

AVATARS OF “INTERCULTURALITY”

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ABSTRACT:

This text is a compilation of the three central explanatory statements developed within the framework of the “Habitar la Interculturalidad” (Inhabiting the interculturality in English) colloquium, carried out virtually on June 23, 2020, by the Centro Regional de Formación Docente e Investigación Educativa (CRESUR)-Mexico. Consequently, this article is no more or less than three “thoughts out loud” that attempt – in times of virtuality – to put into words the tensions, thoughts, and coordinates that characterize these times.

Thinking, reflecting, and talking about interculturality is, in short, thinking about the other. To this end, critical thinking enables diverse, plural, and alternative horizons to the hegemony that Modernity generated in the field of social and human sciences. Rethinking such intended universality is a task that has been generated from different and varied fields for some time now. It is no coincidence that in many passages of these explanatory statements, the focus is on the role of education and the university. But the current context of pandemics, lockdowns, and social isolation clearly gives such attempts an even more particular, and perhaps more urgent, character. The look of the other as a threat – even viral – makes it imperative. As Rita Segato mentions, the departure from a univocal worldview can only lead to a circle of increasing violence. How do we deal with differences? is one of the questions articulated, in one way or another, by the three authors. As José Tasat proposes, inhabiting and combining this difference implies “imagining and creating the world again,” where the other can be something more than just a threat. To do this, as Walter Mignolo warns, it is necessary to constantly ask about “who enunciates interculturality?” which implies – among many other issues – an in-depth review of feelings, knowledge, and human ties.

RITA SEGATO

One of the topics that has always been an enigma for me from the time I lived in Brazil, and that has emerged here and been mentioned by several speakers who preceded me, is: *What will an Indigenous person learn at university? Why the great struggle for educational inclusion?* I always remember an event that perplexed me, and it can be said that it was traumatic. For more than ten years, I cooperated with FUNAI, the National Indigenous Foundation, in Brazil, and I accompanied several workshops with Indigenous women in all regions of the country. During that period, I attended a great meeting on Indigenous education in the city of Cuiabá, the capital of the State of Mato

Grosso, in which 500 Indigenous representatives participated. But I must say that it was surprising and distressing to perceive the disagreement and the difficulty of clearly establishing what the Indigenous people seek and bring back from the university. It is not that there are doubts about the need to have access to university studies. What is difficult is to have clarity about the objectives: *What does the state offer to the Indigenous people in terms of education? What is being aimed there, and for what purpose?* For a long time, I thought about this issue.

For example, regarding the subject of our conversation here, I disagree with one of the speakers stating that the solution to the pandemic comes from the communities. The solution to the pandemic will come from a vaccine found in the same context of environmental imbalance in which the pandemic originated because, and this is important to understand when we think about the university and Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants, colonial-modernity offers on one hand, the antidotes and remedies for the ills that it already introduced with the other one. The remedy will undoubtedly come from the one who introduced the illness. So, that is where the university, the inclusion, and the great struggle for affirmative action in education that we have had in Brazil come into the picture. When I heard the Brazilian colleagues here, I could not help but remember that when we started at the University of Brasilia in 1999, the struggle for quotas — what is called in Spanish *reserva de cupos* — for Black students and ways to access university for Indigenous students. Most anthropologists were initially opponents of these policies of inclusion. Great and appointed anthropologists, and many others, later changed their positions because, as they argued at the time, entering university meant being absorbed by the nation’s culture and putting the “difference” at risk. It is possible to doubt whether this was a real argument or a slay way of trying to prevent the university from having black students, so diligently predominantly white and so resolutely Eurocentric in the knowledge that it values and in the authors that it teaches in its well-known practice of the “Coloniality of Knowledge.” Maintaining the university “white,” in line with its contents’ whiteness, was also to protect it from inclusion policies. It was argued, then, especially from anthropology, that it would be an *assimilationist* policy, this being, of course, and rightly so, a bad word.

From this, the issue of interculturality comes in, and the big question is:

What can the university offer without assimilating? That is, without destroying the difference or eroding the civilizational armor that protects the world of the individual entering the university from another place, their communal world, as was said here, from their environment made

up of a nature that is neither a “thing” nor “resources,” a life that cannot be objectified. Therefore, what can the university offer? This is one of the great dilemmas that anyone interested in interculturality must consider, and it is not easy to do so.

One of the easiest ways to understand it is the following: they come to learn the antidotes and remedies for the ills that the university and the world of that university have already introduced. They need to learn them there. Moreover, I always quote, in that regard, the exciting fragment of José María Arguedas in his novel *Todas las Sangres*; when the community explains to the adorable character Demetrio Rendon Wilka why they send him to Lima so that he can go to school, they tell him: “Go, fly over the world like the sparrowhawk. Go and learn the vices of white men. But then come back...” [Translated quote from its original in Spanish] So, that is one of my answers on this topic, which is complex and requires extensive and informed reflection.

What happens to the Black person and the Indigenous person when they come to the university to learn what is needed to survive? What do they need, for example, to study law? To see if, with the instruments of law, they manage to protect their world precisely from the society that has formulated the law they are now learning. What is the purpose of Medicine? Similarly, to protect yourself from the diseases that the ‘white’ world knows because it has introduced them. That is why I state that knowledge of white men is needed to achieve protection from the illness of the white man. They need the answers this same world provides to the illness it caused.

