

PROGRESS AS BARBARISM

EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE AND PHILOSOPHICIDE OF THE WEST AGAINST INDIGENOUS COSMO-SPIRITUALITIES

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Abstract

In the paper, the author subjects the narrative of “interculturality” to a critique from an intercultural perspective, invoking the critical potential of Intercultural Philosophy in contrast to a culturalist “interculturality” light. The background of this analysis is the epistemic violence exercised by the West in the fields of knowledge, science, and education. This violence is particularly noticeable in the case of philosophy, leading to a sort of “philosophical homicide” (philosophicide) with respect to indigenous

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philosophies, such as the Andean one in the case of *Abya Yala*. The paper concludes with some guidelines for the challenges that a critical Intercultural Philosophy must face in the 21st century.

Keywords: intercultural philosophy, Andean philosophy, epistemicide, *Abya Yala*, philosophicide.

Napredek kot barbarstvo. Epistemično nasilje in filozoficid Zahoda nad domorodnimi kozmo-duhovnostmi

Povzetek

Avtor v prispevku kritično obravnava narativ »medkulturnosti« iz medkulturne perspektive, pri čemer se sklicuje na kritični potencial Medkulturne Filozofije v nasprotju s kulturalistično opcijo »medkulturnosti«. Podlago analize tvori epistemično nasilje, ki ga izvaja Zahod na področju znanja, znanosti in izobraževanja. To nasilje je še posebej opazno na področju filozofije, saj vodi v nekakšen »filozofski homicid« (filozoficid) v razmerju do domorodnih filozofij, kakršna je v primeru *Abya Yala* recimo andska. Članek se zaključi z nekaterimi smernicami glede izzivov, s katerimi se mora soočiti kritična Medkulturna Filozofija v 21. stoletju.

Ključne besede: medkulturna filozofija, andska filozofija, epistemicid, *Abya Yala*, filozoficid.

In his 1961 work *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Levinas warns in the “Introduction” that it is of utmost importance to be very careful not to “become the useful fool of morality.”¹ What the philosopher of human ethics par excellence says about “morality,” Intercultural Philosophy² can say about “culture”: that we should not be the useful fools of intercultural discourse, proposing and doing philosophy in an intercultural way. After more than thirty years of efforts, Intercultural Philosophy—like so many emancipatory and progressive currents—is facing the possibility of a “kidnapping” not only by the postmodern “culturalist” philosophy, but also by neo-liberal capitalism itself, which has “discovered” interculturality as a vein of “universal” knowledge to be exploited and appropriated.

What happened despite Levinas’s warning with the “ethical”—the absorption of the ethical dimension by the economy—and what is happening today with “ecology” and “sustainability,” is also about to happen with the “intercultural.” The media and digital mega-machine of capitalist neoliberalism seek to absorb the initially critical concept of “interculturality” for the purposes of marketing and globalization of the Western model of knowledge and power. In doing so, it is not much concerned with the subtle differences between “multiculturalism” and “interculturality,” like, for example, the slogans of the fashion company Benetton (*United Colors of Benetton*) or the transnational company Coca-Cola (*Be Open Like Never Before*) suggest. The “intercultural” narrative (in a postmodern sense) has become fashionable.

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1. Recovering the critical and anti-systemic potential of interculturality

Intercultural Philosophy emerged in Latin America as a continuation and creative renewal of the Philosophy of Liberation, considering the “hermeneutic turn” in the wake of the Fifth Centenary of the Conquest in 1992. In other

1 The French original is entitled *Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* and was published in 1961 by Nijhoff editor in The Hague. The English translation was published in 1977. The quote in the French language reads: “qu’il importe au plus haut point de savoir si l’on n’est pas dupe de la morale.”

2 I put the term in capital letters, in order to indicate that it is a recognized and established trend, although it has different “schools” and strands.

parts of the world, Intercultural Philosophy has had other antecedents, such as, e.g., in India “Subaltern Studies,” in Europe Comparative Philosophy, and in the USA Postmodern Theories. Although different strands of intercultural thinking have intersected over the last thirty years, two main “paradigms” or currents of Intercultural Philosophy can be discerned. One is based on the idea of “diversity” and strongly raises the issue of “identity,” in an exercise of comparison between different philosophical traditions.³ The other is based on the real “asymmetry” between cultures as an expression of inequalities and injustices at the global level.

Due to the global constellation of economic, political, and symbolic power relations (media, marketing), the first paradigm is becoming increasingly dominant in the fields of aesthetics, politics, and the sciences of symbolic representation (ethnology, theology, religious sciences, art, etc.). The result is often an absorption of the critical and emancipatory potential by the “global” monoculture itself; the criticism and opposition against this was precisely the reason for the emergence of the theme of “interculturality.” It is no coincidence that in political debates, the “intercultural” discourse is often reduced to a discourse on multiculturalism and its challenges in migrant-receiving countries.

For Intercultural Philosophy not to become “the useful fool” of multiculturalism and of a postmodern aesthetic of *anything goes*, it is essential to recover the critical and anti-systemic potential of the theme of “interculturality.” And this implies betting on the second paradigm of Intercultural Philosophy that has been cultivated above all—but not exclusively—in Latin America, that is to say, an interculturality in the emancipatory, liberating, and critical perspective. With this option, Intercultural Philosophy clearly distances itself from a postmodernity *light* and bets more on transmodernity as well as the possibility of maintaining and deepening the discourse of “justice” and “inclusion,” despite being part of a “meta-narrative” that has been delegitimized by a large part of the Academy.⁴

3 The “classical” work on this paradigm is: Mall 1995. Cf. also Yousefi 2005.

4 Enrique Dussel introduced the concept of transmodernity as a liberating alternative

This return or recovery implies, at the same time, a broadening or deepening in two senses. It must include the “decolonial” discourse as a transcendental analytical moment for the 21st century, on the one hand, and it must establish true and symmetrical dialogues with indigenous philosophies and knowledge, on the other hand. This does not mean abandoning the path taken by Liberation Philosophy or the analysis of power and dependency as proposed by Dependency Theory or Marxism. On the contrary, it is an extension of the socio-political and economic critique to the level of symbolic representation and epistemologies (knowledge production). Ongoing neoliberal globalization broadly repeats the mechanisms of European colonialism of Western Modernity, only in a more subtle and less martial form, but no less effective and devastating for “dependent” societies and cultures. Such “neo-colonialisms” in epistemic, symbolic, and media perspective forms the “ideological” foundation for actual (neo-)colonization in terms of economic, political, and military power.

