Learning to Unlearn

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In Chapters 3 to 6, we explored different aspects of the modern/colonial world order, focusing on the coloniality of knowledge and being and, simultaneously, the attempts and decolonial possibilities in which the formation of global political societies and scholarship are engaged. Ethnic (Chapter 3) and gender decolonial formations (Chapter 4) in Central Asia and the Caucasus were followed by a decolonial readings of the complicities in Western imperial imaginary of the concepts of Human(ity) and citizenship. In this closing chapter, we make a case for education, particularly higher education, to engage the Humanities as a branch of learning from the perspective of decoloniality. We further claim that the Humanities shall not be conceived as a branch of knowledge next to Natural and Social Sciences and the professional schools (engineering, law, medicine, business administration) but as the overarching ethical horizon of research and learning. Nevertheless, thus conceived, the Humanities can offer and follow different trajectories. One of them would be the Humanities in line with and dependent on market ideologies of progress, development, capitalist accumulation, and the like. The other, would be more in tune with theology of liberation and liberal ideals of a democratic and just society, without calling into question the basic principles of capitalist economy. And, the third trajectory would be the one we are arguing here: learning to unlearn the previous two hegemonic options and engage in decolonial Humanities. To argue this point, we review
the history of the University in the Western world and take Amawtay Wasi [House of Learning] in Ecuador as a model of learning to unlearn in order to relearn, that is, to engage in decolonial education.

To start with, two kinds of histories of the university as an institution may help us understand the dilemmas now confronting universities all over the world. The Plan Bologna in Europe and the meeting in Davos on the future of the University (Mignolo 2009b) are turning learning into a tool for efficiency and economic development, giving to “learning to manage” the central role in the corporate university. The task of learning to unlearn becomes urgent as far as management and efficiency are the terms of the rhetoric of modernity and progress that conceals the logic of coloniality and domination. For whom are management and efficiency beneficial? In the recent past, the world witnessed or is witnessing two failures of management and efficiency: the invasion of Iraq and the collapse of Wall Street. That route of knowing, the belief under which knowledge is created and argument built, is no longer tenable. To imagine nonmanagerial futures based on the principle of “living well” rather than in efficiency and belief (or make belief) that good management and efficiency bring happiness to all is an ideal that benefits the elite, who put forward the idea and can maintain it through various means (institutions, money, media). We need then to recap the history of higher learning in Western civilization. Since the history of the university has been linked to colonial expansion, since the sixteenth century, and therefore the imperial, learning to unlearn is a decolonial endeavor in two senses: It is necessary to decolonize imperial education and it is of the essence to work toward decolonial education.

Since the European Renaissance and European colonial expansion in the sixteenth century—that is, the foundational moment of the modern/colonial world—the accumulation of money has gone hand in hand with the accumulation of meaning and of knowledge. Today “historical/structural dependency” still structures the world, both economically and epistemically. How did that happen? How was it possible that a local conception of knowledge, grounded on Greek and Roman experiences and categories of thought, become hegemonic through various stages of five centuries of imperial expansion? In what follows, we sketch how that happened, and in the end, we advance some ideas of how to delink from that imperial legacy and engage in epistemic disobedience. Before engaging in this task, we need to identify the logic and the consequences of imperial thinking.

Western categories of thoughts (let us remember, grounded in Greek and Latin and translated into the six modern European imperial languages: Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, German, and English) put any other
category in a double bind: they are either “incorporated” (and their singularity erased) into Western categories (e.g., transforming Hinduism and Buddhism into “religions”) or dismissed and rejected (all economies based on capitalist principles and knowledges that cannot be assimilated to Western normativization of life and subjectivities, from governments to “popular” knowledge, e.g., Vandana Shiva’s report on traditional knowledge of the forest or the administration of water in conditions of water scarcity).

The logic of Western imperial epistemology consists in a meta-discourse that validates itself by disqualifying the difference. That is, it consists of making and remaking the epistemic colonial difference: Barbarian, primitives, Orientals, Indians, Blacks, and so on, are qualified as people “outside” or “behind” who need to be brought in and to the modern present. Modernity then is not a historical epoch but an imperial category of self-validation and disqualification of the epistemic difference. Take philosophy of science, for example. Once these categories of knowledge have been institutionalized in Western scholarship and translated into common sense (or in Western appropriation of Greek and Roman legacies), they become totalitarian, preventing any other kind of knowledge to be recognized at the same level as philosophy and science. Similarly with political theory (democracy) or political economy (capitalism), after the financial crisis of 2008–2009, the main issue in the media and high learning institution was how to save capitalism, not to propose an-other economy (based on reciprocity instead of gain and accumulation that promotes destruction and killing in all forms, from war to food crisis). Learning to unlearn means to delink from the illusion that knowledge in all spheres of life is bound to one set of categories that are both universal and Western.

