

“Other” Knowledges, “Other” Critiques: Reflections on the Politics and Practices of Philosophy and Decoloniality in the “Other” America¹

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In his undergraduate thesis presented to the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in 1980, Rafael Sebastián Guillén, now known as Subcomandante Marcos, described philosophy as a kind of muddle or mess, an embroilment in which theory, ideology, and knowledge are intricately wrapped up with science and politics: “Philosophy. I am doing philosophy, we are doing philosophy. Philosophy of science to be more exact. Theory of theory. Mental masturbation that doesn’t even reach an orgasm. Verbiage that does, however, have its affect in science and in politics” (Guillén 6, my translation). As Guillén went on to note:

[From this philosophy] it is necessary to take some distance. Leave the discourse. Detect its mechanisms of operation, the places in which it emerges, the places where it has effect, the places where it disappears. It is necessary to speak of philosophy as non-philosophy, to turn philosophical discourse against itself... to change the problematics...to make a political change in theory... [recognize] various forms of “doing” philosophy, various “practices” of philosophy ... open up problematics that might produce new theoretical and practical intentions... assume a political position that makes possible an “other” discursive strategy, “other” philosophical work, and opens “other” spaces of theoretical production. (110, my translation)

It is these “other” places, spaces, and positions that form the heart of my intervention here; “other” philosophies and “other” knowledges that challenge not only the definitions and boundaries of philosophy’s continental-analytical divide, but also the geopolitical ordering of knowledge and the questions of who produces knowledge, how and where, and for what purposes. Specifically, my interest is with situating knowledge production in the local modern/colonial histories and local struggles of the “other America”, that is the America of the South—by which I mean the south, or souths, too often obfuscated in “America,” including the “souths” within the north as well as in and within the Caribbean, Central America, and South America, and most particularly Andean America. Such interest finds its base in the particular ways Andean indigenous and Afro-descendant intellectuals and movements understand and use epistemic production as a key component of their political projects,² projects aimed not simply at confronting the vestiges of colonialism (decolonialization), but rather at the radical reconstruction of knowledge, power, being, and life itself.³ Projects aimed at “decoloniality”, understood as the simultaneous and continuous processes of transformation and creation, the construction of radically distinct social imaginaries, conditions, and relations of power, knowledge.

But my interest does not simply rest there. Rather, it intends to also place at the center of discussion and debate my place of enunciation and practice with regard to this “other” thinking. In so doing, it poses philosophical, methodological, and pedagogical questions of what it means to “think and act *with*”, to name epistemic spaces and places and the ancestors they invoke, and to assume an ethics and praxis of intervention and critique that keep as central the intertwined relation of modernity/coloniality and the subjectivities and epistemologies this relation has intentionally subalternized, ignored, and displaced (the *damnés* of which Fanon spoke). It seems to me that these are the questions that are at the heart of what this special issue proposes with regards to decolonial turns and post/trans-continental interventions.

The Geopolitics of Critical Thought in the Frame of Modernity/Coloniality

European thought flows from a meditation
that lasts centuries, millenniums,
and that is called “philosophy.”
- Henri Lefebvre

European thought is Greece and Rome.
It is paganism and Christianity in “flesh and bones.”
European thought is Socrates made Christ
and made Hegel. European thought has put God
and reason in the human mind. A mind with
“its” God and “its” reason is a slave and assassin mind.
European thought is slave and assassin thought.
- Fausto Reinaga (1982)

Let’s go, comrades,
the European game is definitely finished,
it is necessary to find something else.
- Frantz Fanon (1999)

To speak of the geopolitics of knowledge and the geopolitical locations of critical thought is to recognize that in most places in the globe, what continues to predominate are Eurocentric modes of thinking. For Frantz Fanon and Fausto Reinaga, intellectuals whose thought found its base and reason in black struggles in the Caribbean and Africa and indigenous struggles in the Andean America, the hegemony, “universality”, and violence of such thinking must be confronted, and a different thought constructed and positioned from the histories and subjectivities of the people. Fanon, in fact, was a referent for the quechua-aymara Reinaga in the sixties. Reinaga not only cited Fanon –a phenomenon heretofore unknown in indigenous writing of this period- but more importantly endeavored to think with Fanon in a kind of decolonial alliance of sorts. As Reinaga wrote, “the indianist and indigenist writer, the free writer of today and of the new generations, the intellectual concerned with MAN, as an essential and supreme value, do not have other than one path, one exit: the Third World, that speaks in the genial throat of the black Fanon” (*Intelligentsia* 235, my translation).⁴

For Reinaga, as for Fanon, the problem is not with European thought in and of itself but with the intimate entanglement of such thought to the processes and projects of modernity and,

following Quijano, the coloniality of power.⁵ In fact, it is with the initiation of both, modernity and coloniality, in Latin America in 1492 as part and parcel of European expansionism and capital accumulation that the struggle against domination and dependence begins.

Our struggle comes from afar, from the same instance that the Spanish hordes invaded the Confederation of Amer-Indian Peoples. Our struggle is against all European vestiges... Roman Law, the Napoleonic Code, French democracy, Marxism-Leninism, all that maintains us in dependence, in mental colonialism, in blindness without finding the light. (Reinaga *La revolución india*, 15; my translation)

Such legacy is made more complicated when one takes into account the naturalization and intransience of this eurocentricity, of mental colonialism and blindness even amongst the Left and the proponents of so-called “critical” theory.