However, care must be taken not to embrace decolonial and post-colonial theories without qualms, as if they hold the key to critical interculturality. With regard to the question of the critique of colonial and neo-colonial structures and moments, we can also see two quite distinct strands. The watershed is practically the same as in the case of “interculturality”: there is an Anglo-Saxon-European tradition that speaks of “postcolonial studies,” and there is a Latin American tradition that speaks more in terms of “decolonial studies,” “decoloniality,” and the “decolonial.” Although it may seem a matter of label and nomenclature, it is much more than this.

“Postcolonial Studies” emerged in contexts of recent formal political decolonization, such as in India, and are based on “Subaltern Studies” (Gayatri Spivak); the postcolonial thinker *avant la lettre* is the Palestinian Edward Said

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to the Western (European-US-American) concept of postmodernity. For Dussel and Liberation Philosophy, the “transmodern” recovers the critical potential of Modernity (e.g., the Enlightenment), in order to criticize, at the same time, also the “colonial” excesses of this Modernity. In this sense, the transmodern is based on the “meta-narrative” of justice and humanity, against a relativism of ethical indifference. Cf. Dussel 2003. Decolonial theories have taken up the concept of transmodernity. Cf. Mignolo 2000. The concept of “transmodernity” was first coined by the Spanish philosopher Rosa María Rodríguez Magda in her book *La sonrisa de Saturno* (Rodríguez 1989).

with his 1978 work *Orientalism*,⁵ which opened the debate on Eurocentrism and the perception of the “other” by a dominant Western civilization. Through Indian thinkers (Guha, Spivak, Bhabha), Postcolonial Studies spread to the United States and Europe (Stuart Hall) and had a strong impact on literary criticism, sociology, and anthropology. Postcolonial Studies do not refer only to the phase of (political) decolonization, although the term “postcolonial” was initially used in this sense, but must be placed in the context of (European) postmodernism and poststructuralism. The suffix “post” denotes all periods after formal colonization and includes contexts that were not formally affected or determined by modern European colonization.

242 In a sense, the “postcolonial” approach (like the feminist or intercultural approach) is a transversal approach that includes all spheres of human life and all cultural contexts. For the Anglo-American tradition—which, however, also predominates in Europe—the binary pair of the opposites *West and the Rest*⁶ and thus the critique of “Eurocentrism” is in the foreground. As already mentioned, Postcolonial Studies are closely linked to so-called *Subaltern Studies* (Spivak) and, in the United States, to *Critical Whiteness Studies*. Important concepts of Postcolonial Studies are “hybridity” (new transcultural forms), “liminality” (cultural interstices), and “mimicry” (appropriation by imitation), while issues of cultural, economic, and media asymmetry remain largely ignored or invisible.

“Decolonial Studies” can be traced back to the 1961 work *The Damned of the Earth* of Franz Fanon,⁷ a native of the Caribbean Island of Martinique (Martinique), who raises the question of persistent oppression of the formerly colonized population through new forms of “colonialism.” In 1992, the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano published a landmark text on the subject of “coloniality and modernity/rationality,” in which he sees the continuation of the colonization of the whole planet by the “West” in the universalization of typical Western rationality and thus of its forms of knowledge and knowledge

5 Said 1978.

6 The expression comes from Hall 1996. See also Ferguson 2011.

7 Fanon 1968 [1961]. Fanon did not yet distinguish between the “postcolonial” and the “decolonial”; his “decolonial studies” remain mostly in the “postcolonial” tradition of the Indian current, applied to the “postcolonial” context of the Caribbean.

production, coining the expression “coloniality of power.”⁸ The task of “decolonial critique” is to uncover the deep layers of colonial domination in the sense of “epistemic violence” (Spivak)⁹ and to initiate a comprehensive epistemological decolonization, affecting science as well as culture, politics, and law.

Quijano’s approach was taken up and further developed especially by the Argentinian scholar Walter Mignolo (currently teaching at Duke University), the Argentinian Mexican philosopher of liberation Enrique Dussel, and the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos. In Latin America, the narrative of the “world-system” (Wallerstein) as the epitome of the globalized colonial hegemony of supposedly single ideology, epistemology, economy, and geopolitics is very familiar. This Western model is accompanied by a “binary” worldview, which is based on Western essentialism and its bivalent logic, and which divides the whole world into women and men, black and white, homosexuals and heterosexuals, indigenous and non-indigenous, *the West and the Rest*, and thus excludes *a priori* intermediate (“liminality”; “hybridity”) and transitory spaces, or, at best, considers them inferior.

For the “coloniality of knowledge,” this means that non-Western forms of knowledge, their philosophies, spiritualities, theologies, and contexts of meaning are disrespectfully demoted to “religious consciousness,” “mythological attempts at explanation,” or “folk wisdom,” and Western *episteme* is hypostatized as the only source of meaning. Important for the “decolonial” approach are cultural and civilizational asymmetries, the question of power, and the connection to concrete liberation (and thus Liberation Theology and Liberation Philosophy).¹⁰ Decolonial studies aim to go beyond a *light* interculturalism¹¹ and mere multiculturalism, questioning the symbolic order as a manifestation of power relations.

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8 Quijano 1992; 2000, 246ff.

9 Spivak 1988.

10 For a good overview of decolonial studies, see: Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel 2007; Grupo de Estudios sobre Colonialidad 2012; Restrepo 2010.