To start shifting the geopolitics of knowledge, delinking and engage in epistemic disobedience, it is necessary to excavate the foundation of Western categories and principles about the knowledge itself and the values attached to a certain kind of knowledge used to devalue epistemic differences, that is, building and maintaining the epistemic colonial difference that reverts to and complements imperial epistemic differences: Mandarin, Russian and Arabic, to name a few languages spoken by billions of people are not languages epistemically sustainable in the epistemic world order. Knowing how and critical thinking can be found in any community of living organisms that can use their hands to do while thinking and thinking while doing. Knowing how is a matter of surviving and living in community. But with knowing how comes knowing, that, which is the first level of theoretical knowing. If you know how to make shoes, it is not the same as birds knowing how to make a nest. Making shoes implies already a level of doing that goes beyond
living on the basis of what nature gave you, feathers, fur, or renewable leaves. Knowing what projects theoretical knowing that into a level of complexity in which other doings and thinking enter into consideration: Knowing what is the theoretical level that operates in the domain of options. One, perhaps, could say that the Greek breakthrough was to move from knowing that to knowing what and the achievement of Western civilization was to capitalize on it: Theology, philosophy, and sciences are three disciplinary formations responding to the same basic principles on which knowing what has been built. Exploring and unveiling such principles became an urgent task for decolonial humanities in confrontation with the corporate values of management and efficiency. Therefore, decolonial humanities means epistemic disobedience (since critiquing the foundation of Western knowledge accepting Western epistemic rules of the game does not go very far—it remains within an obedient kind of criticism) and delinking. It means learning to unlearn (delinking, epistemic disobedience) in order to relearn (inventing and working out decolonial categories of thought that allow building noncapitalist and nonimperial values and subjectivities.

We say the “humanities,” and not just “the humanists” (as a species distinct from natural scientists and scholars in professional schools) for the reasons stated previously regarding the role of the Humanities and decolonial Humanities. Since all knowledge and understanding is human understanding (from genomics to dance, from electrical engineering to literature, from mathematical models in economy to political economy), every scholar, academic, and scientist has a responsibility toward the humanities; in other words, he or she has critical, ethical, and political responsibilities in the production, dissemination, transformation, and enactment of knowledge. The Humanities can and must do something else in relation to what they have been doing in the past. If the Humanities, since the Renaissance, has contributed enormously to the expansion of the realm of interactions and imaginations of human beings, it was oblivious to what laid out beyond the realm of a regional concept of the Human that was projected as universal. Unfortunately, the achievements in the Humanities were the brighter side that hid from view the Humanity that was being negated. Therefore, the task of decolonial Humanities is to redress the lost balance for which imperial Humanities was responsible. In other words, the Humanities have to be recognized in their contribution to the very idea of Modernity as well as for the creation of its negated side: the idea of the Unhuman.

As we said, the accumulation of money, in the constitution of Europe, the West, or Western civilization, went hand in hand with the accumulation of meaning. The role of imperial Humanities was crucial in this regard. Think
about “museums of natural history,” for example. They are a clear example of
the accumulation of meaning and knowledge; and the “histories” of muse-
ums of natural history parallel those of capitalism and European expansion
all over the globe. Let this serve as a paradigmatic example in the sketching
of two kinds of histories, the proper knowledge of which is beyond my reach
at this point. As I said earlier, I am not interested in history per se, or in cov-
ering all the important details that would satisfy the empiricist scholar, but
in underlining two historical trajectories: first, the linear history of the West-
ern university, and second, the fractured histories of universities in colonial,
Third World, and “emerging countries.”

Redressing the balance in decolonial education, we have the case of
Amawtay Wasi, showing all of us a way out of these two histories, those of
the Western universities and of the West’s colonial surrogates. In describing
colonial universities as “colonial surrogates,” I do not ignore the fact that
universities embedded in colonial histories are centers where critical schol-
ars and intellectuals have emerged and continue to emerge.84 What we say
is that critical scholars, scientists, and intellectuals trained in the universi-
ties of colonial, Third World, or emerging countries do not fail to recognize
their position vis-à-vis Western universities. In fact, the concept of “colonial
surrogates” emerged from my encounters and conversations with critical
scholars, scientists, and intellectuals working in Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina,

In other words: universities, in the Americas since the sixteenth and the
seventeenth centuries, were created and run by Spanish and British immi-
grants and their creole (Anglo and Spanish) descendants. In Russia, the
Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation, higher education and universities
were Western models that displaced, as in other parts of the world, original
schooling, nurturing as if Western universities offered the latest and most
“advanced” model, good for all over the world. Thus, in the history of this
place (America), a group of transplanted Europeans ignored and marginal-
ized indigenous knowledge from Patagonia to Labrador and destroyed the
African memories that the slaves brought with them. They started a type
of institution (the university) and a kind of education that was rooted in
European history since the Middle Ages. The colonial universities both were
and were not European universities; they aspired to be but were not quite.
The colonial difference implied in this relationship explains the long, his-
torical inferiority complex, in both Anglo-and South America, with respect
to Europe. The theory embedded in the creation of the Universidad Inter-
cultural led me to review the history of the university in the Western world
and its links to colonialism—or, better yet, to coloniality. It is argued today
that “colonialism” is no longer a valid description of our “postmodern” era. I argue, however, that although “colonialism” as a system of historical and geographical structures of power may have ended, “coloniality” is alive and well.85 “Global coloniality” is an appropriate description, in my view, of the current restructuring of the colonial patterns (e.g., coloniality) that shaped the modern/colonial world, from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century. “Global coloniality” does not imply a global university but, rather, the reproduction of coloniality at a global scale under neoliberal values and principles of education.

An important chapter in the history of the university in the modern/colonial world (through the different phases of colonial and imperial European and U.S. expansion) was written in the nineteenth century, during the transition from the Renaissance to the Kantian-Humboldtian era, when secular philosophy and science triumphed over Christian theology and rhetoric. The nation-state became the prevailing form of government, displacing despotic political regimes (which reappeared in the twentieth century as different forms of totalitarianism and dictatorship) and the foundation of the modern nation-states in Europe and in modern/colonial states elsewhere. The first wave of “postcolonial” states emerged in the Americas. The colonial Renaissance university, organized around the trivium and the quadrivium in the service of the church and the Crown, gave way to the colonial Kantian-Humboldtian university, organized around philosophy and sciences in the service of the emerging nation-states. However, in the seventeenth century several temporalities coexisted that were not alien to the planetary transformations of the Renaissance university. While, in the Americas, the university was part of the process of decolonization and the construction of colonial nation-states, in South Asia and (North and sub-Saharan) Africa, which were falling under the colonial control of Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy, the Renaissance university did not have the same strong institutional stature.