Max Horkheimer, still recognized today as one of the “fathers” of critical theory (it is interesting that there are no mothers), pointed in 1937 to the alienation in traditional theory (and philosophy) between value and research, subject and object, knowledge and action, arguing for a “critical attitude”, including a change in the subject and function of knowledge, in the relation between being and consciousness, and between the theorist and the oppressed sectors of humanity, all aimed at “the suppression of social injustice,” radical transformation, and the construction of a new society (76-77). Such thinking also has its reflection in the thesis of the pre-Subcomandante Marcos, although his point of reference was not Horkheimer but rather Karl Marx and “the ghost of the inexistent althusserism” both of which, according to Guillén, call for a new manifesto and practice of philosophy: “philosophy as the weapon of revolution.”⁶

For Horkheimer and the much less known and much more irreverent philosopher Guillén, philosophy and critical thought necessarily have to do with issues of social justice and transformation. But what neither could see, at least at the time of their writings, was the existence of “other” conceptual and political frameworks, “other” knowledge production, and “other” subjects marked not simply by distinctions of class but by the lived experience of coloniality and the racialized structure it has engendered.⁷ Thus while Horkheimer could not see outside the realms of eurocentered modernity and the borders of a few European nations, Guillén, in his pre-Subcomandante phase, could not see outside the Marxist lens of capitalism and class exploitation or the post-structural foucaultian postulates of power.⁸ For both, although in different ways, the roots of philosophy and of critical thought are found in modernity and the continental model—a model that, as Chela Sandoval makes clear, is nothing more than a limited ethnophilosophy with its own local history marked by gender, race, class, region, and so on.

This inability to see the historical knot between modernity and coloniality which finds its origins not in the seventeenth century in France, Germany and England, but in the conquest of the Americas and control of the Atlantic in 1492, and in the patterns of power that colonialism and slavery instilled, still remains overlooked in much of critical thought in Europe but also in the Americas. In fact, amongst what might be referred to as the new globalized Left (a Left which after the defeat of socialism in Europe, found renewed hope in spaces such as the World Social Forum), theoretical-ideological referents for the renovation and reconstruction of critical thought remain largely anchored in Euro-American and continental perspectives, in “new” readings of post-structuralism and post-modernism,⁹ and in a continued discarding of or lack of

attention to the critical knowledge production of people of color, particularly intellectuals not from the “academy” but associated with social movements and with a “collective” rather than individual thinking. This was made evident in the 2005 meeting of the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. Here the voices of Afro-descendant and indigenous movements remained absent in the major spaces of debate of the Left (spaces overwhelming represented by white men of Euro-American origin). And while indigenous (but not Afro-descendant) movements were given for the first time their own territorial space, this was physically and programmatically marginalized from the main space of the Forum.

Anthony Bogues and Lewis Gordon (especially in *Existencia Africana*) aptly argue that the lack of attention to the intellectual production of people of color has to do, in large part, with the generalized perception that such thought is simply derivative of “experience,” which in the case of blacks is tied to slavery, colonialism, racism, and other social phenomena, and therefore, devoid of serious, original or global thinking. Obviously such positions do not take into account the fact that these same “experiences” have their origins in the interstices of modernity, frequently serving as counterpoints to its universalist and progressive claims. They also do not consider the fact that, as Bogues also points out, that the “overarching framework for modernity’s emergence was the rise of racial slavery, colonialism, and new forms of empires” (2), thus, it seems, implicating whites as well in this “experience.”

For the Left, “experience” in and of itself is not the problem. In fact, “experience” is important in that it both reveals the lived realities of oppression and of resistance and helps to think social change and revolution. Yet it is not the voices or intellectual production of those who have lived “this” oppression and resistance that has generally been of interest to leftist thinkers, but rather the interpretation and utility of this “experience.” That is to say, it is the intellectual practice of “*speaking for*” the subalternized and oppressed that has generally characterized leftist politics and leftist thought particularly in Latin America; a practice that tends to reproduce and maintain subalternization. The problem, then, and with regard to the discussion here, is with the ways leftist critical thinking continues to disparage, obscure or negate the intellectual production that derives not from modernity itself but from its other face, that is, from coloniality and from the subjects who have lived the colonial wound.

To consider coloniality as constitutive of modernity is to understand modernity as a global rather than European phenomenon, one with distinct localities and temporalities that, as Mignolo has argued in *Local Histories*, do not necessarily adjust to the lineality of the geohistorical western map. It also requires making visible that which has been made invisible and subalternized. That is, the epistemological perspectives that emerge from colonial subjectivities, histories, memories, and experiences; subjectivities, histories, memories, and experiences that do not simply remain anchored in the colonial past, but that are (re)constructed in different ways within the local and global coloniality of the present.¹⁰ These are the “other” knowledges, the “other” philosophies—knowledges and philosophies otherwise—that the continental model continues to refuse and deny.

