothes, but dreams. They wish to buy a dream to be the same as those who wear the European dress” (Pamuk 2000).

38. The Ottoman Sultanate and Russia had a lot in common. The Ottoman territorial expansion was stopped early in history because, to unite with their ethnic and cultural “relatives” in Central Asia, the Turks already in the sixteenth century had to (and could not) bypass Shiite Persia, which later on resulted in the clash of Russian and Ottoman interests in the Balkans. The multiethnic, multiconfessional, and multilingual Russian Empire, with its extensive principle of conquering the space, started to lose its position in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the presence of capitalist Western empires of modernity and had to satisfy its expansionistic appetites mainly in the East and South (i.e., in the locales that were drastically different in an ethnic-religious sense from the metropolis). Each of these empires was born in the outskirts of its religious-cultural oecumena, but with the passing of time, each proclaimed as its imperial mission to take the central place: In Russia, it was the famous Moscow as the Third Rome doctrine, according to which the ex outskirt of Byzantine empire, which became Christian relatively late, claimed the role of Orthodox Christian center, and in Turkey, it was the Central Asian, and hence relatively remote from Muslim centers and shrines, origin of Turks, who became Muslim only in the tenth century and began to inhabit Anatolia even later but soon turned into the most powerful Muslim empire—even if for a relatively short period of time. The Ottoman Sultanate had to correspond to this new role, turning from the eclectic, in the cultural and religious sense, marginal state into the center of Islamic civilization. Embracing Islam, the Turks became the heirs of the ancient high Islamic culture and here, as well as in Russia, a complex religious configuration of juxtaposing itself to both Islam and Christianity was obviously at work. If, in the Russian Empire, it was a juxtaposition with Islam (an other religion) and a contrast between Orthodox and Western Christianity (i.e., an internal Christian difference), then in the Ottoman Sultanate, the juxtaposition was done not only along the obvious division into Christians and Muslims but also within Islam, which was reflected in the rather negative attitude of the Sunnite Ottoman Sultanate to Shiites. Religious identification of both Russians and Turks at that time was relatively perfunctory, syncretic, and border but was presented certainly as the
only true religion on the basis of which the Ottoman and the Moscow imperial myths were slightly later created. For more details, see Goodwin (1998), Lieven (2000).

39. At the time of writing the first version of this chapter, the FAO Summit on the food global crisis just ended. During the summit, it was reported that Monsanto, DuPont, and Syngenta, the largest companies controlling transgenic seeds and fertilizers, declared huge profits. The UN, IMF, and WB concurred that the crisis was human-made and could be fixed. It is not a paradox: It is ingrained in the rhetoric of modernity, based on progress and salvation of all kinds, while increasing capital accumulation and, in this case, “using” people risking starvation as “bodies to feed,” to increase food production, and hence the profits of the corresponding corporations. Look around and you will see the same seeming “paradox”: a rhetoric that maintains the faith in progress and development as salvation, while increasing the mechanisms of economic and political control, by maintaining a structure of knowledge that justifies development as the only way to freedom and happiness. Any alternative to such structure of knowledge is condemned as antidemocratic. La Via Campesina and Food Sovereignty, the two global organizations in the sphere of political society working toward the decolonizing knowledge that controls and manipulates the global food crisis, were not invited to this summit. It was limited to transnational corporations and international organizations (UN, IMF, World Bank).

Chapter 3

40. The name “Eurasian studies” itself sounds highly ambiguous. In the Russian mind, it immediately evokes Eurasianism as a philosophic-cultural movement of the early twentieth century, going through periodic revivals at the times of nationalist and imperial booms, like today. This is not what is meant by the name “Eurasian studies” in the West. It rather designates just a presumably objective geographic phenomenon—Eurasia. However, geography here hides a geopolitical myth. Eurasia in geography means the whole continent, which comprises Europe and Asia. Geography does not recognize Berlin walls and divisions between Protestantism and Orthodox Christianity or Latin- and Cyrillic-based languages. Therefore the term “Eurasian studies” is meaningless in a geographic sense, because it would mean to study France along with Turkmenia and Spain along with China. What is meant by “Eurasian” here is rather a geopolitical and civilizational myth of not Europe and not Asia, which Russia stands for. Thus, although Russia itself stopped being interesting for Western area studies, its specter is still present in the very name of “Eurasian studies.” However, this euphemism seeks to erase Russia and replace its name (and former power) with a “new” geopolitics of knowledge.