11 This term may seem unhelpful and inaccurate. I refer to a discourse that is too superficial, often linked to aesthetics and marketing. “Diversity” and “difference,” or, respectively, the “indifference” of value judgements, may simply pass as facts of a post-modern reality, especially in the global North, but they do not address neither the issue of the asymmetries contained in these diversities nor the question of “justice”.

While this power in colonial times was quite manifest and could be identified with “colonial power” and its symbolic capital, in post-colonial and neo-colonial times, the analysis of power and “coloniality” is much more difficult. While in other contexts, such as India, this analysis underlines subalternity and persistent colonial structures in present-day societies, Latin American decolonial theories emphasize the production of knowledge, the domination of certain epistemologies, the internalization of colonial values, and symbolic and mental whitening as elements of contemporary colonization. Formally, Latin America has been living in post-colonial conditions for two hundred years, but even so, the continent drags along many elements of colonial domination in its legal (*lex romana*), educational (banking conception), political (*caudillismo*), economic (extractivism),¹² and religious systems. What is more, colonialism has been intensifying in recent decades as a form of voluntarily assumed alienation. There are bad tongues that say that Miami is the clandestine capital of Peru or Cuba, but perhaps they are not as bad as the real neo-colonialism a large part of the Latin American population must live with.

244 Critical Intercultural Philosophy (of Latin American origin) attempts to articulate the tradition of the Philosophy of Liberation, intercultural dialogue or polylogue, and decolonial studies in such a way as to recover the critical and anti-systemic potential of intercultural thought against its “kidnapping” by the postmodern neoliberal mainstream, which is nothing more than a reedition of a neo-colonial Western centrism. Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, one of the initiators of intercultural thinking in philosophy, considers the anti-imperialist movement in Latin America as a precursor or anticipator of decolonial thinking, without having fallen into the postmodern mirages.¹³ In Latin America, decolonial thinking was developed, above all, by the “Modernity/Coloniality” group of (mostly) social scientists, the leading voice of the so-called “decolonial

12 “Extractivism” denotes an economic system based on the exploitation and extraction of raw material (oil, metals, gas, wood, soya, etc.) without adding value, just as it happened in colonial times with silver, gold, coffee, sugar cane, etc. This dependency on the export of raw material leads to what is called the “curse of raw material,” because it keeps the exporting countries poor and dependent. Today, extractivism is strongly criticized because of the ecological damage it produces.

13 Fornet-Betancourt 2017.

turn.” Apart from the recently deceased Aníbal Quijano, this group includes Walter Mignolo, Arturo Escobar, Santiago Castro-Gómez, Ramón Grosfoguel, Agustín Lao-Montes, Edgardo Lándier, Nelson Maldonado, Catherine Walsh, and, as the only philosopher, Enrique Dussel.

2. The epistemic violence of the West

In order to address the hegemonic stance of Western Philosophy in relation to “subaltern” (or rather: “subalternized”) philosophies, such as the indigenous ones of *Abya Yala*,¹⁴ I want to elaborate further on a specific concept developed by decolonial studies, namely the concept of “epistemic violence” and the corresponding concept of “epistemicide.” Both refer to the type of “coloniality” commonly known under the title of “coloniality of knowledge,” which has to do, in contrast to the “coloniality of power”¹⁵ and “coloniality of being,”¹⁶ with the production, dissemination, application, and valuation of knowledge.

“Epistemic violence” is a concept coined by the Indian literary critic and feminist thinker Gayatri Spivak in her 1988 article “Can the Subaltern Speak?”; it is taken from Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “symbolic violence”¹⁷ and adapted to the situation of subaltern groups, including women.¹⁸ According to Spivak, “epistemic violence” consists of the colonial process of “subjugated” colonized knowledge:

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14 I prefer the native term *Abya Yala* (which in the language of the Kuna people of Panama means “the land where we live”) to “America,” which is due to the Italian *conquistador* Amerigo Vespucci’s eagerness to eternalize himself. Normally, authors make a distinction between *Iberoamerica* or “Latin America,” on the one hand, i.e., the culture and society under Spanish and Portuguese influence, and *Amerindia* or *Abya Yala*, on the other hand, i.e., the original native culture and society, the so-called *América Profunda* or “Deep America” (Rodolfo Kusch).

15 This concept has been coined by Aníbal Quijano (Quijano 1992; 1998) and refers to the contemporary prolongation of the colonial foundations that underpinned the formation of the capitalist order in the so-called “modern” era.

16 Maldonado 2007.

17 Bourdieu and Passeron 1970.

18 Cf. note 9. Spivak Chakravorty draws not only on Bourdieu’s concept of “symbolic violence,” but also on Michel Foucault’s analysis of the nexus between knowledge, power, and social control.

By subjugated knowledges one should understand [...] a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity. (Spivak 1988, 77.)

In the Anglo-Saxon world, this concept (epistemic violence) has had greater repercussions in the Black and Afro community; one of the most prominent representatives is the Afro-American feminist philosopher Kristie Dotson.¹⁹ In the Latin American context, the Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez²⁰ has explored the concept further, while the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos has been one of the pioneers in raising the decolonial question of epistemology in general, and the “coloniality of knowledge” in particular, as an important tool for understanding how colonialism continues to function beyond the Colony.²¹ Epistemic violence would be, according to this concept, the perpetuation of colonialism by other, more subtle, and sophisticated means than its “classic” form of the colonial era between the 15th and 20th centuries.

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According to Boaventura de Sousa Santos, there are five modes of epistemological discrimination that result in the production of absences or non-existence in the “other”: the ignorant, the backward, the inferior, the local/particular, and the unproductive or sterile. The “colonial” or “neo-colonial” is extended through the (partial) negation of the colonized person or nation to be an epistemic and productive subject, and by affirming the own position as “literate,” “advanced,” “superior,” “universal,” and “productive.” Philosopher Moira Pérez extends the concept to any “colonial” and “neo-colonial” regime, in order to indicate the ideological underpinning of the dominant technoscientific complex: “epistemic violence as a structural phenomenon is a key, if little recognized, underpinning of systems of privilege such as racism, sexism and cissexism, which is strengthened by its own imperceptibility” (Pérez 2019, 82).