The university was and still is part of this set of changing processes, which maintains the logic of coloniality through “nation building.” Nation-states are not the end of coloniality; they are simply its restructuring. British education in India in the nineteenth century (Viswanathan 1989), for example, followed a logic similar—although with different content—to the one that organized the study of Latin and rhetoric in Mexico in the sixteenth century: In both cases, the university was crucial to the introduction, and eventual displacement, of existing forms of knowledge that were labeled “traditional” and measured against the “modernity” of secular philosophy in European science. The practice of science in nineteenth-century India86 and the creation of state universities in Latin America (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay,
Brazil) were processes complementary to both nation building and the different temporalities in the restructuring of coloniality of power and knowledge. The difference was that, in Latin America, the new universities, built according to the Kantian-Humboldtian model, coexisted with universities from the colonial/Renaissance period, which entered into a process of radical transformation. In nineteenth-century Latin America, the state universities were linked to the process of nation building, although this occurred in “dependent” countries—or, if you prefer, under conditions of “internal colonialism.” Decolonization meant, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that an elite of “creoles” or “natives” took power and reproduced the patterns implanted by colonial rulers. In this sense, nation-building was a form of colonialism, of internal colonialism. That is, it was a pattern of coloniality in the hands of creoles of Spanish descent or mestizos of Spanish and Indian mixture. The university of the nineteenth century, in British India as well as in Spanish America, followed the Kantian-Humboldtian model of the European university.

The “corporate” university is the type of university that, in industrialized countries, has been displacing the Kantian-Humboldtian tradition since the 1970s. Its exemplar model is the U.S. university (see Wallerstein 1997). In ex–Third World countries, the “model” began to be imposed in the late 1980s but more clearly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The initial manifestations of the newly imposed “quality control” of the faculty as well as of departments and special programs, in Argentina or in Mexico, were the demands that professors publish in refereed journals, account for their research and publications periodically, and so on. Another manifestation has been the progressive deterioration of major state universities and the parallel and complementary divergence between accumulation of money and accumulation of meaning, characteristic of capitalism and Western universities. In Latin America, state universities had been the home of the humanities or the human sciences of critical thinking (sociohistorical, ethical, and political) and, of course, major centers of political upheaval against the various versions of dictatorship. The deterioration of state universities has been mirrored by the proliferation of private “universities,” the majority of which are centers for professional and technical training only. Philosophy and other humanistic disciplines either have a low profile or are not part of the curriculum in the private “universities” emerging in Latin America. They are, so to speak, the latest manifestation of “modernization,” in which local elites see the university as both a business like any other and a sign of “modern” status. A new facet of coloniality manifests itself in the turn that higher education is taking in both developed and emerging countries. Historically, Italy and the
Iberian Peninsula provided the model of the Renaissance university, while Germany and France provided the model of the Enlightenment university, in the tradition of Immanuel Kant and Alexander von Humboldt. Today, the U.S. that is mainly leading the way in the transformation of the latter model into that of the corporate university, a phenomenon that should be seen in the context of other neoliberal developments in Latin America, such as the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and Plan Colombia.89

Let us consider the three moments in the histories of the university and the *temporal* epistemic fractures in its European version then look at the *spatial* epistemic fractures emanating from its colonial version. We also examine spatial epistemic fractures in the emergence of the Universidad Intercultural, which has been led by indigenous intellectuals with the collaboration, of course, of mestizos and Whites. It may be objected that we are trying to cover too much ground in too few pages. Not really, since our goal is not to describe in detail the full history of the European and colonial universities but to highlight three epistemic fractures of the institution. The temporal one fits Michel Foucault’s conceptualization of “epistemic breaks” in the history of Western thought. The other two largely escaped Foucault’s model, at the same time, as they allow for a critique showing the regional limits of his “epistemic breaks.”

One of the spatial fractures, in the Americas, is the history of the colonial university in the hands of Hispano-, Luso-, and Anglophone creoles as well as mestizos, particularly in South America, where the first four major modern/colonial universities were created. By “spatial fractures,” we mean that the colonial university (in its Renaissance, Kantian-Humboldtian, and corporate versions) was always coeval with and dependent on the metropolitan university, while at the same time disrupting the memories of the colonies. It was not the same thing to read Aristotle in Salamanca or Paris as in Mexico City/Tenochtitlan or Cuzco. Similarly, it was a different experience to read Rousseau in Paris than to read him in Nigeria or Bolivia in the middle of the nineteenth century. In contrast to the Renaissance and (Kantian-Humboldtian) Enlightenment universities, which generated two colonial fractures (one when the university was at the service of the monarchy and church and the other when it served the metropolitan or colonial state), and to the corporate university, which expanded and introduced a new set of values over the state university (both in the metropolis and in the ex-colonies or independent states), Amawtay Wasi, the Universidad Intercultural de las Nacionalidades y los Pueblos Indígenas, introduced a fracture of a different kind. For the first time in the history of the modern/colonial world, a university was created whose epistemic foundation (e.g., the principles and
the type of knowledge) was no longer that of the European Renaissance university and its medieval and classical (Greek) foundations. The foundation of the Universidad Intercultural is not Greece but the Tawantinsuyu. “What is that?” you may ask. If you indeed asked yourself this question, that is the point I am trying to make, since you would not have asked it if I referred to Ancient Greek society and cosmology or to the Greek polis, doxa, and episteme (“Tawantinsuyu” is the Quichua word for “the Four Territories,” a map of the world for the Inca Empire; Barja 2001). Of course, Western knowledge and civilization is part of the curriculum of the Universidad Intercultural. It will be duly “included” and processed. The radical difference here is that we are talking about the “inclusion” of Western civilization within a curriculum grounded in indigenous philosophy and not about the “inclusion” of indigenous knowledge within the state (and corporate) university, whose foundations remain in the Renaissance and the Enlightenment types of universities.