In the case of the insurgent philosopher Guillén, it is these “other” knowledges and “other” philosophies that began to place into question and eventually crack the Marxist-Leninist (and urban white-mestizo) lens that before the late 80s had served as the sole focus of his and the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional's (EZLN) revolutionary vanguard thinking. As

Marcos notes, all began to shift when the EZLN was confronted with a reality and thinking they could not explain, that of the indigenous communities:

We thought it was the same to talk with the proletariat, with a peasant, with a worker, or with a student... And instead we found ourselves in a new world with regard to which we had no answer . . . It is very difficult when you have a theoretical framework that seems to explain all of society and you get to a place and find out that your frame doesn't explain anything . . . We really suffered a process of reeducation, of remodeling... It was as if all the elements we had—Marxism, Leninism, socialism, urban culture...—became dismantled. They disarmed us and then armed us again, but this time in a much different form. (Le Bot 148-51, my translation)

The persona of Marcos is not without critique, including with regard to what some call his assuming of a contemporary “*indigenismo*” and a form of “speaking for” indigenous people.¹¹ Yet what interests me here is not the positioning of his persona, but rather his coming to terms with the limitations and geopolitics of Marxist-Leninist thought. That is, his awakening to the presence and importance of “other” critical modes of thinking.

The section that follows affords a deeper consideration of these “other” perspectives and their marking and construction of a different critical thought that is not singular but plural in formation, and that finds base and reason not in modernity but in the histories, subjectivities, and knowledges that coloniality has marked. As such, they are constructions that radically challenge and transform the historic processes of epistemic and existential subalternization; constructions that enable critical theorizations *from difference*, opening up new analytic, critical, post/trans-continental, and decolonial possibilities of knowledge and existence.

Decolonialization, Decoloniality and “Other” Thinking

The use of “other” here is not meant to refer to one thought more, but instead and in conversation with the Moroccan-Islamic intellectual Abdelkebir Khatibi, a collective mode of thinking that is produced and thought from difference, towards liberation. It is a thought that demands a radical elucidation, a strategical use, and a play with the political, a thought that opens decolonial possibilities, not just in the social and political spheres but also in terms of existence. In this sense, “other” thought becomes a strategical tool in the struggle to confront non-existence, dominated existence and dehumanization—key referents, it seems, in rethinking critical thought or critical knowledges from other spaces and places—spaces and places that modernity (or intellectuals like Horkheimer) could never have and cannot imagine, but also from other subjects—the *damnés* or “wretched of the earth” of Fanon.¹²

In Latin America, the construction, logic, and use of “other” thought have long existed amongst indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples, although Latin American philosophers, social scientists, and leftist intellectuals have seldom recognized or valued its existence. This thought is what is passed down and reconstructed from generation to generation marking “philosophies of existence” to use Lewis Gordon’s terms (see *Existentialia Africana*), that have a significance and use that is clearly ethical and political in character. In fact, in recent years, it is the socio-political, intellectual, and existential use of this thought and praxis that has permitted indigenous and

Afro-descendant movements to strategically position themselves from their colonial and ancestral differences. These positionings radically challenge both coloniality and the racialized status quo—what the kichwa intellectual Luis Macas has called the structural problem of the “colonial tare.”¹³

The ways that such positionings cross and build thought, and the ways that such thought orients praxis is of increasing interest to the movements themselves and to their intellectuals; it is constitutive of what we might term as new shifts or turns toward a politics, ethics, and epistemology of decoloniality. As the Aymara intellectual Esteban Ticona notes, echoing in a certain sense the thinking of both Frantz Fanon and Fausto Reinaga, the clamor among indigenous (and black) thinkers to speak of “our thought” should not be viewed as vengeful or isolationist (see 5). Rather, it is a necessary and essential part of decolonization, and of an indigenous (or black) ethics-politics grounded in liberation, respect, and life. It is in the rebuilding of this thought and ethics-politics that the movements turn to their intellectuals: to the elders who continue to transmit ancestral knowledge but also to the thinkers whose knowledge has been transmitted in both oral and written form. Such is the case in this latter example and with regard to the Andean region, of such intellectuals as Fausto Reinaga, Manuel Quintín Lame, and Manuel Zapata Olivella, all of whose writings were not directed at the academy but at the processes of liberation of their own peoples.

The recent and renewed use of these writings by the movements is demonstrative of their decolonial projects. For Bolivia's indigenous movement, for instance, Reinaga's more than thirty-two texts have taken on an important significance, particularly after his death, in guiding discussions about “Indianism” and quechua-aymara thought, and in orienting the ethics-politics of the movement.¹⁴ Similarly, Manuel Quintín Lame's manifest *Los pensamientos del indio que se educó dentro de las selvas colombianas* (The thinking of the indian who educated himself within the Colombian jungle), written in 1939 and first published in 1971, continues to serve today as “an indispensable tool for the political education of indigenous communities...” (Rappaport 54).¹⁵ It is “disseminated through political assemblies, educational workshops, small reading circles of the indigenous press, and guerrilla schools, that is to say, in the ‘vivencias’ of the indigenous movement” (Rappaport 71). In the case of the Afro-Colombian intellectual Manuel Zapata Olivella, his numerous works likewise have an important function for Afro-descendant intellectuals and groups today in both Colombia and the region.¹⁶ Unlike the texts written by white-mestizo anthropologists *about* blacks, Zapata Olivella's writings which cross the genres of literature, philosophy, history, and the social sciences, speak *from* the Afro-descendant experience, making visible the particularity of coloniality, the lived nature of the African diaspora, and the processes of socio-political “awakening.” Together Zapata Olivella, Quintín Lame, and Reinaga afford, in different ways, a kind of documentation of “other” thought, thought that is seldom if ever part of Latin American philosophy or university study.