Another issue is the concept of difference or the progress that interculturality represents concerning multiculturalism. The first way in which interculturality was thought of in the country of multiculturalism is that the state in schools would monitor the relationship among Black, white, Indigenous, Hispanic, and Asian people who all would share the same space inclusively and deliberately. There would be quotas for each of these racial segments of this ethnic pentagon; they would be transferred to typical school environments, and there they would coexist during school time, thus interculturalizing. However, I believe there must be much more at stake than this. Consider, if the presence of these people fails to transform the state, that is, if schools are not made accessible, adaptable, and capable of transformation; if they merely operate from above; and if the state supervising the expected interculturalization of society fails to acknowledge its own whiteness, Eurocentrism, and power and knowledge coloniality, then history does not change.

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Therefore, in the search for an intercultural society, the state cannot solely assume the role of mediator and articulator, of supervisor of differences, ignoring that it is not on a pedestal of neutrality, but that is one of them, one more of these differences. The state is white - between us- it is an implant, a transposition of the European management artifact bearing the same name. Still, it operates among us with a solid para-state influence and suffers from what I have repeatedly called: “a foundational error.” Moreover, it is patriarchal, as I have argued in a variety of texts, arguing that it is the last phase of patriarchy since it represents the moment when the space of male, public, and political works is transformed into an encompassing sphere and captures everything that claims to be endowed with politicity. Moreover, it is the agora that seeks to capture and monopolize politics, transforming itself into an agora where voices that pretend to impact collective life must resonate, thus dismissing, with this maneuver, the politicization of domestic management and the political history of women. Then, returning to intercultural education, if the diverse presences attracted to the school fail to transform such space and that supervisor, that state management, its structure, and the very modes of the institution, the intercultural project will have failed.

Another of the difficulties that must be deeply and carefully considered when we discuss interculturality, a subject that Pepe Tasat and I have discussed, is that cosmoses are neither commensurable nor equivalent. There is no equivalence between civilizational cosmoses; for example, there is no equivalence between the Pachamamico cosmos and the Christian cosmos, nor is there an equivalence between the Christian cosmos and the African-American (Brazilian) cosmos, to name one I know in-depth, and through my participation. I have written a lot about this: the candomblé people and the Nagô community of Recife, with whom I lived for a long time and upon whom I wrote my doctoral thesis, visit seven Catholic churches as part of their initiation process. When I asked how this was possible, the answer was surprising: “Our dead (eguns) are locked here next to the house -in the quarto de balé- without doors or windows for all eternity; there are the ancestors, they are cared for in a closed room that only men enter through a narrow opening, very few men, the initiates, and only at a few times of the year. So why do we go to church? Because sometimes we like to feel that there is also another heaven to which it will be possible to go” [Translated quote from its original in Spanish].

When discussing this topic with Pepe Tasat, he made me see that this example of the religious field could well be included in what philosophers call paraconsistent logic; that is, a logic that is no longer monologic, as the West and monotheisms have cultivated, leading intelligence in the direction of monopolistic, exclusive, and excluding logics for which difference, is always a problem to be solved. I dealt with this subject

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also a long time ago in another text, talking about the difference between the initiation religions and the conversion religions: in a conversion religion, the subject is no longer A to become B, while in an initiation religion, the person is initiated into a religion, but they do not need to abandon their other spiritualities. In other words, they are not monological nor monopolistic. Thus, there are monological cosmoses and cosmoses that are not monopolistic. The structures of the cosmoses are very different, and it is impossible to translate them and find analogies; they are not even analogous, and their importance is that in them, it is possible to navigate between the differences without pretending to equate their convertibility. These are the cosmoses we must defend, which must be behind a project of interculturality. In them, there is an awareness of inconsistent logic. I believe that today, we must move forward with full force, trying to understand the importance of inconsistency.

A fourth aspect of the intercultural project, which I mentioned earlier, is that it is essential to try to destabilize, to deconstruct the *world-thing*, that is, the objectification of life, that crossing between Cartesianism and capitalism that produces the disasters we are witnessing in the relationship between humanity and nature. Resulting from this cross between colony, capitalism, and Cartesianism the invention of race originates, which is one of the most extreme forms of the objectification-naturalization-biological fixation of the bodies of the vanquished in the process of Conquest and Colonization, together with the other extreme form of objectification of the bodies characteristic of the patriarchal political order. I also believe that *communality* destabilizes an objectified world and that the operators of the communal are women; the ones who tie together the communal world are women. Therefore, it is possible to speak of the strong affinity between feminism, communality, and the revitalization of the *interculturality* project.

Finally, the limits to constructing an intercultural society are exposed today by the advance of the pandemic. It behaves like an excellent X-ray machine, a mega-scanner that passes over the world and exposes all the frightening aspects of the contemporary phase of capitalism and neoliberalism. It exposes to the open sky the frontiers between inclusion and exclusion and exposes the problems of permanent exclusion, of which a group of sociologists, of which Aníbal Quijano was part, anticipating the idea that exclusion is not and cannot be a problem to be solved because it is inherent and constitutive of the last phase of capitalism. The pandemic giga-scanner also exposes gender conflict, as gender is inevitably a conflict and the matrix of the patriarchal order, and, in turn, patriarchy is a conflicting order because it is an unequal system. Patriarchy is a political order; it is not a religious or moral order but a political order and an unequal political order. Therefore, it cannot be non-confrontational, and the

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pandemic exposes its conflict inside the home. Finally, the pandemic exposes the genocidal tendencies of the world we live in, as evidenced in Brazil, where Indigenous societies are being decimated and have lost some of their most influential leaders, such as the great cacique Paulinho Paikan and Ariana Yawalapiti.