The history of the European university since the Renaissance has been framed as part of the larger macro-narrative of Western civilization. In this narrative, history originated in Greece, spread through the northwest of the Mediterranean, then crossed the Atlantic to culminate in the U.S. Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” is as good an example as any other in rehearsing such macro-narratives, although he mainly covers the twentieth century. In this framework, the university is an invention of the Middle Ages, of the High and Late Middle Ages around the twelfth century, to be more precise. The creation of the university as an institution was the culmination of a process of scholastic learning. There were continuities, writes Marcia Colish (1997), linking the revival of speculation in the eleventh century with the interests and methods of masters and cathedral schools and universities in the twelfth century and after. One of the major links was the belief and the confidence that reason could shed light on any subject and that the increasing use of logic and semantics would take medieval philosophy well beyond its classical roots (Colish 1997: 266). Since the university, today, is rooted in a tradition of learning originating from monastic and cathedral schools, the university is complicit with both philosophical universalism and Christianity. The mottoes of many universities, inscribed on their official seals in Latin, with that language’s corresponding legacy in the conceptualization of knowledge, is an obvious reminder. Latin was not only the language of learning; it was also the language of power. Previously, Arabic and Hebrew had been pushed out of the temples of learning in favor of Greek, which supported a Greco-Latin tradition in learning parallel to the Judeo-Christian tradition in religion. These centuries-old epistemic power struggles have clear ramifications in the history of Israel, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,
as well as, of course, for the most recent history of colonialism, from the
British Empire to U.S. imperialism. The medieval university, in other words,
laid the foundation for the geopolitics of knowledge under whose hegemony
much of the world still lives.

In the university of the European Renaissance scholastic learning was
displaced by humanistic learning. Accordingly, the role and profile of the
humanist replaced that of the *scriptor* and *notarius* as well as new roles that
had emerged in the twelfth century, the *magister* and the *grammaticus* (Gil
Fernández 1981: 231–428). At the top of the pyramid were theologians and
the “masters” of the law. The names they received at the time were *literaratus*
and *jurisperitus*. The appearance of these social actors in the Middle Ages is
linked to “the emergence of written culture” (Stock 1983: 30–88). In the late
Renaissance, the towering symbolic image of the humanist, the Renaissance
man, cut across the redistribution of knowledge in jurisprudence, political
philosophy, history, grammar, rhetoric, poetics (or literature, as we say since
the Enlightenment), mathematics, music, and dialectics. Latin was still the
master language, and the *trivium* and the *quadrivium* remained as a general
frame for the organization of knowledge.

But an *extraordinary* series of events intervened in the history of the
Renaissance. And here is where the second kind of history begins. The out-
of-the-ordinary event I refer to is the colonization of the New World and the
creation of New World universities. The colonial university, in the Americas,
had a function different from that of the European Renaissance university.
It had a mission that was clearly “out of place”; that is, the university in the
New World did not have the medieval university’s burden of the past (hence,
the temporal epistemic fracture). It had the burden of the present, since it was
implanting itself over the institutions devoted to education in the Aztec and
Inca “empires,” as well as over the remains of Mayan knowledge in astronomy
and mathematics (hence, the spatial epistemic fracture). The colonial univer-
sity was a university without history, so to speak, a university out of place,
since it did not include the educational tradition of the Aztecs but did include
that of the Greeks and Romans. Nahuatl, in other words, was not considered
as valuable as Greek and Latin. Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies
neither corresponded to the history of the West nor were recognized by the
missionaries and men of letters who founded the Universidad de México and
the Universidad de San Marcos in Lima, Peru. The model of the Renaissance
university, on the contrary, contributed to the eradication of the Aztecs’ and
Incas’ educational institutions and the displacement and subalternization of
their ways of knowing. Inca and Aztec knowledges, in the minds of mission-
aries and men of letters, were dictates of the devil and consequently should
be eradicated. What the Spaniards called the “extirpation of idolatry” was in fact an epistemic lobotomy. The mission of the Universidad Intercultural is precisely to ground itself in the knowledge tradition that was marginalized and disrupted by the installation of the colonial/Renaissance university in the New World. But, of course, the mission of the Universidad Intercultural is not a recuperation of ancient knowledge but its reactivation in the process of appropriating Western technical contributions, although not Western values of education, which are increasingly complicit with capitalism.

The second spatial epistemic fracture is harder to understand. To some, it may sound “New Age” or “new Rousseauian.” Those who think thus may be limited by the very frontiers of “modernity” that allowed for the successful invention of “traditions” to bolster the epistemic position of “modernity.” Other skeptics may not know that the Universidad Intercultural is a political project—as were the Renaissance and Kantian-Humboldtian universities—grounded in many years of indigenous social movements and emerging from the 1987 reform of the Ecuadorian constitution. Still other doubters will remain unconvinced because they cannot accept that indigenous people and people of African descent can meet their own needs instead of waiting for the Whites and mestizos in power to generously offer what they—as inferior people—need. In other words, one of the difficulties in truly understanding the radical nature of the project, of the Universidad Intercultural, is coming to terms with the fact that there are other forms of knowledge (beyond the Western tradition) that are equally valid. One of the impediments to overcoming the blindness of the ideology of modernity and modernization is understanding that the great intellectual and scientific achievements of the West are indeed great achievements, but that, at the same time, there is no reason why the rest of the world has to bend to them. Linked to the need to uncouple the recognition of achievements from imperial motivations is the fact that the complicity between the accumulation of money and the accumulation of meaning (knowledge) are two sides of the same coin. “Knowledge,” in the prevailing view, is still conceived of as, above all, a kind of materiality and geopolitics available to everyone, regardless of sex and sexuality, color, belief, or the part of the world where one was born, grew up, and went to school and the university.