41. Several attempts have been made by Russian scholars working within the Frankfurt school tradition in the last decade to apply postcolonial theory to post-Socialist discourse by turning it upside down and assigning the role of the subaltern to the ex-Russian colonizer in the newly independent states. However, the old geopolitical models are still obvious in these constructs, as they look mainly at those colonies that have always claimed their closeness to Europe (the western Ukraine, the Baltic countries) in contrast with Russia coded as an Asiatic empire. This is a cunning rhetoric, as it attempts to transfer the Russian imperial guilt and responsibility to the ex-colonial others (Penzin 2011).

42. Even the best of the Western experts on Central Asia suffer this Orientalist bent, which is clearly seen in the titles of their articles, in the visual representations of the
people adorning the covers of their books, which stress the sensational and the exotic and abuse the modernity vs. tradition and civilization vs. barbarity dichotomy. See, for example, Sahadeo and Zanca 2007.

43. The mardikors were and are today, in post-Soviet Central Asia, the day laborers with no permanent jobs. After the 1916 Turkistan massive revolts against the Czarist Empire, connected among other things with the Russian attempt to force the local population to public front-line work, a whole subculture of mardikor insurgent songs and poems emerged, many of which remain only in oral form and only recently were collected and presented in the Uzbek Memorial of the victims of repression. The usual tactic was to collect the oral histories, as if for the future publication, then hide them in inaccessible archives and get rid of their reciters (the ozans or shamans), attempting to buy them into Socialism by asking them to write odes to the tractor and kolkhoz, or later, to publish the dastans in distorted forms, where the liberatory heroic impulse was amputated (Paksoy 1995a, Tekuyeva 2006a).

44. This is a question that recently caused a heated discussion among the Western ex-Sovietologists, who started to question the formula of divide and rule and attempted to prove the presumable good intentions of the Soviets in drawing the Turkistan borders by stating that the Bolsheviks were thinking not only about defending the intactness of their new empire but also about activating their nation-building and, later, gradual nation-dissolving theories and creating a new brand of colonialism. This is the opinion of Francine Hirsch (2000) among others. To anyone who has experienced the Soviet power from within, this rationale sounds not only simplistic and easily bought into the Soviet ideological clanking but also highly cynical, as it presupposes that one can somewhat excuse the USSR if one proves that it was building a new and better brand of colonialism! In all such reasoning invariably alienated from history and from the indigenous subjectivity, there is a crucial element missing—that of race.

45. The yard of my Moscow apartment complex, as well as the majority of other Moscow yards, has been cleaned over the last five years by a family of Uzbeks from Namangan. Both the husband and wife have university degrees. He is an engineer and she is a doctor. They brought three children, out of five, to clean Moscow streets as well. The children are segregated at a Moscow school. The family resides in a construction trailer that, as they explained to me, is much better than before, when they stayed in a basement infected by rats. The municipal authorities employ them half legally, with a $100 monthly salary, and no Moscow “registration,” which makes them vulnerable to any policeman in the street. Today, when the economic crisis hit Moscow violently, the Uzbek families are risking quick deportation and subsequent starvation at home.

46. The resistance tactics of the Central Asian peoples were and are similar to those of the Caribbean intellectuals, who also resorted to fiction instead of forbidden historiography or philosophy, to tell the truth and preserve the link with the past, with the ancestral beliefs, with their freedom-fighting legacies. It is resistance in the disguise of fiction that we find, for example, in the works of Alisher Ibadinov and other Central Asian writers of the Soviet time, most of whom perished in Stalin’s purges. Unfortunately, today, after the Central Asian states became independent and it is seemingly the indigenous people who are in power there, the same logic of repression persists. A telling case is the fate of Mamadali Mahmudov, a writer who, having suffered in Soviet times, received a prize for his resistant literary works after the gaining of independence, but then in the 1999 was imprisoned again, this time, apparently by the new government, which promotes its freedom-loving and democratic image (Paksoy 2002).
47. Kalpana Sahni correctly points out a process of gradual popularization of racism and Eurocentrism in the Soviet period, linked with the erasing of the difference between the elite and popular culture. If, in Czarist Russia, Eurocentrism arguably was restricted by the aristocracy and middle class strata, in the Soviet Union, it became a commonplace discourse among the Soviet people (Sahni 1997: 162). Today, we can trace the remnants of the Brezhnev era myth interiorized by Russians and used as a justification for the colonization excesses and neocolonialism. It is a myth first formulated in Lenin’s time and depicting the sacrifices of the “great Russian people” for the development of the backward nations. Soviet economists and ideologists of the 1970s revamped this myth by adding pseudo-scientific grounds to it. In the last decades of the Soviet rule, it was necessary to take attention away from the deteriorating living standards of the soon to collapse empire. The economic stagnation was then presented to the Russian majority as entirely a fault of Central Asia, which presumably the heroic Russian people constantly dragged to their own higher status, risking their own well being and prosperity. This myth continues to live today in both Russia and Central Asia and the Caucasus zombified by the Soviet propaganda and still generates colonial complexes.

