

ACADEMIC-INTELLECTUALS AND THE INSURRECTIONAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS/SUBJUGATED KNOWLEDGES IN LATIN AMERICA

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Introduction

We are presenting a work in progress, a possible reading of some developments in the Latin American intellectual/political field. Succinctly, we claim that the knowledge practices of some academic-intellectuals are shifting in such a way as to signal a radical departure from the 'traditional' role that academic-intellectuals have had in Latin America. This re-direction is part and parcel of a much larger process, namely, the gradual rejection of the modern project by increasingly larger sectors of the Latin American population and their ongoing efforts to bring about 'worlds and knowledges otherwise.' In effect, some of the social movements that have become highly visible in Latin America at the turn of the 21st century are probing the modern project - including established knowledge practices of academic-intellectuals - according to expectations, logics and standards other than the ones that have dominated at least for the last two centuries.

While our primary goal here is contributing to a discussion about what this probing entails for academic-intellectuals concerned with social movements, in order to get to this point we will have to go over our claims in more detail. Thus, we will begin with a discussion of how, since independence, the role of the Latin American academic-intellectual has been, in one way or another, related to bringing modernity into fruition. Then we will briefly address how the arrival of post-structuralism in parallel with a new wave of modernization in the garments of neoliberalism created a productive tension that opened the door in the academy for a radical departure in how the role of academic-intellectuals is conceived. Next, we will discuss new (or newly visible) patterns of social mobilization which, we argue, indicate a gradual abandonment of the modern project as a guiding reference. At this point we will be in a position to address in which ways these social movements have impacted in sectors of the academy to some extent prone to seek a way out from the conundrums of modern knowledge practices and their effects. In our conclusions we will reflect on the significance of these developments for the way in which the role of the academic-intellectual can be conceived.

The Latin American Academic-Intellectual

For the sake of clarity, before we enter fully into our discussion, we need to make explicit the situatedness (see Haraway 1991; [Colectivo Situaciones ?](#)) of this exposition, that is, from what position/stand are we advancing our arguments. We consider ourselves to be part of those sectors of the academic world that have been impacted by, and have become entangled with, the Latin American social movements of which we will speak here. While we will discuss later the historical and epistemological specificity of this impact and entanglement, it would help to advance now a basic understanding that structure our reading of developments in the Latin American intellectual/political field. This understanding, which has been more clearly articulated

by a loosely connected Latin American research program on modernity/coloniality and decolonial thought,¹ implies that modernity far from being an ontological condition with universal reach is the enactment of a particular myth (i.e., a sets of stories about the ultimate foundations of reality) into a world that has been violently imposed upon other worlds.² We must be clear stating that at the root of our ‘understanding’ there is a foundational claim: that reality is multiple, not in the sense that there are multiple readings of one reality but rather that there are multiple ontologies, multiple worlds.³ On this basis, we consider that it is only through the violent imposition upon, and invisibilization of pluriversality that modernity can think of itself as an ontological condition with universal validity. From a vantage point sustained by continual violence, non-modern worlds appear to modernity as anomalies or obstinate refusals to follow a universal path to modernity and its quasi-paradisiacal promises of deliverance. Being defined in such a way, the non-modern is amenable to a multiplicity of interventions whose violent nature gets denied while, at the same time, rendering other worlds invisible and modernity’s claims to universality plausible. It is often the case that invisibilization manifests in the form of denying other worlds their positivity, they exist just like errors: ‘we know, they believe.’ This is an intrinsic corollary of the modern project and it is in this context that we must understand the role of academic-intellectuals in Latin America.

We use the composite term academic-intellectuals to stress the specific ‘spatial’ configuration of the regime of power/knowledge in which the modern project has unfolded in Latin America and elsewhere. In this spatial configuration, the academy is a central site of reproduction of the tenets of modernity and is therefore invested with great authorizing power. This means that the authority to speak truth and prescribe appropriate actions has to be somehow sanctioned through the protocols and rituals of the academy. In this regime, the category of intellectual implicitly connote some degree of familiarity with the knowledge produced in the