The “conquest” of America meant the demolition of indigenous educational and economic systems. Universities in the New World were located in the land of people whose languages and histories bore no relationship to either Greek and Latin or Arabic and Hebrew. In sixteenth-century Mexico, a very interesting and intense effort was made to teach Latin to the Nahuatl-speaking Indians. The Crown soon came to believe that this was a risky
proposition (since indigenous people might use what they learned against the Spanish institution for their own liberation), and by the seventeenth century, teaching Latin to the Indians was a forgotten episode of the early stage of colonization. Frederick Douglass told a similar story, later on, in the context of African slaves’ relationships with their masters in the U.S. There is here a “discontinuity of the classical tradition” (Mignolo 1992), a discontinuity that can be attributed to colonialism (Mignolo 1995, 2000), which I identified as one of the two spatial epistemic fractures. The second, and radically different, fracture is the Universidad Intercultural. Before going into more detail about the Universidad Intercultural, let us look at the internal colonial transformation of the colonial Renaissance university into the colonial Enlightenment one, that is, at the first temporal epistemic fracture in the history of the university within Western civilization. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, secularization and the French Revolution, together with a redistribution and reconceptualization of knowledge, led to the emergence of what is known in the history of learning as the Kantian-Humboldtian university, that is, the university at the service of the emerging nation-states. The nineteenth century witnessed the birth of the social sciences—required by the need to organize government and civil society—and also the consolidation of political economy. Wilhelm Dilthey, at the end of the nineteenth century, conceptualized the distinction between the natural and the human sciences, between the nomothetic and the ideographic forms of knowledge, between explanation and understanding. Knowledge of nature became detached from knowledge of society and of human beings. Such a conception of knowledge is alien to the indigenous histories in the Americas, as well as to concepts of knowledge and understanding beyond European modernity. The transition, across the Americas, from the colonial to the national period implied the transformation of both the colonial Renaissance university into the colonial Kantian-Humboldtian university and the colonial provinces into nation-states. The colonial elites that controlled the economy, the church, and the government were not bourgeois elites, as in Europe. There were significant differences between the Anglo- and Spanish-American revolutionary elites; in both cases, however, coloniality was a physically invisible but always present force among the creoles in both Anglo-and Spanish America.

While this transformation was under way in the Americas, the British in India were beginning their version of a process that the Spanish and Portuguese had started in the “New World” almost three centuries earlier and the Anglo-Americans a century after that with the foundation of Harvard and other early universities in what would become the U.S. (see Viswana-
than 1989, Prakash 2000, Gortari 1979, and Jardine 1999). A similar process would unfold in the nineteenth century in other places in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean, where the British and French Empires extended their colonial administration. These processes were part of the second modernity, the Enlightenment. In the ex-colonies, the story evolved somewhat differently depending on whether the metropole was Spain, Portugal, France, or England. Between 1776 and 1831, approximately, these colonies became independent from their former masters and began the process of building themselves into nations. The colonial Renaissance university founded in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries had to transform itself under new social demands and a New World order. New universities were created. The University of North Carolina, the first state university in the U.S., was chartered in 1789 and opened its doors in 1795. The point here is that, while the model of the Kantian-Humboldtian university was that of higher education under new forms of colonialism, in the emerging nation-states of the Americas, the same type of university began to replace the model established during the Renaissance. But, of course, the process in the Americas, particularly in South or Latin America, was not the same as the process in Europe. Europe and the Americas were separated by the colonial difference (“the colonial difference” meaning not only that people in the colonies are “different” but that they are “inferior” and need to be “civilized,” “modernized,” or “developed”), a difference that is in place today, although their histories have followed divergent paths. The university, in other words, played a fundamental role in nation building. However, while for England and France, and of course for Germany, nation-building was part of Western expansion and the civilizing mission in the Americas, it was linked to nation building and the articulation of a new form of colonialism, “internal colonialism.” In India, as well as other places in Asia and Africa, the university was instead part of the colonial regime. This was also the period in which philology, in the European universities, contributed to the creation of the idea and the images of the “Orient,” as well as the idea of the “South” of Europe (e.g., see Dainotto 2000). The Kantian-Humboldtian university was, in other words, the university in what Hegel labeled as “the heart of Europe” (Germany, England, and France), while the Renaissance university was, mainly, the university in what became the “South” (Italy, Spain, Portugal).