48. The situation started to visibly change when I was working on the second revision of this chapter—the indigenous social movements in practically all former and present colonies of Russia/Soviet Union have begun to raise their voices due to various internal and external factors.

49. See a thorough and unbiased report of the event by Shirin Akiner (2005).

50. In the last several years, an armed resistance has been emerging in the territory of historic Circassia. Analysts both in Russia and abroad viewed the Nalchik bloody uprising of October 2005 as Circassia’s entry into a war of liberation. The recent decision making Sochi the place of the 2014 Winter Olympics and the large scale preparations for this event have stirred up the Circassian resentment globally. Circassian organizations point out that, by an irony of history, the 2014 Olympic Games will mark the 150th anniversary of the Circassians’ defeat by Russia in 1864 (Tlisova 2007). One of the possible scenarios is that the Olympics, if they ever happen in Sochi, might be the match that would light a major uprising in the Caucasus, this time centered on the Cherkess people.

51. In Andijan, it was particularly graphic, as the incident started with the insurgents breaking into a local prison and forcibly freeing the prisoners (killing and wounding those who refused to obey) then marching them down the main road toward the National Security Service, where they were made to stand as a human shield as the insurgents fired on the building behind them. The bodies of those killed earlier in prison were thrown in front of the railings. See Akiner (2005) for more details.

52. However, there were links between religion and social movements in Latin America in the past, for instance, in the Peruvian anticolonial movement of Aky Onkoy.

53. This sentiment is expressed in the attempts to apply the postcolonial discourse to an analysis of the Russian situation of the “new subalterns” in the ex-colonies. See, for example, Alexei Penzin’s works on this problem (2011).

54. Thus, in 1851 American popular writer, globetrotter, and publisher Maturin Murray Ballow (Lieutenant Maturin Murray) wrote a sensational exoticist tale The Circassian Slave, or the Sultan’s Favorite. A Tale of Constantinople and the Caucasus (Murray Ballou 2006), in which he presented Circassia as a prototypal South of Europe populated by noble savages: “Circassia, the land of beauty and oppression, whose noble valleys produce such miracles of female loveliness, and whose level plains are the vivid scenes of such terrible struggles; where a brave, unconquerable peasantry have, for a very long period,
defied the combined powers of the whole of Russia, and whose daughters, though the
children of such brave sires, are yet taught and reared from childhood to look forward to
a life of slavery in a Turkish harem as the height of their ambition—Circassia, the land of
bravery, beauty and romance, is one of the least known, but most interesting spots in all
Europe” (Murray Ballou 2006: Chapter 4).

55. Nakshbandi was born near Bukhara, where now stands his shrine and mausoleum
to which thousands of people have been paying homage for six centuries. Nakshbandi
Sufism was one of the main versions of Islam in this locale for a long time, predictably
banned in Soviet years. This order was different from other Sufi orders, as it did not stress
the ascetic life and turning from the real world to the transcendent one but rather spoke
for the equality of both worlds, the real and the mystical, their existence in each other and
through each other. This philosophy is marked with a special tolerance and rejection of
orthodoxy: It regards women as equal to men and allows them into the main parts of the
mosques along with men.