JOSÉ TASAT

I will discuss inhabiting, and it seems to me that some issues within inhabiting are worth considering. One cannot inhabit without ground, nor can one inhabit without culture. We know no other way than through the history of an empire, a culture, and an identity. Unfortunately, in this way of inhabiting, we are engaged in the framework of what we describe in the social sciences as a process of domination. There is always an ‘other.’ And in that ‘other’ we reference, we assume a voice and a place to tell the story. It seems to me that these ‘others’ include individuals, enslaved people, from the stratification of race, nobodies, women, and peasants. There is always a way to articulate oneself within logic, which is a condition for living. Both affirmation and negation are two sides of that coin to combine with each other.

In turn, there is always a hegemony, and that worldview action to inhabit the world is processed mythologically. In this era, the myth of science gives us the basis of validation and is a provable fact. The pandemic clearly came to demonstrate that those bodies were present. Those bodies that, unfortunately, we see losing their lives, transitioning to another stage according to the worldview from which it can be interpreted, are related to a healthcare system that clearly cannot fully provide adequate care. In this matter of inhabiting, what we, the modern and the first six speakers (including Rita and Walter), have been stating is that we are very monadic, as we start by describing things. If we move away from the monadic, then the monadic is an entity that explains things, but if we consider ourselves part of a relationship, the issues would be different. Walter points out this when he talks about community and what Rita refers to when she speaks of a different logic, what she describes as non-nomological compared to the monopolistic, paraconsistent logic.

We are orphans of theory, which clearly relates to the viewpoints we continue using, as we still have really outdated paradigms from the last five years. I believe that the richness of our reality should allow us to develop new poetry. Why poetry? Because it allows us to imagine a transformed world. Yes, these are key features; unfortunately, the construction of violence as a bonding feature. However, it is one of them. However,

it is also true that we must express ourselves differently, both in educational and cultural fields.

What is the purpose of this exacerbating of profit maximization, minimizing costs, exacerbating environmental extractivist activities, and exacerbating productivity as an alienating area in daily life, alienated from us to be colonized differently, to carry a way of thinking that leads to disintegration, a break-through of a social bond that excludes us. Thus, the communal, the policy of friendship, and the spheres of political belonging provide us shelter, allowing us, from that shelter, to insist differently. But where do we insist? We insist on organizations that must have the possibility of democratizing democracy because, otherwise, decision-making sovereignty remains with the same people. We continue to live, and I take this from Walter Mignolo, in a tension of either westernizing the East or orientalizing the West. And this tension is something we experience daily.

On the other hand, it seems to me that the dehumanization of humanity is to inhabit within the framework of difference. What we cannot accept has to do with this difference, and we always think in terms of a hegemonic logic of similarity when the reality of living with difference itself is cohabitating. Therefore, above all, action is action by itself. If the action is action by itself, the interpretation of that action is made by specific sectors that almost always are those that hegemonize a narrative of interpretation to give meaning and to establish control over the public sphere. Who steps into the popular sphere, who enters the public domain to demand the eradication of racism, to denounce the recurrence of existing and constant femicides? We are the ones who take on a voice of that difference to be heard.

And I think that all the different theories that have been brought up let us look beyond the objects and look at the differences, and someone always benefits from that difference. Let us look at the stratification that clearly constitutes us; this stratification is not of class but about race, and let us look beyond the fact that this logic of personal alienating slavery is not the only thing that makes us isolate ourselves from others and ourselves. That is why I think if one thinks about inhabiting, one thinks about a worldview. If we continue in this Western worldview of a capitalist state, a predatory state, or an anarcho-capitalist state, that is where the cards are played. If we continue to play these cards, interculturality as a form of articulation must try to reconcile the differences. It is the most challenging thing because those who hold power enjoy it while everyone else insists on having a different voice. Today, it is interesting to think about how we, from a field of thought, can contribute to the confrontation of forces because we do nothing but provide logic for thinking.

The confrontation of forces takes place in the field of politics. In other words, it is another segment. I believe that illuminating and giving importance to such a shift to ancestral or popular wisdom allows us to give a different meaning to action because the popular/ancestral has a logic that reason cannot comprehend. This tension that exists today between a conservative power, the invisible hand of the market, with its white-glove transferring currencies in the financial system to enrich itself, and the mass media that play in favor of the system and continue to deteriorate the other as a condition for the other's non-existence. It seems to me that this also relates to logic as simple as, if my freedom ends at the freedom of the other, what conservatism needs most is for the other not to exist.

Therefore, another tension that occurs, which I believe is essential to me and requires distinct scientific consideration, as Ernesto Laclau says, is populism because it carries within it a force of reason that conventional reason does not comprehend. Yet, it enables access to the distribution of social goods for those who lack them and within all the visible and invisible, constant frameworks with which a political system is inhabited. However, this occurs in the same place, within the logic of the state, but it seems crucial to me sometimes to move away from the logic of thinking from the state. If one moves away from the logic of thinking from the state, one can assume a different habitat because if we remain prisoners by the belief that things are the way they are, nothing will change. We need to imagine the world anew, as Rodolfo Kusch said, and the only way to imagine it is with the law of excluded middle in philosophy. This principle allows us to see that things can be and not be simultaneously and in the same aspect, prioritizing the possibility of relationships. There is something about relationships that is much stronger than the monadic way of expressing ourselves. That is why I insist on taking up the word, taking on a voice. Without a voice, a body, a territory, and being together with others, it is very hard to change our way of life.