19 Dotson 2011. For Latin America, cf. Bidaseca and Vázquez 2011.

20 Castro-Gómez 2000.

21 Cf. Sousa Santos 2010a; 2010b; 2014 [2009].

In colonial times, epistemic violence served as an ideological justification for the “superiority” of Western-European science and technology, and, on the philosophical level, for the exclusivity of the philosophical value of the colonizers’ thought. Through the mechanism of “othering” the conquered and colonized indigenous populations, these were labelled as “barbaric,” “illiterate,” “heathen,” and “ignorant,” depending on the aspect to be emphasized. And through processes of negation, compartmentalization, parallelism, and adaptation, the aim was to maintain the supremacy or even exclusivity of the dominant European knowledge. This process entailed a veritable “epistemicide,”²² an extirpation of millennia-old indigenous knowledge, and the almost total loss of indigenous “traditional knowledge.” It leads essentially to the destruction of knowledge, sciences, and cultures that did not know or did not want to assimilate to the white Western culture, and part of this are indigenous philosophies.

Whereas in the colonial era, “epistemicide” was carried out brutally and *manu militari*, in the post-colonial era (which is at the same time neo-colonial) epistemicidal tendencies manifest themselves much more subtly and under the cloak of “progressivity” and “development.” Western technoscience has been and remains for more than five hundred years the primary actor of epistemic violence, imposing the standards of the *Academia* on the whole world and exporting the European and US-American model of development and progress to other contexts. Universities and the mass media are currently the main drivers of the “universalization” of the scientific ideal and the single Western epistemology. This means, for “other” knowledges and epistemologies, that any knowledge, science, and technology that does not conform to the standards of Western technoscience, is considered folklore, cosmovision, para-science, or simply mythology. In the case of philosophy, any attempt to elaborate or reestablish non-Western indigenous philosophies is dismissed as “romanticism” and “backwardness,” or, at best, as “mythology.”

The epistemic violence of the West manifests itself in the dynamics of elevating certain “dogmas” or “axioms” of modern Western philosophy to a

22 Concept coined by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (Sousa Santos 2017).

supracultural, universal, or even absolute status.²³ The vast majority of these axioms are preconceptions that are no longer questioned, because they are part of the DNA of modern Western thought, justified by the colonial and neo-colonial “success” of its current globalization. Even though the postmodern discourse has deconstructed such “totalizing narratives” as “ideologies,” the subtext of Postmodernity is one that exercises epistemic violence on all narratives that are not compatible with the “meta-narrative” of Western Modernity.²⁴ This meta-narrative—translated in economic terms as “progress” and “growth”—is still in place and is expanding day by day to the farthest corners of the planet, to the point of wiping out all “other” knowledge or science. It seems a tragic irony that the postmodern movement, which was to “diversify” discourses and ways of knowing (epistemologies), is truncated in a violent “single epistemology,” in an increasingly radical and barbaric Western centrism.

248 I would like to mention some of the supposed “axioms” of this hegemonic epistemology that dominates the planet and brings it to its ecological, anthropological, ethical, and political breaking point. First, it is the conviction that time is oriented linearly from a beginning to an end (linearity) in a continuous and ascending manner (progressivity). This “conviction” of Semitic origin forms the ideological basis for Western “optimism” that everything is oriented towards an “*omega point*,” be it classless society, perfect market, or paradise on earth. The road to such a point is called “development” or “growth,” depending on the approach (economic, political, cultural) and the interest at stake. Today, to think of an economy without growth or a society without development is blasphemous and considered nonsense or

23 Hegel’s position on the “New World” being nothing more than a more or less faithful copy or a “lively echo” of what is happening in Europe is commonly known. “Was bis jetzt sich hier ereignet, ist nur der Widerhall der Alten Welt und der Ausdruck fremder Lebendigkeit.” (Hegel 1979, 114.)

24 I consider “Postmodernity” as nothing other than Modernity taken to its extreme form, i.e., a kind of “hypermodernity.” The currently dominant economic, political, and philosophical narratives have not overcome “Modernity,” but rather presuppose it and perform it in a perverse way (climate change, arms race, pandemics, inequalities, racism, sexism, etc.). By abandoning any criteria of “truth” or “justice,” postmodern discourse becomes accomplice of this kind of hypermodernity.

even a logical contradiction.²⁵ A corollary of this is the concept of “progress,” i.e., the firm conviction that “development” and “growth” inevitably lead to “progress,” i.e., an improvement of the living conditions. The Western axiom of the progressivity of time, together with the principles of development and growth, forms the backbone of an ideology that is exported under the name of “modernity” to the entire planet and even to space.

Second, there is the conviction of the dieresis or epistemological dualism between subject and object. A (human) subject is viewed vis-à-vis an object in such a way that the former possesses all the characteristics of an autonomous, rational, spiritual, and active entity, while the object in the tendency is considered inert, dependent, irrational, and passive. The metaphysical foundation is Descartes’s ontological dualism between a thinking spiritual “substance” (*res cogitans*) and an extensive material one (*res extensa*), which has repercussions on the modern Western conception of “Nature” as an exploitable and appropriable object. The Cartesian “I think therefore I am” (*cogito ergo sum*) becomes “I conquer therefore I am” (*conquiro ergo sum*) or, respectively, “I colonialize therefore I am.”²⁶ In the postmodern context, it can be translated into “I consume therefore I am” (*consumo ergo sum*), with the implication that what is consumed is the “object,” Nature, the so-called “natural resources,” the planet Earth.

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This epistemological dieresis entails an elitist anthropology that is defined by what differentiates the human being from all the rest (speciesism or human centrism). In fact, this “human being” is the white adult Western male owner, and women, children, indigenous people, Afro-descendants, as well as non-human nature become the “object” of his predatory enterprise. Therefore—and this is the third axiom of Western Modernity—, a conflictive and competitive anthropology is imposed, first against Nature, but second

25 Post-development and degrowth positions form a minority in economic discourse and are almost not taken serious by the Academy. Growth belongs to the inherent logic of capitalism to such an extent that, in the face of the breakdown of the planet, “green growth” is now being proposed as a continuation of capitalism beyond the climate crisis.