56. There are many parallels between the non-European borderlands of Eurasia and
other locales marked with transcultural impulses. One of them is the idea of a hybrid,
impure ethnicity, mixed blood. It was the Russian imperial scholars that built the conve-
nient—pure in blood—classification of people living in Central Asia. In reality, they never
existed. And, even the imperial ideologues themselves realized that. The first Turkistan
general-governor, von Kaufman, lamented that the local population is mixed and often
impossible to define in ethno-geographic terms (Abashin 2004: 49). Moreover, there was a
specific variant of Central Asian Creoles—the “Sarts”—half Uzbek and half Tadzhic, in
an ethnic sense and in some elements of the way of life resembling the Tadzhic but speak-
ing a Turkic language (new Uzbek) and not Farsi. And, again, as in the Caribbean or in
Latin America, a suprareality made these internal names unimportant for the people
themselves, because they knew that a certain pan-Turkic identity is working for the unity
of all Central Asian tribes. The latter was dangerous for the Russians, and Russia fought
this threat in many ways, from the forceful change of linguistic hierarchy to a population
census based on binary principles.

57. Ilkhom comes from an Arabic word meaning “inspiration which God sends to
the creators.” In 1976, a half-underground club of young artists, musicians, and poets
called Ilkhom founded a theater studio—the first independent theater in the whole Soviet
Union—which was to become the center of Tashkent’s alternative aesthetics. Its first per-
formance was at attempt at a transcultural link, as it combined the traditions of the Uzbek
street theater Maskharaoboz with the latest theatrical experimentation, which gradually
resulted in the creation of specific Ilkhom theatrical principles and school of acting based
on constant improvisation.

58. When I was writing the second version of this chapter, Ilkhom brought to Moscow
theater festival The Golden Mask, the two last Weil shows—the most ambitious and pro-
vocative of his projects. I was lucky to attend one of them, Ecstasy with the Pomegranate,
a sensuous parable of yet another trickster, a Russian by origin, modernist painter Alex-
ander Nikolayev, fascinated with the Orient. He came to Uzbekistan, later became a Sufi
and turned into Usto Mumin, always driven by an angst and attracted by a transsexual
Bacha [boy] dancer. This performance is a virtuoso transcultural, transmedia, and global
phenomenon, not only in its presentation but also in its creation. The androgynous bat-
cha dances were directed by a famous American dancer, writer, director, and founder of
the modern interracial and intercultural dance group Reality, David Rousséve. A talented
young Uzbek artist, Babur Ismailov, did a fascinating work of adapting Nikolayev’s paint-
ings for video and animation presentation during the show. An interesting Korean by origin composer, Artyem Kim, created a delicate, sensuous, and suggestive soundtrack of the *Ecstasy*, based on rhythmical leitmotifs repeated in various media—from traditional musical instruments to voice and even pebbles in a big metal pot. As a result, a border performance emerged, always balancing on the edge of various art forms, languages (Weil uses Anzaldúa's type of bilingual repetition with variation when a phrase is first said in Uzbek then repeated in Russian but with a deviation), rhythms (traditional Uzbek mixing with Caribbean), symbols (e.g., queer semiotics interchanges with Sufi).

59. The abundance of English-speaking universities in Central Asia is particularly symptomatic in relation to the Amawtay Wasi phenomenon, as it demonstrates how easily indigenous cosmology, knowledge, and thinking can be appropriated, neutered, and used as a new multicultural edition of mind colonization. A perfect example of such initiative from above (as opposed to Amawtay Wasi, as the indigenous people project from below) is the regional internationally charted University of Central Asia, cofounded in 2000 by the heads of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzia, and Tajikistan under the supervision of and with the money from “his highness” the Aga Khan, the Imam [spiritual leader] of the Shia Imami Ismaili Muslims since 1957 and a representative of a small expatriate Muslim top elite in the West (UCA 2011). The university is positioned as promoting the Central Asian Mountain Societies and their cultural and economic heritage in the new world order. Yet, the curricula and specializations, the tuition in English, and other telling details demonstrate that the university is going to make Western style experts and new local elites according to the new old formula: ethnic-national-regional in its form, neoliberal-capitalist in its essence.

Chapter 4

60. In 2002, the *Slavic Review* organized a discussion on the meaning of race in the USSR, where opinions differed from Eriz Weitz’s (2002) parallel between Nazi and Soviet racial politics, even if there was no clearly defined idea of race in the Soviet Union, in his view, and Francine Hirsch’s (2002) opposite idea of the clear Soviet definition of race accompanied by an incoherent and often inconsistent racial politics. In good faith, the American scholars tried to analyze Soviet modernity without paying much attention to its darker colonial side or listening to the colonized/racialized/gendered voices. In reality, the Soviet racial othering is not unique for any modernity/coloniality, as it is based on the familiar operation of divesting the (unreformable) enemy of its human nature to justify its annihilation. On top of that, there was always a gap between the official racial ideological discourses and rhetoric in the USSR and the real practices of the Janus-faced empire.