Yet it is not just in the work of intellectuals, but also in the ethical-political and epistemic practices of the movements themselves that the construction of this thought assumes its significance. A key example can be witnessed in Ecuador's indigenous movement and its collective political project. Key to this political project is their signification and use of “interculturality,” understood as an ideological principle clearly indicative of an “other” thinking. For the National Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE),

interculturality points to the radical transformation of social structures and institutions, and the building of a Plurinational State. It is the ideological principle that guides indigenous thinking and actions in the social and political spheres but also, and more recently, in the decolonization of knowledge.¹⁷ Thus while the movement's earlier politics and agency in the 80s and 90s were concentrated primarily on land and identity struggles, legal rights, and structural change in the nation-state, this politics and agency expanded in the first decade of the twenty first century to include what various indigenous intellectuals and indigenous institutions term "scientific interculturality." What this "scientific interculturality" marks is a politics and agency of epistemic character, a politics and agency concerned with the colonial designs that position indigenous knowledge as local and pre or non-modern, as compared to the supposed universality and non-temporality of westernized knowledge (including its manifestations in neo-marxist and continental critical thought).¹⁸

At the base of scientific or epistemic interculturality is the need to strengthen and position an *Abya Yala* philosophy.¹⁹ This strengthening and positioning functions from a different epistemological logic, a logic not grounded on the equality of knowledges (that is, bringing indigenous knowledge up to the status of westernized knowledge or opening up westernized knowledge to include other knowledges—what Raúl Fornet-Betancourt and others refer to as "intercultural philosophy"—or what we might better term a continental philosophic multiculturalization. Rather, it marks a logic conceived in and thought from *difference*—the colonial difference but also the ancestral difference that existed before colonialization— and, as such, from referents exterior to the continental model. What the idea of epistemic interculturality thus enables is work towards the relating of knowledges within and from difference, a relating that requires an epistemic transformation in our very understanding of knowledge, philosophy and thought, and the continental rationalities that underlie this thinking. It is a relating that is based on the belief that western knowledge and continental thought are, in and of themselves, insufficient.

Epistemic interculturality affords more than a strategic response to the colonial order—more than an ability to move between worlds or to function in a zone of contact or a border place of relation. Instead, it proposes an articulation of knowledges that takes into account the intercultural co-construction of diverse epistemologies and cosmologies, in which knowledge, as philosophy, is never complete but always "in construction"

The practical significance of this epistemic interculturality can be witnessed in two of the Ecuadorian indigenous movement's recent educational projects. One is the reorienting of indigenous bilingual education toward "scientific interculturality", that is toward a curricular model based on the problem of asymmetries, on the status of science, and on the need to urge "epistemological readings from indigenous peoples, in an attempt to build an interrelation of native and western knowledges" (Ramírez 12). The second is *Amawtay Wasi* (house of wisdom), the Intercultural "Pluriversity" of Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples of Ecuador This higher education project, in operation since 2000 (and officially recognized in 2003 by the Ecuadorian state) understands its mission as one that:

Responds from epistemology, ethics and politics to the decolonialization of knowledge..., a space of reflection that proposes new ways of conceiving the

construction of knowledge...potentializing local knowledges and building sciences of knowledge, as an indispensable requirement to work not from the answers to the epistemological, philosophical, ethical, political, and economic order, but from a proposal based on [Andean] philosophical principles. (*Amawtay Wasi* 8, my translation).

Amawtay Wasi's conceptualization, organization, and logic are grounded in a renewed comprehension and use of ancestral science, that is of an *Abya Yala* cosmology and philosophical theory of existence centered on the concept of *chacana*—relationality or connectedness. This concept and value of connectedness orients an educational perspective that has its base in the complementarity, reciprocity, correspondence, and proportionality of knowledges, practices, reflections, lived experiences, and cosmologies or philosophies, all of which, in turn, organize the “pluriversity’s” five knowledge centers, an organization that marks a radical departure from the continental model of disciplinary and “disciplined” faculties, departments, and programs.²⁰

But while indigenous peoples have clearly had to struggle with the historical and lived effects of coloniality, including in the knowledge sphere, such struggles in Latin America have most often been to the exclusion of Afro-descendants. Even in Colombia and Venezuela, the countries after Brazil with the largest Afro-descendant populations, native peoples, with significantly smaller numbers, have achieved a much greater level of cultural, political, and legal recognition.²¹ In this context and reality, peoples of African descent experience a kind of double subalternization. That is, the subalternization exercised by the dominant white-mestizo society, but also that exercised by indigenous groups. The fact that the recognition of indigenous peoples’ existence has typically come at the expense of African descendants and that the establishment of black slavery had as its principal motive the saving of Indians (as people) from extermination, marks a history that has tended to position Indians above Blacks in the social classification scale. It is a history that, for Afro-descendants, has meant a continuous struggle with racism and racialization and for existence, against this double subalternization, which finds its roots in the racial order that the coloniality of power established. But what this double subalternization also marks is the difference within the colonial difference and, as such, the difference in and within the productions of “other” thinking. Fanon’s emphasis on the dehumanization and non-existence experienced within the African diaspora is central in this regard. Thus and in contrast to recent indigenous struggles to position their knowledges with regard to western knowledge, the recent reconstruction and strengthening of an “other” thought among Afro-descendant communities has as its aim the confronting not of western knowledge per se, but of that part of the project of modernity/coloniality that has denied Afro-descendants their existence and humanity (see León “Pensamiento cimarrón”). A denial that takes on added significance in the Andean region of South America—a territorial imaginary and construction in which the peoples of the African diaspora are made invisible and their history and experience negated.