WALTER D MIGNOLO

I will summarize what I had planned to say to connect it to the many interesting things mentioned. I begin with a couple of questions: When did the conversation around interculturality begin? Who is talking or was talking about interculturality? In the United States, the dominant theme was multiculturalism. It began to be a topic of conversation in the public and university spheres in the 1970s. Why? First, because of the civil rights movement (1969), and second, due to the increased immigration from Central America, South America, and the Caribbean, the melting pot could no longer be maintained. The melting pot was an appropriate metaphor while immigration was European, Eastern, and Western, but European. When non-white individuals

from Africa, Asia, and Latin America began to arrive in the United States, the melting pot ended, and multiculturalism emerged, displacing it in the triumphant rhetoric of modernity. However, it was the state that talked about multiculturalism through civil society. It encouraged individuals to celebrate their third-world culinary arts, practice their religions, dress as they wished, maintain their dances, and hold their parties, but not challenge the state. In other words, it was a liberation of the content of the conversation but not of its terms, that is, of the rules of the game. The state maintained control over the enunciation under the guise of freedom and change. It was a sweet measure to satisfy people, avoid altercations, and accommodate third-world immigration.

In Latin America, interculturality became a topic of conversation and debate. I see it as the Latin American version of North American multiculturalism when interculturality is used in a broad sense in the public sphere. But who speaks about interculturality, and what does it mean? When people in the Ecuadorian or Bolivian states, which are somewhat familiar to me, speak about interculturality, its use corresponds more or less to the sense of multiculturalism in the United States, with the obvious differences of the corresponding local histories —imperial history in one case, colonial in another, ethical and demographic composition, economic levels, and social distribution of wealth. When promoted by the state, the rhetoric of interculturality preserves the underlying logic of coloniality. For example, the Constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia established that both are plurinational states. Interculturality and plurinationality are related concepts, although there is an important nuance: plurinationality is a Constitutional concept that calls into question the mononationality of the nation-state, while interculturality is a matter debated in the public sphere. It is not established in the Constitution that Ecuador and Bolivia are intercultural states. In the United States, the same concept of plurinationality is unthinkable for both the state and the media, Republican or Democratic, coverage which supports the *status quo*. Why is that? It is a topic for another conversation.

The intercultural issue is very different when Indigenous or Afro-descendant people speak and use the words intercultural and plurinationality in their political positions. For the state, the word plurinational is in the Constitution, but we have yet to see any effort in Bolivia or Ecuador to activate what is constitutionally written. In turn, for the Afro-descendant communities of the Colombian or Ecuadorian Pacific, plurinationality in the Constitution is a concept that legitimizes their claims. As for intercultural, they appropriated the concept and changed its meaning. First and foremost, “they did not change the content but the terms of the conversation.” That is, they displaced and appropriated the enunciation of the state and the public sphere (civil society, mass

media, and social media) to Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. For these communities that live in harmony, the territorial state line dividing Ecuador and Colombia is of a state and social nature, non-communal. The communal has its own rules of coexistence and organization. The territorial state lines are proper to the state, not of *Abya Yala* or *La Gran Comarca* (The Great Region in English), the territorial nomenclature for Indigenous people, the first, and Afro-descendants, the second. Or it is our problem because that line divides us. Afro-descendant communities no longer inhabit Latin America, but rather The Great Region; that Indigenous community no longer inhabits Latin America, but *Abya Yala*. In managing its affairs, the intracultural refers to the communal policy agreed upon among Indigenous people. These are matters that they resolve among themselves. Afro-descendants named it *casa adentro* (inside the house in English). Intraculture belongs to *casa adentro*. Interculture concerns *casa afuera* (outside the house in English). It describes the relationships between communities and the state.

Interculturality refers to the moment when what has been agreed upon intraculturally and *casa adentro*. It is confronted interculturally with the state. These two moments are crucial for the detachment of those who live and practice it and those of us who participate from the outside. Thus, we can understand that culture (in its words of inter-culture and intra-culture) is neither an object (a being) nor something that can be combined or used to make two beings communicate. Instead, “culture is created by human beings” through their constant use of language and their daily living within the modern/colonial (today) state order. We enter the political-epistemic field and move away from the idea that culture is something that people have rather than something people do. The introduction of the words *intraculture* and *casa adentro* and the appropriation of interculturality to mean *casa afuera* reduce the state and the national and media public sphere to their proper terms: that is, although it is hegemonic and dominant, in discussions about interculturality, the state no longer has the final say in either politics or knowledge. That is why there is detachment from the hegemonic or dominant state discourse and the public sphere, as the case may be. It is both political and epistemic, as it states that neither the state nor the media can suppress them. They can silence them but no longer suppress them.

So, it is no longer about asking ourselves *what interculturality is, but who enunciates interculturality*, when, where, for what purpose, and why? Ontology does not prompt us to ask these questions because the assumption is that ontology guarantees the representative discourse that describes and explains what is and what exists. Therefore, it hides and paralyzes the questions that uncover enunciation and show us what is built by enunciation. I believe that what I just said connects with many things that have al-

ready been discussed here by Mario Vilca, Luciana Ramos, Eduardo Oliveira, and Rita Segato. This brings us to the question of education.