26 The *conquiro ergo sum* comes from Dussel (2013, 40 ff.). In his view, the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum* is the consequence of a previously already determining *conquiro ergo sum*, in the sense that European Modernity (including philosophical Modernity) is inconceivable without colonization and domination of the Other by the “conqueror.”

also against women, and, in general, against the non-Western world. Through “objectification,” the “other” becomes an object of appropriation, exploitation, and destruction, and the Western “subject” claims the exclusive right to knowledge, science, and philosophy. Economically, this anthropology (*homo homini lupus*) fosters classical capitalism and postmodern neoliberalism based on competition, exclusion, and the predation of the “other.” Together with the axiom of progressivity, this kind of anthropology leads to the destruction of the environment, to all kinds of sexism and racism, and to great inequalities at global and national levels.

250 A fourth axiom refers to the strong anthropocentrism that dominates Western Modernity. The human being—in the figure of the white heterosexual male adult owner—is the measure of all things that must be adapted to the stated ideal. Nature serves the human being as a reservoir (“natural resources”) and a field for the realization of the predatory anthropological project. If the other cannot be “anthropomorphized,” any kind of “natural” nexus is cut off, and the obstacles imposed (disease, death, hunger, etc.) in a totally artificial world are to be overcome. Climate change and the recent pandemic, which are symptoms of this human hybris, are treated as “enemies” to be subjected to the will of technoscience and the narcissistic omnipotence of “denatured” man. Anthropocentrism becomes colonialism, racism, sexism, and unbridled capitalism under the Eurocentric assumption that the adult European white man best embodies the anthropological ideal.

A final and sixth axiom of Western Modernity with respect to epistemology has to do with the predominance of analysis as a tool for knowing and mastering the world. Analysis (literally: “de-composition”) is based on the conviction that an “object” can be comprehensively known, by breaking it down into its parts, investigating, and describing each of them, and by putting them back together to come to full knowledge.²⁷ Western technoscience is broadly based on this axiom, which has produced astonishing results in the technological,

27 In the *Discours de la méthode* (1637), Descartes described this method, which was to strongly permeate Western Modernity and the concept of “science.” The full title is: *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison et chercher la vérité dans les sciences* (*Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One’s Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences*). Cf. Descartes 1993 [1637].

pharmaceutical, and military conquest of the planet. It is a typically masculine (in a generic and non-biological sense) and violent approach, because, if the “object” of research is a living being, the analysis leads irremediably to its death. There is not only a strong androcentrism, but also a kind of necrophilia (preference for dead objects) and an aversion against organic processes (often associated with women, nature, and indigenous peoples).

The epistemic violence of the West consists, therefore, in imposing these axioms on the rest of the planet as “universal” truths, and distorting, disqualifying, or even destroying all kinds of axioms or principles that contradict them. The same was attempted in the West with feminist and ecological thought, and continues to be done with alternatives, arising precisely from the critique of the patriarchal, capitalist, predatory, heteronormative, and anthropocentric “monoculture.” The epistemicide perpetrated by the dominant Western technoscience is thus directed at both “the other knowledge” of indigenous peoples and “the subaltern knowledge” of the West, whether in the past or in the present. There is a whole history of “heterodox” knowledge throughout the history of the Western philosophical and civilizational paradigm that has been marginalized, disqualified, and finally extinguished by the dominant epistemology, especially since the European Renaissance.²⁸ Today, there is also a whole range of “alternative knowledge” to the hegemonic epistemology, such as complexity theories, the *Gaya* hypothesis, chaos theories, or the paradigms of complementarity (“The Tao of Physics”).²⁹ All these epistemologies suffer from the stalking by the dominant epistemology with the aforementioned axioms. In the case of colonized societies, the so-called “Southern” epistemologies³⁰ compete asymmetrically and unfairly with the power of Western technoscience.

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28 For attempts to recover these subterranean streams in the history of Western Philosophy, see: Fornet 2004; Callahan 2020.

29 Capra 1975. On chaos theories cf. Solé 2001; on complexity theory cf. Morin 2007 [1990]; on the *Gaya* hypothesis cf. Lovelock 2000.

30 Cf. Sousa Santos 2014 [2009].

3. Epistemicide as philosophicide: the case of Andean Philosophy

In the case of *Abya Yala*'s indigenous knowledge and wisdom, the epistemicide committed during the colonial period has been perpetuated to the present day. Denial, exclusion, marginalization, and, above all, ignorance have driven ancestral cosmo-spirituality,³¹ religiosity, culture, and philosophy completely underground. And what remained of it was branded by the representatives of Western knowledge as "myth," "backwardness," "heresy," and "barbarism." In the religious sphere, attempts were made to eradicate every trace of pre-colonial religion and ritual, but to no avail. In the field of science and technology, the high level of knowledge and technology of the Inca Empire and other precolonial societies was simply ignored. And regarding philosophy, the Western definition itself eliminated from the outset any possibility of there being "philosophy" in *Abya Yala*. It was imported from Europe, and America has since then—according to Hegel—devoted itself to faithfully copying the European currents and schools of the day.

252 This colonial conception found what was presupposed: a "barbaric" people, uncivilized, irrational, without philosophy or law, without morals or thought, as, for example, the Spanish historian and theologian Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda claimed in his work *Democrates Alter*.³² According to the Western definition, "philosophy" is an exclusive product of the Western spirit, as Hegel in the 19th century and even Heidegger in the 20th century emphatically reaffirmed. This

31 I prefer the notion "cosmo-spirituality" over "worldview," which is an invention of European cultural anthropology that underlines the dominance of the sense of sight as it has dominated Western "theoretical" (*theorein*: "to see") thinking. Moreover, the notion of "spirituality" suggests that it is something integral and integrative, a praxis and some knowledge at the same time.