A philosophic/epistemic response to this condition can be found in the recent reconstruction and strengthening among Afro-descendants in the region of what is termed “*lo propio*,” a positioning in and through difference in which identities and knowledges take on a clearly political significance and strategical utility. The main place for this positioning has been in

community and organization-based processes that since 1999 have been working towards proposals and practices of “ethno-education” or Afro-oriented education. As the Afro-Ecuadorian intellectual Juan García Salazar notes,

Ethno-education is an effort by excluded peoples to visualize, construct, and apply a project which has as its foundation the aspirations and cultural criterion of these peoples. To ethno-educate is self-determination. It is putting into practice and into effect values and knowledges that the community deems necessary; all as part of the process of an articulation of collective knowledge.²²

For García Salazar, one of the key leaders and thinkers in this process, the central purpose of ethno-education should be to enable an encounter “with ourselves, with what we are, and with what we have contributed,” that is, to stimulate a “*casa adentro*” or “in-house” process that awakens feelings of belonging. But it is also to teach the knowledges that we were taught were not knowledges. “The struggle is to return *this* form of knowledge, and in this way understand life, understand our own knowledges and insert in the educational process *our* vision of history and *our* vision of knowledge” (Walsh and García Salazar 323). Such processes also point to the necessity of “out-of-house” work aimed at both penetrating and decolonizing dominant structures of knowledge and education, including at the university level.²³

Of interest here is not the “out-of-house” work, but rather that which occurs within; that is to say, the strengthening in recent years of a consciousness which is underlined in “other” thought, what might also be referred to as “*pensamiento cimarrón*,” cimarrón or maroon thinking (see Walsh and León; León). A thinking understood as social, political, and epistemic interventions directed towards the de-enslavement of knowledge and being; a thinking that is subversive and liberatory precisely because it works to awaken a sense of collective belonging, and to build and strengthen epistemologies and practices of questioning, resistance, reconstruction, and liberation.

The use of cimarrón/maroon here is not meant to indicate the fugitive nature of the term, but rather its lived significance: the recuperation and reconstruction of existence, of liberty, and of freedom, human conditions that for Afro-descendants in the Andean region (and generally in the Americas) still remain illusory. *Cimarronism* today denotes the revolutionary and autonomous thought found in the struggles for human and ancestral rights, the right to life with dignity, and the development and respect of ethnic, cultural, historic and political identities (see de Dios Mosquera). It is to recall how the first maroons constructed their liberty, freedom, and thinking in community, in territorial spaces or *palenques* defined for their collectivity, insurgency, and resistance. But it also to recognize the emergent presence and visibility in recent years, particularly in Colombia and Ecuador (and partly in response to legal advances), of social, political, and epistemic positionings by Afro-descendant communities, organizations, and groups, aimed at confronting colonial and racialized structures and at marking their colonial-ancestral-lived difference. It is in this context that the notion of *cimarrón* thought and of *palenques*, also understood as liberated spaces of thought and being, take on an important significance, serving as a kind of floating signifier or bridge between the struggles of the past and present and in response to the physical, symbolic, existential, and epistemic violence of modernity and coloniality.²⁴

To speak of the emergence of a *cimarrón* thinking then is to underscore an attitude and collective consciousness in the present, but in conversation with the ancestors (see Walsh and Leon). A thought and logic whose base is in ancestry, understood not as a return to Africa, but as lived philosophies and collective memories that constantly reconstruct historical, cultural, and spiritual ties and energies and rearticulate feelings of belonging within everyday life, recalling Gordon's "philosophies of existence" (*Existencia Africana* 10). Ancestrality is central to the construction of *cimarrón* thought as an "other" thinking not only because of the ties and energies that it summons, but also because of the ruptures it creates with the temporal, lineal, and rational order of history and of knowledge²⁵, as well as because of the geopolitical de-centering it affords with relation to philosophy, continentalism, and coloniality.

In this sense, *cimarrón* thought is that which emerges from the difference established with slavery, enslavement, and colonialization, but also from the difference that existed before. It is a political and culturally subversive thought that does not submit to the monoculture of western rationality. It is a thought that marks autonomous and collective spaces for the exercise of knowledge and existence, connecting thought, being, and action in ways that confront the ongoing dehumanization of coloniality.

Taken together, *cimarrón* thought and epistemic interculturality represent critical steps in the construction of political, ethical and intellectual projects whose goals are not only decolonialization, but also and more importantly the urging of decoloniality in terms of knowledge, power, and being. To speak of decoloniality, in this sense, is to make visible struggles and strategies against coloniality, thinking not just from its paradigm, but from the people and their social, political and epistemic practices. It is to take into account what Nelson Maldonado-Torres calls a "de-colonial attitude" (*Against War* 105), an attitude clearly present in the intellectual agency of the indigenous and Afro-descendant movements of the region, and in their construction and strengthening of logics, forms, and projects of "other" thought and of "other" philosophical work that open and map "other" spaces of theoretical production and of social and political transformation.²⁶

Enunciations and Elucidations: The Pedagogy and Praxis of Decolonial Interventions

To speak of post/trans-continental shifts and decolonial turns in philosophy, theory, and critique requires a serious consideration of the contributions and implications of local histories and subalternized epistemologies, as well as a serious attention to the shaping of dialogic connections among them. But it also requires a political and ethical attention to our own practices and places of enunciation and thought with regard to these histories and epistemologies, to the interventions that we might undertake with regard to building oppositional consciousness (Sandoval), decolonializing methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith), and critical pedagogies (see Walsh "Introduction"); that is, to the ways we assume political positions that make possible "other" philosophical work and open spaces of praxis and of theoretical production otherwise. All of this is to say that in confronting the hegemony and coloniality of western thought, it is necessary to also confront and make visible our own subjectivities and practice. To be critical, in this sense, means to grasp how and with whom we come to know; to understand both the partiality and potential of understanding (Walsh *Pedagogy*, 140).