And now, at the intersection of the two histories (the colonial and the modern), we come to the period after World War II. The U.S. started to assume the role played until then by England, France, and Germany. This was the era of the Cold War and the Cold War university (Wallerstein 1997), the era in which the social sciences, in the U.S., gained preeminence over the
humanities. It was also the era of decolonization in Asia and in Africa, and the era of the Cuban revolution and dictatorship in various Latin American countries. The social sciences in the U.S. were associated with the materialization of “area studies.” Even if there were conflicts between those who defended the purity and rigor of the disciplines and those who became experts in the “content” of certain areas, the fact remains that “area studies” was an affair of the social sciences as much as “Orientalism” was an affair of the humanities. It was also the heyday of the social sciences in the sense that they were part of the project of the “development and modernization” of the Third World. In Latin America, the social sciences are a recent addition. Although there were cátedras of sociology before 1950, the social sciences as a branch of knowledge were introduced in or after the late 1950s. Interestingly enough, the report of the Gulbenkian Foundation, *Open the Social Sciences* (Wallerstein et al. 1996), emphasized the crisis of these disciplines not only in the “central countries,” where they were born and prospered, but also in the Third World. The “Gulbenkian report” was followed by thirteen small volumes in which the future of the social sciences in various regions of the former Third World was discussed.

But, this was also the period when the corporate university began to displace the Kantian-Humboldtian model. The more technologically oriented social sciences (economics, political science, and sociology) remained the exemplars of rigorous and useful knowledge, while the humanities and the interpretive social sciences (history, cultural anthropology, and interpretive sociology) lost their previous standing in the hierarchy of efficient knowledge required by corporate values associated with knowledge. The consequences of the corporate university’s emergence became apparent after the end of the Cold War. In the former Third World, including Latin America, the principles of “excellence” and “efficiency” became guiding tenets of knowledge production. Parallel to these processes, the large state universities in various Latin American countries started a process of disintegration (see Chomsky et al. 1997 and North American Congress on Latin America 2000). The *fuga de cerebros*, or “brain drain,” accelerated in various countries, as well-regarded intellectuals, scholars, and scientists migrated to Europe and the U.S. Scientists in former Third-World nations also voiced their discomfort with the deprived and meager conditions under which they had to do their jobs. The “network society” (i.e., the world society connected through the internet more than by means of transportation), as Catalan sociologist Manuel Castells calls it, does not have the same intensity in the South as in the North. Until 1996 or so, Africa and Latin America were not yet on the map of this society. “Excellence” and “efficiency” turned against the scientific
and scholarly production of the Third World. And, once again, the possibilities for technological expansion have been restricted by the demands and expectations of economic designs.

The preceding story is a blueprint of two kinds of histories of the university. However, we are often reminded of the canonical names in the history of Western thought (Diderot, Smith, Marx, Freud) but not of those whose intellectual production was part of the canon not of “modernity” but of “coloniality.” A few examples of the latter are Guamán Poma in Peru (in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries), Mohandas Gandhi in India, Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon in the Caribbean, Nelson Mandela in South Africa, and Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas in Mexico. In all these cases, the production and transformation of knowledge and understanding was not restricted to the university.

Here are the issues from the previous narrative that I consider relevant to our discussion:

1. Our main thesis is that the history of capitalism runs parallel to the history of knowledge. Also, an implicit distribution of values and labor places knowledge in relation to nature. Asia, Africa, and Latin America became the providers of “natural” resources to be processed in the countries in which the Industrial Revolution took place and prospered. These three continents were also placed in the role of providing information and culture but not knowledge. Or, the knowledge produced in the regions that were either colonized or remained outside the scope of colonial expansion was considered relevant only in and for those regions. The situation today is not radically different from the one that began to unfold five hundred years ago, when the Renaissance university was transplanted to the New World. Of course, since then, numerous “nation-states” have been considered “developing countries.” Universities are institutions that depend, today more than ever, on the economy. Thus, in “developing countries” one can surmise that we also have “developing universities.” There is not yet a transnational institution for higher education with the function that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund perform in relation to the state in developing countries. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) may be the closest we can get to a transnational institution related to research and education.

2. The histories, as I have told them, imply a relation of “dependency” that is not just economic but also epistemic (that is, cultural, intellectual, scientific in a larger sense of the word, and technological, as well
as related to the natural and social sciences) and manifests itself at the level of the disciplines. This was one of the concerns of the Gulbenkian report. Dipesh Chakrabarty, a South Asian historian now teaching at the University of Chicago, noted the particular kind of epistemic dependency in the domain of history as a discipline. Chakrabarty remarks that the “history” of the Third World cannot be written on “its own,” since history (as a discipline) is a European invention. Consequently, the history of the world “depends” on European history. In this regard, Chakrabarty (2000) underscores that, while European historians do not need to quote, mention, or take into account the history of India when they write the history of Europe, Indian historians cannot write their own history without taking into account European history. My own understanding of “epistemic dependency” runs parallel to economic dependency and touches all areas of knowledge, as I suggested earlier in describing colonialism as disruption of the epistemic and economic organization in the Andes and Mesoamerica. You may be thinking that I ignore the fact that “dependency theory” has been harshly criticized. But, I am aware of that. However, just because “dependency theory” has been criticized and because “dependency” does not “depend”—so to speak—on the evil designs of foreign capitals (only), it does not follow, necessarily, that we should not think in terms of “dependency.” How else can one describe the situation of Argentina today? As I finished an earlier version of this essay, Eduardo Duhalde was the president and the Argentine crisis seemed to be hitting bottom. It would be difficult to ignore that, while the “financial dependency” of Argentina on the IMF and the government of the U.S. is not the only explanation for the crisis, “structural interstate dependency” is a foundational factor of capitalism at the international level. Capitalism functions not only by exploiting the labor of individual workers but by taking advantage of interstate export and import, natural resources in “Third World” countries (oil, for example), and financial flows of capital and interest.