32 "He compares these endowments of prudence, ingenuity, magnanimity, temperance, humility and religion of the Spaniards with those of those little men in whom one can hardly find traces of humanity, who not only lack culture, but who do not even use or know letters nor preserve monuments of their history, but a certain obscure and vague memory of some facts recorded in certain paintings, lack written laws, and have barbarous institutions and customs." Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1490–1572/3), Spanish historian and ecclesiastic, chronicler of King Charles V, took the opposite position in the controversy with Bartolomé de las Casas on the legitimacy of the Conquest and the subjugation of the "Indians" as slaves. The quote of Sepúlveda is from: Pereña 1992, 209.

definition includes textuality, individual authorship, exclusionary binary logic, institutionalization, and systematization of thought as essential presuppositions for it to be recognized as “philosophy.” And, according to colonial criteria, indigenous knowledge lacked all these characteristics, so the verdict was clear: *Abya Yala* does not have and does not produce philosophy.

But this appreciation has to do with the “axioms” of dominant Western thought and a systemic blindness to other kinds of thought and knowledge. Andean cosmo-spirituality or philosophy is not in line with these founding principles of Western Modernity, indeed: it is totally incompatible with them. But this does not mean that it was and is not a valid way of thinking and an alternative to the supposed “universality” and absolute validity of Western technoscience. It is an “other” philosophy based on another kind of epistemology, ontology, logic, and anthropology. The dominant epistemology of the West tried and still tries to disqualify Andean Philosophy as mere “cosmovision,” “spirituality,” “mythology,” or, at best, as a kind of “philosophical folklore,” but in no way as “philosophy” as such. This is a concrete example of epistemicide—or more precisely: philosophicide—perpetrated due to a lack of awareness of one’s own contextuality.

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Comparing the founding “axioms” of modern Western Philosophy, which have become unquestioned and declared universally valid, with the deeper intuitions of Andean Philosophy, we can see at the same time the great differences between the two as well as the restricted validity and importance of the former. Philosophical otherness or alterity renders philosophical sameness, in this case hegemonic Western Philosophy, relative and contextual. In comparison to the first axiom of the West—the linearity, continuity, and progressiveness of time—, Andean Philosophy upholds the principle of temporal cyclicity. This implies that the supposed direction of time is not unique, from past to future, from *Alpha* to *Omega*, but can be reversed and oriented in the opposite way, from future to past. The cyclicity of time includes temporal periods (cycles) that repeat themselves or are reproduced at another level, but discontinuously, with certain abrupt changes and ruptures (*pachakuti*).³³ What for the West is

33 Cf. in this respect: Estermann 2004; 2021a; 2021b. A *pachakuti* (literally: “the return of the *pacha*”) is an abrupt and unexpected change in the cosmic order due to

“progress,” i.e., the almost deterministic improvement throughout history, from the past to the future, for Andean Philosophy can be a regression, depending always on other determining factors of Andean *pachasophy*.³⁴

That is why, in the Andes, it is rightfully said that the “future is behind” (*qhepa pacha*), and the past “ahead” (*ñawpa pacha*), without implying a value weighting. According to the cyclical conception of time, it does not run in a totally “neutral” and continuous way, but implies “qualities,” such as crucial moments (*chakanas*)³⁵ for the change of epoch, period, or era. The abstract quantity of the clock is challenged by the quality of the temporal moments that have to do with relationality as a fundamental axiom of Andean *pachasophy*. What for the West is “progress” and “growth,” for the Andes can be a threat to the cosmic balance. It is inconceivable for Andean cosmo-spirituality that there could be unlimited growth, and that this supposed “growth” could serve as a criterion for the quality of life (“progress”).

254 The real “progress”—if one can speak in Western categories—for the Andes is to reach the ideal of “good living” (*Buen Vivir*) or “living well” (*suma qamaña*, *sumak kawsay*, *allin kawsay*),³⁶ which is not to be confused neither with the hedonistic ideal of Western consumerism of accumulating goods nor with the Aristotelian *eubios* of a life in the middle of two extremes. And the real “regression” consists in the damage done to the balance or harmony of the cosmic system of relationality, which happens precisely in the name of Western “progress.” The unlimited economic growth of neoliberal capitalism with the accumulation of goods and services—euphemistically called “progress”—leads to the collapse of planet Earth and increases existing inequalities at global, national, and regional levels. This so-called “progress” for a minority of 10 %,

a gradual disruption of the cosmic balance. The current ecological crisis is for many Andean *yatiris* and *paq'us* (shamans) an indication of an imminent *pachakuti*.

34 As the Quechumara (Quechua and Aymara) word *pacha* can be seen as a homoeomorphic equivalent of Western “being,” “pachasophy” is a homoeomorphic equivalent of “ontology” in the Western sense. Cf. Estermann 2020; especially chapter 6 “*Pacha y on: ¿Equivalentes homeomórficos?*”

35 A *chakana* (“bridge”) is a point or space of connection between different realities, epochs, phenomena, or ontic regions. The metaphor is the Andean cross called “chakana.”

36 Cf. concerning this issue: Estermann 2015; 2010a; 2010b; 2012.

whose waste and damage are “externalized,” is the real “barbarism” for 90 % of the planet’s population.

The second axiom of Western Modernity, the dieresis between epistemic subject and epistemic object and the subsequent metaphysical dualism, is not known in the Andean context. Much like Hindu non-duality (*advaita*), Andean Philosophy does not distinguish between a rational autonomous knowing subject and an irrational dependent known object. The relations are not one of mutual exclusion or contradiction, but of complementarity, reciprocity, and correspondence. Everything can be an epistemic “subject” of knowledge or an axiological “subject” of action, whether human or non-human, rational or irrational, profane or sacred. Non-duality prevents a *diastasis* between a rational human reality (*res cogitans*) and an irrational non-human reality (*res extensa*). Human being and Nature, the rational and the emotional, the living and the inert, the intelligible and the unintelligible form a pachasophical unity characterized by “polarities” and “parities,” but not by exclusions, contradictions, and dualisms. Andean epistemology is holistic and integrative; it includes aspects of ritual, collective memory, “natural” memory (as in the theories of transcultural physics: water, earth, hills have memory), intuition, and emotionality. As in the Andean world everything has “life” (panzoism), everything also has knowledge and is the bearer of knowledge.