Such musings are infrequent in the academic arena and when aroused (including in this conference where this essay was originally presented) produce tensions, discomfort, and cries about a lack of intellectual seriousness. How are we to read such tensions and discomfort, particularly in a conference dedicated to the “decolonial turn”? What do such tensions and discomfort say with regard to the epistemic structures of reason that we are supposedly trying to rupture, shift, and invert, but also with regard to the structures of genderization? Asked differently, why is it that enunciations and elucidations of subjectivity and praxis are so frequently read (particularly from a male Euro-American lens), and even amongst those of critical and decolonial persuasion, as a “feminization” and a weakening of theoretical rigor? What does this reading suggest in terms of the persistence of “modern reason” and the form of modern thought that began in Greece and Rome? But we might also ask how such frames continue to subalternize, invisibilize, and negate “other” logics and “other” thought, “other” epistemologies and philosophies not simply of modernity, but of rebellion, *cimarronaje* (maroonage), and of existence, epistemologies and philosophies of the *damnés*, of the subjects of the colonial and ancestral difference, and of those who the ego and corpo-politics of modern epistemology and thought has placed in the margins? What happens when not just the mind, but the body, the liver, and the heart enter into theoretical reflections and philosophical contemplations?

The announcing of such questions and concerns is to place in discussion and debate our own subjectivities, practices, and pedagogies. It is to raise concerns regarding “dialogue” versus conference talk, including the consideration of how such dialogue can move beyond theoretical positionings and begin to encourage decolonial shifts and transformations. But it is also to bring to the fore the more embedded tensions entailed in *speaking about* versus *speaking or working with*. That is to say, with what it means to assume an ethics-politics and pedagogy of engagement *with* the social movements, communities, and groups that are often the subject of our writings and thinking. To speak of such ethics-politics and pedagogies, as some did in the conference and continue to do, is not to reify practice over theory, but instead to take seriously Stuart Hall’s assertion that “political movements provoke theoretical moments” (283) and, one might add, decolonial turns. It is also to recall the argument put forth by Paulo Freire that “there is no social practice more political than educational practice. In effect, education can hide the reality of domination and alienation or, contrarily, denounce it, announce another path, becoming an emancipatory tool” (74), including in the struggle for and in the appropriation of knowledge. Yet education and pedagogy are seldom the base of philosophical reflection and discussion.

In my own thinking and practice including what I call shared activist-intellectual work, such concerns have long been key, part of what I consider as an ethical-political responsibility to open “other” spaces of thought and intervention that confront ongoing colonial designs. In the 80s and early 90s, the context of my work was *with* Puerto Rican and Latino communities, and their organizations, and institutions in the U.S.; the focus: collective interventions and reflections tied to the struggles for cultural, linguistic, and educational rights as well as to “other” research and “other” knowledge production (see Walsh *Pedagogy*, and Walsh “Introduction”). With my permanent move to Ecuador in 1995—a sort of rarity of immigrant from the north to the south—, work *with* the indigenous and Afro-descendant movements began at their petition.

With the indigenous movement, this has involved ongoing dialogues about interculturality, the geopolitics of knowledge, and the formation of an indigenous university.²⁷ It has also entailed work with indigenous mayors and local communities in rethinking local government (referred to as “alternative local powers”). Similarly, it has included collaborative work with Afro-Ecuadorian communities in their proposals and efforts towards ethno-education. The establishment in 2002 of the Afro-Andean Archive and Document Fund, which houses, for community, educational, and research use, a large collection of oral histories, testimonies, and photographs, was strategic in this regard. Additionally, it has included the building of spaces for critical reflection and “other” thought and that bring together community-based and activist-intellectuals from throughout the Andean region. The doctorate on Latin American (Inter)Cultural Studies, a masters program on the Afro-Andean diaspora, and the organizing of a permanent *Cátedra* or Chair of Afro-Andean Studies, are illustrative.. All these spaces—considered controversial and overly radical by many of my colleagues—challenge the boundaries of knowledge’s continental and racial divide and the separations these boundaries have attempted to maintain in terms of cultural politics and epistemic production.

To mention these spaces is not to self-reify or place myself on stage. Instead, it is to suggest a consciousness of reflective subjectivity, a commitment not just to theory but also to praxis, a desire to build practices and methods, as Chela Sandoval argues, “for generating oppositional global politics” (183). Practices and methods that enable a “differentially acting form of consciousness and activity in opposition,” that operate in an “altogether different register” (182), and that enable us to think a decolonial ethics-politics in-opposition but also in new position. That is to say, *from* the “other” philosophies, epistemologies, and knowledges that Euro-American science has tried to erase from the picture.

Final Reflections

For the pre-Subcomandante Guillén, all of philosophy implies a more or less defined and more or less developed pedagogical project; similarly, all pedagogical projects are the result of an explicit or implicit philosophy. Yet philosophy and pedagogy are seldom thought of as dialogically entwined, in major part, because of the alienation that traditional theory established between subject and object, between knowledge and action.