61. The exception in this case was the Orientalistic interpretation of the homosexual problematic, particularly, homosexuality between grown men and young boys, especially in the form of the “bacha cult,” which was ostracized by the Russian empire and later banned by the Soviet authorities and presented as an inherent part of Central Asian law. It was not directly linked to Islam though. Lesbianism figured in these accusations much less frequently, although it also was regarded as a direct and unhealthy result of female seclusion and a harmful medieval or bourgeois survival.

62. For instance, she makes a viable comparison of the Uzbekistan national gender project and those of Turkey, but she fails to mention that both cases represent the realm of
subaltern empires and their colonies and the specific identity generated catching up with modernity.

63. The majority of Kamp’s elaborations can be found in earlier books and articles by Uzbek gender activist M. Tokhtakhodzhayeva, published in Uzbek and in Russian (Tokhtakhodzhayeva 1996, 1999, 2001), with only a brief reference in Kamp’s book. This testifies to the asymmetry of knowledge production and distribution—as anything that Kamp would write will be by definition more reliable in the academic world than Tokhtakhodzhayeva’s or Shakirova’s works, as they are assigned the role of native informants and diligent pupils of Western feminists and gender theorists. Therefore, their knowledge is appropriated by the West and reproduced under a sanctified Western name, or sometimes a name that is non-Western but still sanctified by Western education or tenure at a Western university. Chandra Mohanty and Jacqui Alexander address this issue in their seminal Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures: “Token inclusion of our texts without reconceptualizing the whole white, middle-class, gendered knowledge base effectively absorbs and silences us. This says, in effect, that our theories are plausible and carry explanatory weight only in relation to our specific experiences, but that they have no use value in relation to the rest of the world” (Alexander and Mohanty 1997: xvii).

64. See an interesting article on body and gender by a Tadzhik scholar Gulnora Beknazarova, who nevertheless clings to the outdated pattern of the traditional vs. emancipated women (Beknazarova).

65. Area studies and Western-style ethnography lie in the basis of an interesting book written by the northern Caucasus scholar Madina Tekuyeva, Man and Woman in Adygean Culture: Tradition and Modernity (2006a), where one has to read in between the lines to fight the methodological constructions that do not fit the described material.

66. For example, in the Russian and early Soviet Empires, the colonizers demonstratively ignored possible sexual partners from the colonized women as being below their status, while the colonial men who chose the Russian/Soviet modernity also preferred to marry Russian women, thus elevating their own status by acquiring a more desirable (Whiter) partner. Later, the situation reversed, in the sense that the local elites and the middle class started to regard the Russian women as sexually accessible and socially emancipated but definitely preferred to marry local women from good families who were educated and enlightened enough yet continued to act as the bearers of the sanctified local tradition.

Chapter 5


68. There are some exceptions, like German Catholic Carl Schmitt, for whom Catholic Spanish intellectual tradition takes precedence over Protestantism, which was crucial for his co-national Max Weber who argued for the connection between capitalism and Protestant ethics.

69. On the distinction humanitas/anthropos, see Nishitani Osamu, “Anthropos and Humanitas: Two Western Concepts of ‘Human Beings,’” in Translation, Biopolitics, Co-
Notes to Chapter 6


71. An example of how decolonial humanities are being thought out in Russia, see http://www.jhfc.duke.edu/globalstudies/currentpartnerships.html; http://www.jhfc.duke.edu/globalstudies/Tlostanova_how%20can%20the%20decolonial%20project.pdf,

Chapter 6

72. See Walter D. Mignolo, “Globalization and the Geopolitics of Knowledge: The Role of the Humanities in the Corporate University,” *Nepantla: Views from South* 4.1 (2003): 97–119. (Chapter 7 is a modified version of this article.)


76. A copy of Abraham Ortelius’s map can be found at <http://image.sl.nsw.gov.au/cgi-bin/ebindshow.pl?doc=crux/a127;seq=11>; this map was published for the first time in his atlas titled *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1570).


78. I am following here a less-known narrative of another conceptualization connecting people to “cities”: see León-Portilla, 2003, 15–35.