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With respect to anthropology, Andean *runasophy* (or *jaqisophy*)³⁷ holds that the human being is first and foremost a relational being, a *chakana*, i.e., a “bridge” in all senses. He or she is neither a substance nor the coincidence of two incommensurable substances (Descartes), but a relational being (*chakana*) that guarantees or makes impossible the vital flow of relationality. Therefore, the human being is not defined by the “identity” in difference to the others, whether human or non-human, but by the “function” he or she fulfils or does not fulfil in the set of relations. The human being is not primarily a competitor and “wolf” to others, but a complement, helper, caretaker (*arariwa*), and facilitator. This is an anthropology of solidarity and not of selfishness. “Identity”—if we can speak in Western terms—does not consist neither in autonomy or even autarchy nor in competitive opposition and difference with

37 *Runa* in Quechua and *jaqi* in Aymara refer to the “human person.”

respect to the other, but in relationality concretized in social ties (as in the Andean couple or the *jaqichasiña*).³⁸ The selfish and competitive anthropology that forms the basis of the capitalist economic and nationalist political model is, for the Andean Philosophy, absolutely harmful and self-destructive.

In contrast to modern Western anthropocentrism, Andean Philosophy is cosmocentric or biocentric (in indigenous terms: pachacentric), i.e., the measure of everything is not the human being, but the cosmos in its relational structure that forms a kind of organism. Western Philosophy has not always been anthropocentric, but onto- or theocentric, depending on the context and the time. But from the European Renaissance onwards, there was a strong push towards the radicalization of anthropocentrism, not only due to “the Copernican turn,” but also thanks to imperialism and colonialism of the European powers. There is a very clear link between the colonial enterprise and the return to anthropocentrism in the sense of the human ideal embodied by the white heterosexual adult male owner. The world is ordered and changed according to his parameters, human and non-human “otherness” (Nature) is molded, until it is completely adapted to the civilizational enterprise of Western man, which includes colonialism and neo-colonialism.

For the Andes, the human being fulfils a “function” in the totality of the ordered cosmos (*pacha*), but is neither its measure nor its final goal. Life (*kawsay*, *qamaña*) is not “biological,” and therefore is not restricted to “living” beings (in the Western sense), but extends to all beings, which are part of the encompassing relationality. Life and relationship are intimately linked: without relationship, there is no life, and without life, there is no relationship. The human being feels part of the network of relationships at the level of life cycles, agriculture, meteorology, history, and the (astronomical) cosmos. Therefore, the destruction of the environment or the great inequalities and injustices on a global level are an attack on oneself; when a natural habitat is destroyed, something of me is destroyed; when people suffer from hunger, discrimination, and injustice, I suffer from it too. In an interconnected world, there is no

38 This Aymara word containing the notion *jaqi* (“human person”) refers to Andean marriage and literally means “to make each other a human person.” It means that the individual as such is not a full person, but becomes one in and through relationships.

such thing as an isolated self or civilization. The salvation of the planet Earth (*Pachamama*) is at the same time my salvation, and its destruction is my destruction. Modern Western anthropocentrism is, for Andean Philosophy, a short-sighted and suicidal attitude.

This leads to the questioning of the fifth “axiom” of Western Modernity, the predominance of the analytical method in the description, understanding and manipulation of the world. For this conception, the whole is the sum of its parts, and by knowing these, the whole is known. For the Andean world, the whole (*pacha*) is much more than the sum of its parts. The model for the analytical spirit in the West is the machine that later becomes the computer and Artificial Intelligence, all based on the exclusionary binary logic of “truth” and “falsehood,” 1 and 0, efficiency and effectiveness, cause and end, input and outcome. The analytical spirit has as its ideal the inert and dead cosmic and cybernetic mega-machine that functions perfectly. The ideals of Western Modernity could be better realized without the “hindrance” of living beings; the weakness of an ideal free market is the human being, because he or she gets sick, dies, is born, is driven by emotions, and maintains relationships of friendship and love. Capitalism would function at its best without human beings; therefore, it is, at its core, necrophile.

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Andean Philosophy proposes another type of method for understanding, describing, and shaping reality. It is a holistic-synthetic method that is guided by the model of the organism and not of the machine. An organism (*pacha*) cannot be broken down (analyzed) into its parts (organs, cells, etc.) without dying. Analysis is a very powerful tool, but it is invasive, violent, and necrophile, as well as representing the masculine ideal of domination over everything that escapes its exclusionary binary logic. The Andean representational-symbolic understanding is more gynophilic and “caring”;³⁹ it does not attack life, but enters the search for the secrets of life in an empathetic, sympathetic, and

39 The “sexual” meanings in Andean Philosophy do not have to do with the biological, but are cosmic or pachasophical categories. The supposed Andean “gynephilia” does not refer to a preference for the feminine, women, or even matriarchy, but to characteristics that are associated more with a feminine way of being and acting, without cementing gender roles. The Andean division of labor is oriented, for example, by cosmic complementarity and not by patriarchal parameters.

compassionate way. To put it in a very polemical and exaggerated way: for the West, to know is to dominate, for the Andes, to know is to love (even in the biblical sense).⁴⁰

4. Challenges for the future of Intercultural Philosophy

After more than three decades, Intercultural Philosophy is facing major challenges. Today's world is less inclusive, inequalities and disparities between the global North and South are deepening, monocultural and even culturocentric attitudes are again on the rise, racist, sexist, and homophobic exclusionary positions are once again establishing themselves in supposedly consolidated democracies, the pandemic has revealed the true intentions of authoritarian or even fascist sectors and the profit motive of pharmaceutical companies, and climate change introduces new global and regional injustices. The dream of a dialogical and polylogical interculturality seems to have moved further away from realization, so much that its advocates are in danger of becoming the useful fools of the system or of being considered incorrigible romantics. All this does not mean that this vision or utopia must be abandoned or that interculturality as a path to a better world must be renounced, but it invokes another (self-)critical turn.