In the “other” philosophies and knowledges discussed here, these traditional divides have little significance or salience. What is of importance, instead, is the relation of knowledge with what Fanon called the actional, subjective, and situated dimension of human being (see Gordon *Fanon and the Crisis*). For this reason, to speak of post/trans-continental interventions in philosophy, theory, and critique is, on the one hand, to recognize and make visible the pedagogy and praxis of “other” epistemological logics and constructions and their theoretical, ethical, and political potential; a pedagogy and praxis that find their base in the lived struggles that modernity/coloniality have engendered. That is, in ongoing processes to radically reconstruct knowledge, power, being, and life itself, what I understand as decoloniality. On the other hand, it is also to give critical consideration to the ways our practices mark, push, or enable decolonial turns, decolonial turns not just in theory or text, but also in terms of the real-life concerns of domination, emancipation, justice, and liberation. Concerns that also need to be understood in

the increasingly complex context of North and South (including the Norths in the South and the Souths in the North), particularly in light of new constructions of global imperialism and global coloniality but also with regards to “other” maps, “other” places, and “other” geopolitical positionings”, those, for example, invoked by the graffiti on a Quito wall: *América se llega por el Sur*.

In ending, I wish to recall the words of the Afro-Colombian philosopher, cultural worker and “ekobio mayor” Manuel Zapata Olivella who, in November 2004, passed to the other side: “The chains are not on our feet but in our minds.” Therein lays the real challenge, including with regard to decolonial turns and post/trans-continental interventions.

Notes

- ¹ The first draft of this paper was originally presented in the conference “Mapping the Decolonial Turn. Post/Trans-Continental Inventions in Philosophy, Theory, and Critique,” University of California Berkeley, April 21-23, 2005.
- ² The politics of self-identification and naming are contextual and complex. In Latin America, native peoples typically self-identify today first by their *pueblo*, nation or nationality (e.g., kichwa) and secondly by the commonly shared “indigenous peoples.” Peoples of the African diaspora move among different terms, including the more generalized “Afro-descendant”, following the declaration of the Durban, South Africa 2001 Conference Against Racism. “African descended” is just beginning to gain use, primarily among intellectuals, while the self-referent of “Black”, still present in rural communities, is generally declining. National distinctions are also made, e.g., Afro-Ecuadorian. For the purposes of this article and in reference to Latin America, I will follow the more generalized use and its national distinctions; with reference to the U.S., I will respect the self-referents of Black and African American.
- ³ This interest and the reflections presented here do not come from studies *about* these movements, but rather and as I detail at the end of this paper, from dialogues and work *with* the movements and their intellectuals over a number of years. They are reflections grounded in a praxis.
- ⁴ It is particularly in this text, *La intelligentsia*, and in *Los Indios* that Reinaga builds his arguments for a decolonial thought through a dialogue and thinking with Fanon.
- ⁵ See Quijano’s “Colonialidad.” For a detailed discussion of the relation between knowledge and the projects of modernity/coloniality, also see Walter D. Mignolo’s *Local Histories, Global Designs*.
- ⁶ In speaking of “philosophy as the weapon of revolution,” Guillén is drawing directly from Marx, who argued that revolution is the realization of philosophy. But as Fausto Reinaga makes clear “the revolution is thought” when it pertains to the West or to the Metropolis. “Thought is Metropolis as is the revolution. In the Periphery neither thought nor revolution exists. The Periphery is reflection, echo and shadow of the Metropolis; the Metropolis’ fart” (*Podredumbre* 84, my translation).
- ⁷ In this sense, these “other” frameworks, productions, and subjects to which I refer do not seem radically divergent from what Paget Henry referred to in the context of the conference where the first version of this essay was presented as a “culturally distinct philosophy.”
- ⁸ This is not to discount Foucault. Rather, it is to point out the temporal and continental orientation of Foucault’s thinking, an epistemological orientation that, as Mignolo has pointed out, “had and has its western limits in Greece, its southern limits in the northern Mediterranean coast and its point of arrival in the heart of Europe (particularly France from the beginning of the 18th century)” (*Local Histories* 26). As such, for Foucault the “epistemological rupture” is chronological and continental in a universal sense; that is, a critical thought that responds to a geopolitics of several European nations considered and made universal.
- ⁹ This was made clear in the working tables on the “Reconstruction of Critical-Revolutionary Thought” during the Social Forum of the Americas held in Quito, Ecuador, in July 2005. As a summary of the meetings published in

the alternative press noted: “In the vacuum provoked by Marxism, the richness of theoretical formulations that occupy the intellectual scene of critical theory, such as the theses of Foucault, Deleuze, Lacan, and feminist and ecological critique, have opened a horizon of critical currents, the dialogue around which is proving to be extremely positive” (Moreano 6).