Let's return to *Abya Yala* to discuss education and connect with the *Pluriversity Amawtay Wasi* (<https://amawtaywasi.org/>). The history is long and complex. For the topic that interests us here, I recall some details. From what I know, the conversations that first led to the creation of the *intercultural university* (let's remember what *intercultural* means from the Indigenous perspective) began with the request from Ecuador's Indigenous organizations to establish their own higher education institution, Amawtay Wasi (*Amawta* means wise person, *Amawtay* means wisdom, and *Wasi*, home) in the late 80s. It was institutionally established around 2007 or 2008. Rafael Correa closed it during his administration. He implemented corporate university evaluation criteria, and those who evaluated it decided it did not meet those criteria. These are criteria that Amawtay Wasi is not interested in fulfilling as it proposes a non-corporate education. Correa, on the one hand, criticized neo-liberalism and, on the other hand, applied neoliberal criteria in higher education. In 2020, it began the process of reopening.² We do not know the criteria for its reopening or if there will be any permits to the state. What interests us here is the project. The vision of restoring Indigenous knowledge is underway, and this will not stop, even if there are permits for the reopening of Amawtay Wasi.

The gnoseological (the principles of all forms of knowledge) reconstruction of epistemology (the Western principles of knowledge, both their own principles and the monitoring ones of non-Western knowledge) is necessary to restore these forms of knowledge. The estheticis reconstitution (feeling, emotion, belief) of aesthetics in the West (and those who adopted it outside the West) reduced aesthesis to the realm of art and suppressed its understanding in all our actions. We are neither robots nor entirely rational beings who have a body to make the mind work. We call the mind an activity of the brain, but the brain is an organ of the body, such as the liver, kidney, and heart.

One of the key moments in the process of the argument that interests us here is when the state's voice (Ministry of Education) asked why they needed their own university when, given the Constitutional reform of 1987, Indigenous people could attend national and public universities in Ecuador. Do you see the state principle of interculturality? "Come to our university, and we will teach you what we know, the things you need to learn." The belief of state actors in any of their functions and of most civil society

2 Amawtay Wasi and the United Nations intervention for its reopening: <https://www.servindi.org/actualidad-noticias/21/11/2018/abriran-nuevamente-la-universidad-indigena-amawtay-wasi-en-el-2020>

is that Indigenous people are not qualified to be responsible for the teaching of non-indigenous knowledge. The same classic argument: outside Europe and the North Atlantic, people are not capable of self-governance, that is, they do not know how to govern themselves as we govern ourselves, and the way we govern ourselves is natural, universal, and beyond question. But this was precisely what was at stake: The *Amawtay Wasi* project was and is the reconstitution of Indigenous knowledge (not Western state knowledge) “by Indigenous people for all Ecuadorians, and not only for the Indigenous population.”

Do you see the radical shift in reasoning and the struggle over the control of enunciation? That was the response, rearticulated in my own words, to the state’s opening for Indigenous people to attend national universities (a gesture of multicultural or intercultural openness). Now, what I understood was: Thank you, but no. You, Ecuadorians, can come to our university, which is open to everyone. Do you see the interculturality from the Indigenous or *casa afuera* perspectives? It is not about changing the content and incorporating Indigenous content into the national or state or private universities, but about affirming the enunciation rooted in the cosmology of the Indigenous peoples rather than the Western cosmology (theological, liberal, and Marxist) that frames the state universities.

I will make a few remarks about the materiality of the institution and the curriculum. The institution did not use the campus nor the urban structure of universities as a model, many of which are spread over several buildings. Amawtay Wasi goes to the students, to the countryside and the communities, instead of requiring students to move to the city in order to study according to the institutional materiality of the state university. Second, the curriculum and the philosophical orientation of education were not subjected to the “university model,” which is a Western particularity since the foundation of the first university (Bologna) in the Middle Ages. The West is the only civilization that has a university. Surely, because all other civilizations (Chinese, Indian, Arab, Persian, Beni, Aztec, Incas) have “houses of wisdom.” Only for Europeans and Latin American collaborators, what was not Western civilization was barbaric. The university is the Western local configuration of houses of wisdom. The difference is that it managed to impose itself as “The” house of wisdom along with the West’s economic, political, and military expansion.

With the colonial expansion, the model of higher education was installed in the Americas, Asia, and Africa, and the actors who implemented it dismantled the houses of wisdom where the Western house of wisdom was installed, i.e., the university. We refer to this when discussing the colonality of know-how or knowledge: the dispossessed

knowledge. Today, the reconstitution of these dispossessed knowledges is underway. However, they will no longer be what they were because Western knowledge is present and maintains the power differential of colonial difference. Therefore, the reconstitution of knowledge must be based on border thinking, acknowledging colonial differences, and the power differential. Insofar as this is the case, border gnoseology is underway in the Global South and East and the Global North and West since coloniality is everywhere.

How was the curriculum of *Amawtay Wasi* organized? It was not modeled after *the trivium and the quadrivium*, which was hegemonic in the colonial Renaissance university, nor after the Kantian-Humboldtian model, which was hegemonic in the secular university from the late eighteenth century until World War II, nor after the corporate university model that is currently displacing the Kantian-Humboldtian model and prioritizes professional training to generate efficient professionals rather than responsible citizens. The curriculum of *Amawtay Wasi* was modeled after the Southern Cross³ (Figure 1), which also served as the organizational model for the *Tawantinsuyu*: the world organized into four *suyos*, the basic unit of the Andean organization, equivalent to the Greek *oykos*. Look, the Greeks have no privilege except in the Western system of beliefs.