The "world-system"⁴¹ still sells itself as a successful model of "progress" and "development," while it shows its ugly face of inhumanity, authoritarianism, and barbarism to the "others," those excluded from the benefits of an uncontrolled

40 When I speak of "the West" in a general way, I mean a type of civilization and a philosophy of an "ideal type" (*Idealtyp*), and not of something that was always the case; the same is with the concept of "Andes." Francis Bacon's motto that knowledge is power sums up the dominant conception of Western Modernity, even if there were always deviant positions (romanticism, dialogical philosophy, existentialism, etc.). The "Andes" are not homogeneous either, nor are the different Andean philosophical positions. However, there are common characteristics, such as a holistic, relational, gynophilic, and vital epistemology.

41 World-system theory was coined by Immanuel Wallerstein and developed by authors, such as Aníbal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, Samir Amin, André Gunder Frank, and Giovanni Arrighi, and serves as a model for analyzing power at the global level. Wallerstein sees the "world-system" as a series of mechanisms that redistribute resources from the "periphery" to the "center" of the empire. Cf. Wallerstein 2004.

and highly toxic capitalism.⁴² In the eye of the hurricane, everything seems “normal” and absolutely calm; stock markets continue to rise, and the number of billionaires grows in an absolutely perverse way, while poverty deepens, hunger is on the rise, repression increases, and the environment deteriorates at a chilling speed. Most of the global population is not in the eye of the hurricane, but is being mercilessly swept along by its whirlwind. In fact, the real “barbarism” occurs in the so-called “center,” and the so-called “progress” is nothing but the temporary consequence of harmful and catastrophic externalities.⁴³ But little by little, these outlaws are knocking on the doors of the castles and bunkers of a kleptocratic elite like boomerangs, in the form of migrants and refugees, floods and droughts, fires and pandemics. That the desperate want to escape into space is only the clearest consequence of the prevailing save-yourself-attitude.

How to do Intercultural Philosophy in such a context? How to continue to bet on the ideal of dialogues and polylogues in symmetrical conditions? How not to be a dissident voice coopted by the hegemony of the discourse of “progress” and “development”? Or, in other words: how not to fall into the trap of being a “useful fool”, as Levinas warned in the “Introduction” to *Totality and Infinity*?

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The first danger in adopting an “intercultural” stance today is to be identified with a *light*, culturalist position that does not really challenge the hegemonic system, but rather oils it. As I said before, the discourse of “interculturality” has already become a part of the economic, political, and media elite, even if in a totally different sense than what a critical Intercultural Philosophy intends to be. Therefore, the issue of power, asymmetries, coloniality, hegemony, etc., must be

42 An excellent book on the “externalization” of the damage, surplus, and waste of the successful Western model to the global South is Lessenich 2016. The title of the German edition *On the Other Side of the Flood: The Externalization Society and Its Price* alludes to the motto of a generation of waste: *après nous le déluge* (“after us, the flood”), but places it in the present, in different “worlds.”

43 One of the characteristics of late capitalism is that it “externalizes” its toxic waste, socializes its losses, and privatizes its profits, so that the axiom of “the invisible hand” that makes the long-term extension of the wealth of the few to the whole world a reality is refuted by the facts themselves. As in “classical” colonialism, capitalist neo-colonialism relies on surplus populations and the “progress” of an exploiting minority.

(re-)introduced into the philosophical efforts to imagine a more just and inclusive world. For philosophy, the issue of “power” must be translated above all in terms of epistemic violence (including philosophicide), but also in terms of domination and liberation, as Liberation Philosophy puts it. Intercultural Philosophy cannot refrain from a critical and profound analysis of the global landscape, and must call asymmetries and inequalities by their names. I believe that Latin America offers a whole potential for such an analysis, which does not necessarily have to be (neo-) Marxist, but which is an analysis at the level of the system.

260 Second, it should be noted that the Academy has not really abandoned its Eurocentrism or Western centrism, despite certain adjustments and awareness-raising. Even in Latin America, *Abya Yala* is for many philosophers nothing more than a romantic whim of a few, but not a challenge to deconstruct the still Eurocentric matrix of philosophical endeavors. Epistemic violence in the academic world remains strong and widely accepted. A thorough revision of the curricula of philosophy in universities, the decolonization of the educational system, and the interculturalization of academic discourses and standards are indispensable and urgent. However, the real conditions for such changes are adverse; education and training have become a business, knowledge is driven by profit and titles by power. However, it is necessary to insist on the high degree of epistemic violence that prevails in a large part of Latin American—but also Asian and African—universities and institutes of higher education, including philosophy courses.

Third, we need to think in the form of intersectional thinking, including issues of gender discrimination (sexism), ethnicity and skin colour (racism), sexual orientation (homophobia), social class (classism), religious stance (fundamentalism/extremism), and political dissent in the intercultural discourse. The “cultural” theme intersects with issues of “coloniality,” “neoliberalism,” “climate change,” and economic and social inequalities. It is a fact that people of color and women belong significantly more to the poor, marginalized, and politically excluded and are victims of discrimination and the consequences of climate change. The “culture” marker has economic, political, and media repercussions.

In Latin America, the issue of “(de-)coloniality” is, fourth, of particular interest and importance. Many forms of inequality and injustice, discrimination

and exclusion have to do with “colonial” and “neo-colonial” structures and mentalities, which are reproduced in political, economic, legal, and educational systems and which entail epistemic violence at the level of the symbolic and academic. *Abya Yala* has become fashionable in circles of an academic elite, but without changing the foundations of a Western centrism that is still very strong; this can be seen especially in the context of the social sciences and philosophy. The change of terminology from a Eurocentric notion, such as “Latin America,” to an indigenous one, such as *Abya Yala*, is no guarantee for a decolonial and inclusive mentality. The danger of allowing oneself to be coopted by the reigning world-system and naively defending a *light* “interculturality” remains. And “barbarism” continues to be sold as “progress,” “development,” and “modernity.”

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