80. Stories are being told of Chinese people going to the West then returning to China, being welcomed, and initiating companies, small and large, which in part explains the Chinese economic boom in the past twenty years. That is not the case for those from countries like Bolivia, Tanzania, or Tunisia. The various types of frontiers and citizen mobility are strictly related to colonial and imperial differences and to the economic world structures that the colonial and imperial differences contributed to creating and maintaining.
81. Arguments are often advanced that sound like a reaction to the situation in the U.S. rather than an analysis of racism in the modern colonial world. Poverty, in the sense that the term has in the modern colonial and capitalist world and racism are two sides of the same coin: The Industrial Revolution would not have been possible without the Colonial Revolution in the sixteenth century.

82. As with any key category of thought, the decolonial shift needs to be articulated within the conceptual package of Western epistemology (i.e., Greek and Latin translated into modern imperial languages—Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, and English) and to work out the displacement, the fracture, the colonial or imperial differences rearticulated from the perspective of coloniality. As Ali Shariati would say, why shall we study the Q’uran with the instrument and principles of the social sciences and the humanities and not reflect on the social sciences and the humanities from the instruments and epistemic principles we find in the Q’uran? (See Ali Shariati, On the Sociology of Islam [1979], 44–45.) Something similar happens with pacha-sophy, looking at the Greek philosophical legacy from the categories we find in the Aymara language.

Chapter 7

83. On October 20, 2010, a meeting was held in Canada to consider the possibility of a common higher-education framework, similar to the European Plan Bologna (http://chronicle.com/article/A-Common-Higher-Education/125062/). In February 2011, the government of the U.S. appointed a National Commission on the Humanities, http://www.dukenuews.duke.edu/2011/02/rbhumanities.html.

84. See Natalia Vinelli’s interview with Felipe Quispe (2002). Quispe, also known as El Mallku, is a Bolivian indigenous activist and leader. Now in his fifties, he is finishing a PhD in history at the Universidad Mayor de San Andrés.

85. To make a long story short, each time that I write “coloniality,” just think about the other side, the darker and obscure side of “modernity.” And remember that there is not and cannot be modernity without coloniality. The reason why “coloniality” sounds odd and remains invisible is that the histories of modernity have been told from the perspective of modernity itself! As is often said, it is difficult to understand and feel poverty while standing in the marina in Marseilles, looking at the sun set in the Mediterranean. Of course, you can “conceive” of colonialism and “know” that there are poor people around. But, that is a different story.

86. As far as the history of science is concerned, Mexico provides a good example to be contrasted with that of India; see Prakash 2000; see also Gortari 1979. As for the “original” scientific revolution, that is, the metropolitan one that gets exported to and imported into the colonies, see Jardine 1999.


88. For a critical and historical overview of the modern (that is, postindependence) university in Chile, see Thayer 1996. For a historical and critical historical overview, see the classic Readings 1996. Both books generated interesting debates. The one on Thayer’s book was published in Nepantla 1 (Quijano 2000): 229–82. The debate on Readings’s book was published in Smith 1996. See also Sousa Santos [1987] 1998, on “the idea of the university,” and Hinkelammert 2002. For an analysis of the United States and Japan, see Miyoshi 2000.
89. For the peculiarities of the U.S. university during the Cold War, see Chomsky et al. 1997. For the crisis of the university in Latin America during the post–Cold War years, see North American Congress on Latin America 2000.

90. For more information about the structure and goals of the Universidad Intercultural, see Macas 2000, Macas and Lozano 2000, and “Universidad Intercultural” 2002.

91. See also Multinational Monitor 2002. The special issue of the Boletín ICCI-RIMAI from which the quotation is drawn is devoted entirely to the Universidad Intercultural and provides ample information related to the issues I bring up here.

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The Transoceanic Studies series rests on the assumption of a one-world system. This system—simultaneously modern and colonial and now postmodern and postcolonial (global)—profoundly restructuring the world, displaced the Mediterranean *mare nostrum* as a center of power and knowledge, and constructed dis-centered, transoceanic, waterways that reached across the world. The vast imaginary undergirding this system was Eurocentric in nature and intent. Europe was viewed as the sole culture-producing center. But Eurocentrism, theorized as the “coloniality of power” and “of knowledge,” was contested from its inception, generating a rich, enormous, alternate corpus. In disputing Eurocentrism, books in this series will acknowledge above all the contributions coming from other areas of the world, colonial and postcolonial, without which neither the aspirations to universalism put forth by the Enlightenment nor those of globalization promoted by postmodernism will be fulfilled.

*Oriental Shadows: The Presence of the East in Early American Literature*

Jim Egan