Figure 1: A Cross over the City

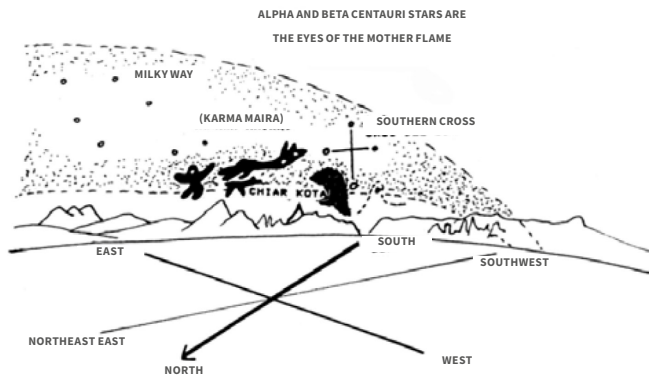


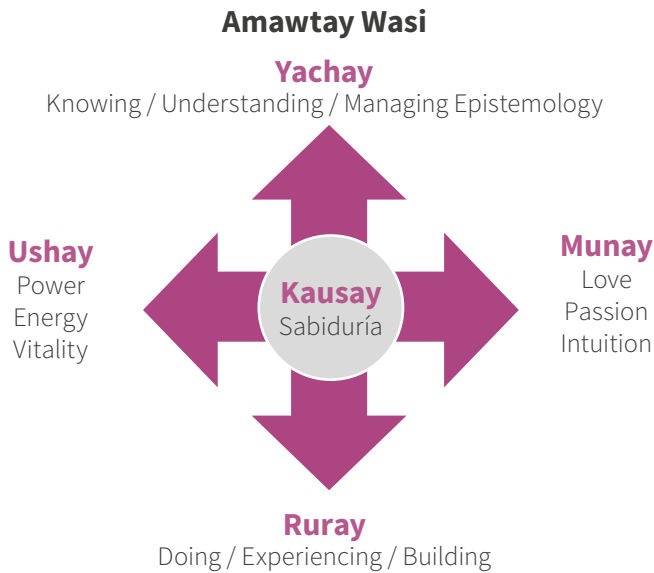
Figure 1

Source: Moscoso, V ((2000). *Una Cruz sobre la Ciudad*. *Revista Ciencia y Cultura*, (7), 55-61.
Available at: <http://www.scielo.org.bo/pdf/rcc/n7/a09.pdf>

3 Design by Victor Moscoso, "Una cruz sobre la ciudad" *SciELO Revista Ciencia y Cultura*, 7, 2000. http://www.scielo.org.bo/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2077-3323200000100009

The curricular structure was organized based on the Andean history, the Indigenous peoples’ philosophy, life practices, desires, and needs. Figure 2 is a basic outline of the curriculum structure:

Figure 2: Curriculum of Amawtay Wasi University



Source: Cortez, David (2012) *Curso “Genealogía del Buen Vivir / sumac kawsay”*, dictated in Flacso Ecuador, July-September

You can see the four curriculum areas (let’s call them that) modeled after the four *suyus* of the *Tawantinsuyu*. And the center, which in the *Tawantinsuyu* was Cusco. Here, it is *kawsay*, which means both wisdom and life, for the simple reason that one cannot live without knowing, and one cannot learn without living. We can understand the meaning of *Sumak Kawsay*, which has received so much attention in recent years from both the Indigenous and non-indigenous intellectuals of Latin America and the American and European academies. We already know that the binary cosmic-political organization of opposites is particular to the West. In all other civilizations, it is about duality, not binarism, and duality is always complementary, not opposing. Each of the members of the duality is half of a whole. Of course, this idea fits into binary oppositions in the West.

In short, a complex issue: To know and understand each area implies knowing their relationship with the others. Nothing is isolated. Second, the horizon of teaching is wisdom. Learning to unlearn to relearn and learn to be. This statement pronounced in the Indigenous experience has an enormous weight: it is based on the colonality

of knowledge and the coloniality of being that deprived them of their wisdom and dignity as people and as a nation. Thus, the conception of *Amawtay Wasi* operates in two ways: intraculturally in the regeneration of knowledge, living, memory, dignity, and trust of the Indigenous peoples. It also operates interculturally in co-existence with the intraculturality of the Creole-Mestizo population and with the state. However, the Creole-mestizo population “does not see” their intraculturality since it assumes it to be universal, even if it is a branch of Western Europe and the United States.

Rafael Correa obviously could not - I say it correctly, “could not” - tolerate the co-existence of knowledge foreign to Western knowledge in national universities, and he used the accreditation tool to close *Amawtay Wasi*. The co-existence of knowledge today and in the future is and will be inevitable, marked by the power differential of colonial difference. In this conflict, Correa took advantage of his presidential privileges and the heavy-hand approach of the state and reaffirmed the canonical university education, a mix of Kantian-Humboldtian and corporate universities. Thus, he founded four new universities at four strategic points in the country: in the North (Imbabura), in the South (Cuenca), in the East (Amazónica), and in the West (Guayaquil). In other words, he translated the quadripartitions of the Tawantinsuyu into strategic spaces of the national government built on the ruins of the Tawantinsuyu. Moreover, the University of Imbabura, named it *Yachay* (it is the area of knowledge in *Amawtay Wasi*) and called it the “city of knowledge.” Here, we see the inter-institutional, intercultural, inter-epistemic, and interpolitical conflict. The ecology of knowledge is a romantic idea of what could be and which overlooks the colonial difference and the political, epistemic, and historical power differential.