- ¹⁰ These subjectivities, histories, memories, and experiences also, and in different ways, constitute the existence-based struggles of Native Americans, African Americans, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans in the U.S. In this sense, Emma Pérez’s reference to a “decolonial imaginary”—the time lag between the colonial and the postcolonial, between the colonial self and the colonized other, in which Chicanos and Chicanas (and we could add: Native Americans, African Americans, and Puerto Ricans) find themselves, affords interesting points of relation and discussion.
- ¹¹ *Indigenismo* is the term used to refer to the politics and practices used by non-indigenous intellectuals to “speak for” indigenous peoples, but peoples seen through the lens of a utopian past and not as contemporary subjects struggling against a dominant racist and colonial system. Such politics and practice began to emerge in Latin America particularly in the 1940s, but continue on in different forms today. The critique of Marcos mentioned here comes from Esteban Ticona, a Bolivian aymara intellectual, and student in the doctoral program of Latin American Cultural Studies at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar in Quito, and as part of class discussions in July 2005.
- ¹² For a discussion of this category, particularly in relation to coloniality, see Maldonado-Torres’s “The Topology of Being.”
- ¹³ Indigenous leader, first president of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador—CONAIE, reelected again in December 2004, former national Congressman, and founder of the Universidad Intercultural de las Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas. During the military-indigenous alliance of national government in the first eight months of 2003, Macas held the post of Minister of Agriculture. Citation based in an August 2001 interview cited in Walsh “(DE)construir la interculturalidad,” 115.
- ¹⁴ Interesting to note is Reinaga’s decision to publish on his own, rather than with publishing houses that might attempt to censor his radical thinking. I thank Esteban Ticona for this clarification.
- ¹⁵ Quintín Lame, a leader and intellectual of the Nasa peoples, and the mind behind the guerilla group *Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame*, was the first Colombian Indian to present a written text at a time when indigenous organizations in Colombia were non-existent. As Rappaport notes in an introductory chapter to his re-published work, the manifest “presents a full array of philosophic arguments about a series of themes, including the relation of the Indians to nature, the future of the indigenous population in Colombia, the nature of legal systems and a crushing critique of the Caucasian elite” (Rappaport 52). It also includes a practical response to the aggression of whites.
- ¹⁶ See article by Gertrude González de Allen in this special issue.
- ¹⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the movement’s use of interculturality see Walsh’s “(De)construir la interculturalidad.”
- ¹⁸ As Muyolema contends, the problem is not only with the duality established in this colonial design but also in the limitations it imposes, assuring that indigenous thought remains local (and in a sense “folkloric” rather than scientific), negating its possibility of universalization. This contention is interesting to consider with regard to Mignolo’s position (“On Subalterns”) that argues for the de-universalizing categories of thought. While Mignolo and Muyulema’s positions, both of which derive from a concern with the colonial matrices of power, are not opposed, Muyulema puts an additional issue on the table—that is, the need to also re-universalize or think universalization not just from Europe but also from Abya Yalean knowledges and places.
- ¹⁹ *Abya Yala* is the name coined by the *cunas* in Panama to refer to the territory and the indigenous nations of the Americas, “land in full maturity,” a name now generally assumed by these nations to refer to the Americas. For Muyulema, this naming has a double significance: as a political positioning and as a place of enunciation, that is to say as a way to confront the colonial weight present in “Latin America” understood as a cultural project of westernization, ideologically articulated in *mestizaje*. As such and as Ticona points out (in conversation with Muyulema), “the ‘recategorizing’ of names, such as *Abya Yala*, means a rethinking of decolonialization from the

experience of kichua and aimara peoples and from their ethical-political values.” Of course, the problem is that while *Abya Yala* recuperates indigenous roots, it leaves out the presence and struggles of African descendants.

²⁰ While the model clearly demonstrates the epistemic interculturality and decolonial thinking to which I have referred here, its limitations are that it has been largely kichwa-centric, leaving out other indigenous knowledges as well as the knowledges of Afro-descendants. This is something that *Amantay Wasi* is now beginning to address

²¹ In Venezuela recent constitutional reforms recognize indigenous peoples and their rights, but not Afro-Venezuelans. In Colombia, the 1991 reforms also incorporated a series of indigenous rights. It was not until two years later that Afro-Colombians were able to get the Law 70 passed, which established their rights in the Constitution.

²² Personal dialogue, 2003.

²³ For a discussion of processes focused on university-level change, particularly with regard to Afro-descendant thought, see Jesús García “Encuentro,” Walsh “Colonialidad,” and Walsh and García.

²⁴ While not the focus of discussion here, it is interesting to consider what the concept of “*palenque*” affords to the new constructions of urban territoriality, particularly in the marginal barrios populated by Afro-descendant migrants in major cities like Cali and Bogota in Colombia and Guayaquil and Quito in Ecuador.

²⁵ A clear example is in the different perceptions and meanings afforded to the notions of “ancestrality” and the “ancestors.” Within many Latin American Afro-descendant communities, the ancestors live on after death, maintaining the same status of “being” and “existence” that have the living, that is as subjects of thought, rights, and obligations. In contrast, western rationality considers the ancestors as dead and therefore as non-beings. Within modern epistemology, the notion that the ancestors live on, continue to think, and to contribute to thought and knowledge is without logic. An excellent example of this ancestrality can be found in Zapata Olivella’s epic novel-narrative *Changó*.

²⁶ This reclaiming of control over indigenous and Afro-descendant ways of knowing and being should not be understood from a U.S. perspective as indicative of essentialism or identity politics. Rather, it marks a politics of difference regionally understood as ancestral, colonial, and epistemic, a politics that derives from other experiences and logics distinct from those constructed and lived in communities of color in the United States. Yet the perception remains, particularly among African Americans, that Latin America’s Afro-descendants are just now experiencing the “awakening” that they lived in the 60s and 70s. The problem, of course, is how a singular (North American) frame of blackness or African descendancy gets universalized, serving as “the” measure by which all other black experience gets analyzed and measured. Is this not yet another manifestation of the geopolitics of knowledge and double subalternization?

²⁷ Dialogues published in the *Boletín ICCI-Rimai*, the monthly periodical of the Indigenous Scientific-Cultural Institute, see <http://icci.nativeweb.org>

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