3. If the map I just traced has a grain of truth, what then are the needs and possibilities for interuniversity cooperation, given the framework of the corporate university and the need to think in terms of international and interdisciplinary relations and cooperation? To address these questions, we need to remember that, while the Kantian-Humboldtian university was linked to nation building, the corporate university appeared at a time when certain nation-states are being rendered less and less relevant. That is, the corporate university is linked to a
global and, in a certain sense, postnational era. How are the conditions of knowledge production changing today in terms of the invention of new tools (e.g., the internet and other technologies that are opening up new avenues for the production and distribution of knowledge traditionally supported by the book)? How are these changes challenging and perhaps making obsolete the conceptualization of knowledge we inherited from the Kantian-Humboldtian university (natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities)? And, what would be the humanities’ role in the response of the corporate university to the needs of globalization?

The story is not over yet, however: a crucial chapter—the second spatial epistemic fracture (that is, a fracture from the European legacy as well as from the creole/mestizo colonial version of that legacy)—began to unfold with the creation in Ecuador of Amawtay Wasi. This university, conceived from the perspective of indigenous knowledge but not for indigenous people only, constitutes a reversal, but not an opposition, of and to the history of the university in the Western world and its colonies that I outlined previously. From the perspective of the European university, whether in its Renaissance or Enlightenment model, whether in Europe or in the colonies, indigenous knowledge was, at best, an interesting object of study, but never part of what was considered true, sustainable, or generative knowledge. The project of Amawtay Wasi radically reverses these relations. However, while, in the European model of the university in Europe and the colonies, indigenous knowledge was an object of study, from the perspective of Amawtay Wasi, modern (Western) knowledge is incorporated as sustainable and generative knowledge. This is a paradigmatic example, in my view, of the epistemic potential of border thinking. From the perspective of subaltern knowledges, all knowledge and understanding is potentially sustainable and generative, while from the perspective of Western hegemonic knowledge, the only generative and sustainable knowledge is founded on the canon of Western thought and scholarship.

Let me address first, then, the notion of “interculturalidad” as the indigenous intellectuals leading the project and the implementation of the Universidad Intercultural are using the term. “Interculturalidad” refers not to the universality of certain phenomena but, rather, to the singularity of the perspective from which intercultural (epistemic, political, ethical) relations are being conceived. We should dispel from the outset the suspicion that “interculturalidad” is just another name for what in the U.S. is called “multiculturalidad” (in Spanish) or “multiculturalism” (in English). To avoid mis-
understanding and false alarms, it should be said first that the meanings of “interculturalidad” and “multiculturalism” are similar when used in the discourse of the state. The differences are historical. That is, they lie in how multiculturalism and *interculturalidad*, as seen from the perspective of the state, have been formed.

Multiculturalism is, in the U.S., an updated version of the “melting pot.” Both terms have been prompted by massive immigration transforming the U.S. society. However, the “melting pot” refers to a society transformed by European immigration at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, while “multiculturalism” refers to a society transformed by massive migration from the Third World and by the internal transformation prompted by the Civil Rights movement at the end of the 1960s. The differences between “multiculturalism” in the U.S. and “interculturalidad” used from the perspective of the state in Ecuador or Bolivia are based on the configuration of the ethnoracial maps in those countries.

In the U.S., the first three sides of the ethnoracial pentagon were formed by the colonial history of Native Americans, African slaves, and European Protestant Whites. To this basis was added the largely Catholic and Jewish European immigration of the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. The fifth side of the pentagon has been added since 1970, with the extensive immigration from the Third World. This is the point at which the “melting pot” has transformed into “multiculturalism.” Furthermore, with the sudden “visibility” of Muslim Americans since 9/11, it has become clear that the pentagon is being transformed by public immigration-control policy into an ethnoracial hexagon.

In Ecuador, and more generally in the Andean region of Latin America, the ethnoracial foundation was laid out by the Indians, that is, the population under the administration of the Inca Empire, and by the Spaniards. Creoles/mestizos, that is, people of Spanish (or European) descent (mixed with “Indian blood”), became the third component of the ethnoracial configuration. Later on, with the end of slavery, the Afro population that was concentrated mainly in the Caribbean began to migrate to other areas of Latin America, chiefly to the west of modern Colombia and Ecuador. The European immigration of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries did not greatly affect the ethnoracial composition of Ecuador. The bottom line is, then, that Indians (about thirty-five distinct groups) form 40 percent of the country’s population, estimated at around twelve million. Mestizos constitute another 40 percent. People of Spanish descent, that is nonmestizos, are calculated to be 15 percent, and people of African descent make up the remaining 5 percent. The meaning of *interculturalidad* should be understood
in this context. Moreover, it should be remembered that the Indian population has a strong organization, the Confederación Nacional de Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE) and that its representatives have occupied and continue to occupy important positions in the government. There are thirty-three cities, at this writing, governed by indigenous leaders, and many indigenous people have been members of the Congress; an indigenous woman, Nina Pacari, was vice president of the Congress until recently (Consejo Nacional de Cultura del Ecuador 2000). Luis Alberto Macas, a lawyer by training, was very influential in the foundation of the CONAIE and is currently director of the Instituto Científico de Culturas Indígenas, or ICCI-Rimmai. He is also the leading figure in the instrumentation of the Universidad Intercultural.90

The government conceives of interculturalidad as a generous move toward the inclusion, in education as well as in other spheres of life, of the population that has not been included during the long years of nation building and creole/mestizo concentration of power. The university in Ecuador, state or private, complemented the construction of the nation-state, which, in Ecuador as in any other country in Latin America, North America, or Europe, is a uninaltional state. However, from the indigenous perspective, the Universidad Intercultural should lead toward a plurinational state. The aims and goals of the Universidad Intercultural, from the perspective of the indigenous people, are not the same as the goals and principles of the creoles/mestizos who created the nineteenth-century university in Ecuador on the European Kantian-Humboldtian model.