I close the first of the topics, which is the broadest, and frame the other two remaining ones. The second point is the “the Americas” issue, from the Mapuche region to the Indigenous peoples of Canada and the Caribbean. This continent, with its Islands, was formed with three major and diverse demographic groups. First, the enormous diversity of the Indigenous peoples and the three great civilizations of the continent, with all their complexities, are summarized in the Incas, Mayans, and Aztecs. In addition, strong cultures such as the Iroquois in the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada and the Osages in the southeastern United States, etc.⁴ From that complexity, their cosmologies survive and co-exist with the Christian/secular cosmology of the West, from whom the U.S. Constitution took and adapted the Iraqi model of confederate states. Again, the current political complexity of interculturality

4 Map of the Native American Regions (Native American), <http://s1.thingpic.com/images/1b/M6jmb2RNfrZ4bfRL-2JnxGC9F.gif>

between the conservative forces to maintain the privileges of knowledge, the institution that protects them, and the liberating and reconstructive forces of dispossessed knowledge. Decoloniality is the reconstitution of dispossessed knowledge by actors who inhabit the present, the memory, the language, and the life practices of that knowledge.

The second demographic constituent arrived from Europe without a passport or invitation, establishing their assets in foreign territories. They created viceroyalty governments in the South and North, cohabitating as visitors (the Pilgrims) or in small commercial centers of the English Crown until the so-called American Revolution, which founded the nation-state. They subjugated the Indigenous populations and contributed to the already established and commercialized trade of enslaved Africans. The Pilgrims and their descendants self-constituted and established their cosmology (the Bible) and then science and secular philosophy, which coexist until today within the same family. The conflicts of knowledge between Christian theology and secular science and philosophy are conflicts within the same family framed by the Greco-Christian-secular cosmology. In the same movement of the constitution of what will be in the United States and Canada in the North and the independent republics in the South, the dispossession of existing cosmogonies and cosmologies that have existed for thousands of years occurs. Here, you see the two faces of modernity/coloniality, while one constitutes the other deposes. Decoloniality emerges in the reconstruction and restitution of the deposed, which is relevant to the present day of those who work in epistemic and aesthesis reconstitutions.

The third large contingent, as mentioned, were enslaved Africans, mainly men, to work on plantations. Millions of Africans populated the continent and the islands of the New World from what is now the United States to the southern tip of the continent. According to Aníbal Quijano, America, modernity, and capitalism were born on the same day.⁵ Two important elements were the massive expropriation of land, the massive exploitation of labor, and the availability of human life to ensure profits.

Forced and voluntary immigration continued. From the 19th century, the illegal declaration of slavery opened the doors for Asian immigration, particularly in the Caribbean. In Argentina, the National Organization since 1852, created conditions for the massive European immigration of the late 19th century and the first decades of

5 QUIJANO, Aníbal. La modernidad, el capital y América Latina nacieron en el mismo día. Interview by Nora Velarde. ILLA, Revista del Centro de Educación y Cultura, n. 10, Jan., p. 42-57, 1991

the 20th century. The Industrial Revolution facilitated transportation, and steamships created favorable conditions for the mass mobility of people in the second half of the 19th century. However, a political aspect is worth highlighting: today, political issues are played out among these three groups in the Americas; in all the Americas. This is interesting to reflect on intraculturality, *casa adentro*, and interculturality, *casa afuera*. Of course, I am not saying that political projects specialize groups since people from different demographics can support and ally with the projects of others. Moreover, not all members of an ethnic group share the political projects of liberation of the group to which they belong. I am saying is that political projects emerge from subordinated ethnic groups in response to the political projects of the subordinate group.

This does not mean that all of us who belong to the subordinate ethnic group support subordination. A peculiarity of political mobility is critical: people of European descent, for example, can and do ally with themselves with Indigenous or/and Afro projects. At the same time, people from diverse groups of Indigenous peoples or the African diaspora can join the projects of people and institutions of European descent. At stake in these displacements are, for example, the loss of privileges of those who support political projects of the Indigenous peoples and/or Afro-descendants without belonging to such ethnic formations. At the same time, people of these ethnic groups can choose to be on the side of the ethnic group to which they do not belong, but which controls the privileges. People are not *politically* linked to their ancestry, although *subjectively*, they always will be, even in conversion. Conversion means that one person has become another.

The conquest dismantled the governing apparatus of the two active civilizations during the invasions: The Aztecs and Incas. The Maya states, independent from each other, were already in the process of decay. The result was that, with the fall of the governments, the people gathered around one or another cultural, economic, and political organization were left without leadership, so to say. However, they kept their cosmogony (creation stories) or their cosmology (ways of life and conceptualizations of their ways of life, knowledge, and sensitivity). Today, all that which never disappeared is re-emerging with political force, challenging the “Latin” American hegemony. This is why the name *Abya Yala* was returned name the territories of the Indigenous peoples, and *La Gran Comarca* was invented to name the Afro-descendant territories. The “Latin” American and Euro-descendants inhabit in the South and Central America. In *Abya Yala*, the Indigenous peoples, and in *La Gran Comarca*, the Afro-descendants. How is this possible? Easy, “Latin America” is not an entity but a political-cultural construct

with economic impact. The same applies to Afro-descendant communities in Ecuador, Colombia, and Brazil that inhabit *La Gran Comarca*⁶.

On the other hand, linked to territoriality and memory, Afro-descendants, in addition to Palanques and Quilombos (Brazil), created Santería (America and Hispanic Caribbean), Voodoo in Haiti (French), Candomblé in Brazil (Portuguese), and Rastafaris in Jamaica (English). In each imperial order, different but concomitant spiritual practices emerged that are still present today. Interculturality does not work very well in “Latin” America because the population of European descent still maintains the feeling, consciously or unconsciously, of marginalization (not to call it racism) of the First Nations and Afro-descendant populations. Meanwhile, non-Latin populations, who are aware of this, are now resurging with a political force that was never been lost since colonial times but which today, for various reasons, has gained an impulse and reached a moment from which there is no return. Zapatismo is an exemplary case. The Zapatistas are restoring what has been dismissed, and in doing so, they are also in the midst of an epistemological and aesthetic reconstitution. In other words, they are moving away from epistemology and opening up gnoseology to reflect on all forms of knowing. They are moving away from aesthetics and opening up aesthesis and all traces of feeling.

The third and last point, but there are many more, I will discuss that I have chosen it for the three or four minutes I have left to speak. Much has already been said about what I am going to say; I am not going to say anything new; I am simply going to add a few more elements. In my experience, the distinction between the communal and the social is crucial. When I speak about the communal, people often ask: “Oh, but how, with capitalism, technology, the media... How are you going to convince the state to be communal?” No, I am not going to convince the state to be communal. To think this way is to accept that the state controls everything and that civil and epistemic disobedience must necessarily be illegal and condemnable by the state. Undoubtedly, the state has the possibility of criminalizing any attempt at disobedience. But there is room for disobedience that, even if criminalized by the state, sustains itself and with the support of a large part of national and international civil society. Zapatismo, again, is a case worth noting.

As Rita has already mentioned, the state—today across the globe and indeed in South and Central America and the Caribbean—is masculine, patriarchal, white, or

6 Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America. The Colonial Wound and the Decolonial Option*. Barcelona and Buenos Aires: Editorial Gedisa, 2006.

quasi-white in skin but white in mentality. However, patriarchal states can undertake public policies that show signs of a maternal state, as Rita also pointed out, maternal. This characterization is complicated and controversial. The problem lies in the word maternal, which evokes in the listener the idea of matriarchy and the biological fundamentalism that defines “woman” (I use quotation marks because “woman” is a cultural construct that denotes and connotes a specific type of body, although no type of body is essentially and naturally a woman without the culture that determines roles and divides them between “man” and “woman”).

In other words, Rita intuitively pointed out when she referred to the government led by Alberto Fernández in Argentina —since it was the early months and everything was chaotic with the pandemic, the debt, and the opposition supporting the pandemic and the debt—. I sensed that what she suggested hinted at what could be a state (better forms of government) and *matrizticas* (from the Spanish word meaning matrix) cultures, with an “Z.”⁷ Maturana relates the *matriztica* culture to the will to coexist, which, for him, it is the path of democracy. For me, it is the path toward the *communal* since democracy is a word linked to the *nation-state and society*. The concept of *society*, the idea of *society* we owe to Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte. The idea of society transferred to the colonies displaced the communal. It also guaranteed the grouping of human beings in competition with each other and separation from “nature.” The reconstitution of the communal today can only occur in coexistence with society and the state (again, Zapatismo is an example). Within the communal, there is no place for patriarchy since in patriarchy coexistence is difficult if not impossible, especially in the current situation as we see in the opposition in Argentina and in the governments of the United States and Brazil. Today, patriarchy fosters a culture of hatred, hence the need to rebuild and restore cultures of love in the restitution of the communal. The *matríztico*, therefore, must not be confused with the feminine, nor should the patriarchal be confused with the masculine. Thus, *matrízticas* cultures are both necessary and possible because today, monarchical states or patriarchal nation-states are sustained by patriarchal cultures. When I use this word, many of my interlocutors, almost all of them, react as if matristic were matriarchal, just as many people confuse colonialism with coloniality.

This is to say that *the communal* is a horizon of coexistence and respect in the culture of love. It needs to be built, but things start to unfold when we begin to talk about it, and it is already being done. The communal, unlike the *social* in any of its forms, includes

7 I am referring to the school in Santiago de Chile, founded by Humberto Maturana and Ximena Dávila, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kRvZRTpN0Q>

the linkage with all living things, of which the human species is a minuscule part. This is how millions of Indigenous peoples in the Americas, Asia, Oceania, and Africa live and think.

However, the hegemony of the *social*, the drug of consumerism, accumulation, and living to work and possess obscure working to live, share, respect, and cohabitate. It is no longer possible to cohabitate in society; competition and hatred are already rooted; we see it in Argentina, the United States, and Germany, and in the Western promotion of the violence that Hong Kong experienced for a long time before COVID-19. I am not talking about inter-state violence but about the culture of hatred in *civil society* (that is, liberal nomenclature) promoted by the right wing and in the United States and Brazil promoted by their respective states. This is very different from the culture of *dignified rage* that motivates protests against injustice and racism, as it is in the United States because of the assassination of George Floyd.

In short, all these highlight factors to be considered in “intercultural” reflections and behaviors: who, for what, when, and where.