The Universidad Intercultural is not framed on a “campus” but disseminated throughout the country, among the communities, like a net. The nodes of the net are mainly in areas with high concentrations of indigenous population. However, the university is for everybody and not for indigenous people only.

All the degrees that the university offers are named in Quichua. The official language of all universities in Spanish America is (still) Spanish, although the colonial languages of the second modernity (English, French, and German) are, in relation to Spanish, what Spanish is to Aymara. That is, “valuable” knowledge nowadays is produced in English, French, or German, not Spanish. There are significant grammatical (not to mention historical) differences among these languages, but it is still “easier” to translate between Spanish and German than between Quichua and Spanish or German. By the same token, translation between Quichua and Aymara or Nahuatl is easier than translation between any of these languages and German or Spanish, and so on. As one example of the difficulty, for a speaker of modern European languages, the future is “in front” of the speaker, thus the possibility and the importance of the idea of “progress.” For Quichua or Aymara speakers, the
future is “behind,” because it cannot be seen. The past can be remembered and therefore “seen”; it is thus “in front” of you, hence the difficulty among Quichua or Aymara speakers of naturally inventing an idea like “progress.”

Let’s give an example from the organization of graduate studies. The name of the program is “Amautai,” amauta meaning a person of wisdom in ancient Quichua and Aymara. The program is composed of cycles: “Amautai Kallari” (general wisdom, first cycle) and “Sumak Amautai” (particularized wisdom, second cycle, equivalent to the PhD). The first focuses on specific knowledges, either practical or reflexive. The second is devoted to the process of researching and writing the doctoral dissertation. The two cycles are linked through the axis of “communitarian practice” in the sense that, while preparing the doctoral dissertation, the candidate has to do work in the community. The other two cycles are “Runa Yachaikuna” (cycle of indigenous sciences) and “Shuktak Yachaikuna” (cycle of universal sciences). The second is seen as “complementary” to the indigenous sciences that are the main component of the curriculum. The first cycle, “Runa Yachaikuna,” has as its main objective “to socialize indigenous knowledge to allow the students to consolidate their identity and to strengthen their self-valorization. That is, the goal is to allow student learning to be” (Boletín ICCI-RIMAI 2000: 53).

Tinku is an Aymara-Quichua word meaning a conflict of power, contrary as well as contradictory, a dialogue of feelings as well as a conceptual struggle, a dialogue of experiences and conceptions of life. Tinku alludes to physical as well as conceptual encounters that are embedded in the history of colonialism and, certainly, in the installation and survival of the Renaissance and Kantian-Humboldtian universities in the history of (Latin) America. The very conceptualization of the Universidad Intercultural is redirecting the future, and changing the path of history. It is a tinku, but now one performed by indigenous agents instead of one performed on them, as was the case with the Renaissance and Kantian-Humboldtian universities. The Universidad Intercultural opens up a wide range of opportunities but, above all, it makes possible an education from the perspective of those knowledges that have been subordinated and displaced in the history of the Western and colonial universities, from the Renaissance university to the corporate one. At this juncture I see two types of university for the future, and a wide range of possibility in between. I say “two types” and not “two universities.” Each type may have a variety of manifestations, but there is a “difference” between the two types that cannot be transcended without serious negotiation. That difference is “the colonial difference,” which has been historically articulated in a wide array of configurations, through the diversity of colonial experiences. The two “types” of possibilities I see are the following. At one extreme is the potential of improving the university within the neoliberal ideals of civiliza-
tion and democracy. That is, a society in which democracy is managed from above, by “skillful and efficient managers,” and in which 30 percent of the population enjoys prosperity and the remaining 70 percent is left out of the social order. At the other extreme is the promise offered by the Universidad Intercultural as a model reproducible around the world. This type of university is guided by the ideal of a “critical cosmopolitanism,” that is, an education whose final goal is to generate, simultaneously with positive knowledge (medicine, law, economy, technology), a critical understanding that balances “efficiency” and “justice,” “development” and “democracy,” “freedom,” and “violence to defend freedom,” and so on.

The role of the humanities in the corporate university is larger than the role it may play within one history, that of the modern (European) university. The critical role of the humanities should be involved with the critical legacies within the colonial university and the radical transformation being enacted by projects like the Universidad Intercultural. At this point, the humanities cease to be the “humanities” of the European tradition and its colonial legacies. They become something else, a space of “border thinking” and political transformation in which the Western contribution to universal knowledge is only one, as important as any other, but regional, not itself universal. And in the same way that the Western and modern epistemology and its institution, the university, built itself by absorbing and integrating other legacies (e.g., Arabic epistemology, so crucial to European modernity), the myriad subaltern knowledges around the world are a living example that Western legacies survive by dying in the womb of those knowledges that modernity itself had to subdue in order to survive as modernity. The next step in the transformation toward a better world, where knowledge no longer is controlled by corporations and imperial states and the uni-versity becomes a pluri-versity, can no longer emanate from Western modernity. The incomplete project of modernity can no longer be completed by and from the ideals under which European modernity was built. Modernity belongs to the planet, and it is up to the rest of the planet to complete the project that European modernity can no longer finish. The total collapse of morality and expertise that we have been witnessing with Enron, WorldCom, the Catholic Church, the IMF in Russia, Turkey, and Argentina, and the silent secrecy of the Pentagon and the CIA vis-à-vis 9/11 are all signs of the limits of Euro-American modernity. More than the accumulation of knowledge and an information superhighway, what is valid are new principles of understanding. In that regard, Western humanities can join forces with the reacti-vated subaltern knowledges in the modern/colonial world, as the example of Amawtay Wasi illustrates.