1 Under this research program, a heterogeneous groups of scholars both located in Latin America and the United States have been discussing since the 1990’s the constitutive relation between modernity and coloniality emerging worldwide since the s. XVI and the emergence of a world-system. For Escobar (2004), in this group, “the proper analytical unit for the analysis of modernity is modernity/coloniality-in sum, there is no modernity without coloniality, with the latter being constitutive of the former (in Asia, Africa, Latin American/Caribbean). Second, the fact that the “colonial difference” is a privileged epistemological and political space. The great majority of European theorists (...) have been blind to the colonial difference and the **SUBALTERNIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE OF CULTURES CHECK THIS** it entailed.” Although emerging in Latin America, this heterogenous collective more than defending a paradigm, wants to create the possibility of “another knowledge” by questioning the intricate relation of modernity and coloniality. Thus, it is a discussion with worldwide consequences for thinking otherwise, for recognizing the material consequences of this geopolitics of knowledge, and for opening a conversation with current ongoing struggles throughout Latin America and other places which precisely are contesting the privileging of particular epistemologies and ontologies materialized in institutions and expert knowledges.

²**Error! Main Document Only.** We do not use the word myth as a synonym for unrealistic or folkloric believes, we use it to refer to ‘stories’ that people tell themselves about themselves and the world. These powerful stories are at the same time both lived experiences congealed into (narrowly defined) narrative forms and narrative forms enacted through everyday life, institutions and ways of knowing. Because they are performative, myths are not true or false, they just engender different worlds.

³ The notion of multiple ontologies have also started to make its way into the North-Atlantic academy, but mainly via science studies and feminist theorizing (Mol, Law, Latour, Haraway) rather than via the impact of social movements, as we will argue, is taking place in Latin America.

academy, although not necessarily implies insertion *in* the academy.⁴ Qualifying the category of intellectual with a site marker, we seek, firstly, to stress the specific role of the academy-site within the configuration of the modern regime of power/knowledge, and, secondly, to signal the existence of different, albeit subalternized, configurations of power/knowledge which produce their own intellectuals.

Overall, in most of Latin America, academic-intellectuals have been since the 19th century enrolled in the project of nation building. Nation-building basically meaning the modernization of society and, thus, the evacuation of diversity from the emerging nation-states, rhetorically through assimilation/integration/development, in practice through violent physical and symbolic suppression of the non-modern, often embodied by the Indigenous populations and more generally the countryside (Rama 1996; Castro 2001). In effect, while there have been much debate (often sorted out violently) about what path to take to the desired end, first in terms of conservative and liberal agendas and later in terms of liberal, populist or socialist agendas, the project of realizing modernity has never been questioned by the ruling elites that set themselves out to bring it into fruition. In this context, the role of universities and more generally of academic-intellectuals have presented both changes and continuities that are important to stress.

Until the end of WWII, academic-intellectuals and universities were envisioned mostly as providers of the technical know how to build the modern nation. These institutions incarnated the scientific-technical reason which bestowed upon the state the authority to rationally “lead” the activities of their citizens (Castro 2001). The exclusions, inequalities and injustices endured by large parts of the Latin American population were conceived as temporary ‘technical problems,’ the consequence of the incomplete character of modernization rather than of modernization per se. It was implicitly assumed that with the application of better knowledge (i.e., produced in the academy) and better education (i.e., the diffusion of academic truths), deliverance from exclusion, inequalities and injustices would ensue, in short, that modernity would at last settle in.

When the project of building the modern nation begins to be debated in the context of the Cold War and the liberation struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, the idea that ‘technical problems’ are actually political problems stemming from structures of inequality actively sustained and protected by those benefiting from them is brought fully into the debates.⁵ This idea operated a great divide between those who embraced a view of academic knowledge as neutral and those who not only contested this view but saw academic knowledge often aligned with the elites’ interests. In the context of a politicized view of social inequalities, the latter argued, both academic-intellectuals and universities could not remain neutral, for neutrality implied a position of acceptance of the statu quo (Guerra and Maldonado 1979). Hence, we see in this period -that peaked in the 1970s - the proliferation of struggles to make universities and academic-intellectuals more responsive to ongoing social struggles (Ribeiro 1969; Archila 2003). More

⁴ Symptomatic of this is that the ‘Others’ recently recognized as intellectuals in academic circles are in one way or another familiar with the protocols, the language and the concept of the academy, or at the very least have been educated or trained in academically informed educative institutions (see for instance the profile of various ‘intellectual Others’ in Warren 1998; Rappaport 2005; Mignolo 2000).

⁵We say ‘brought fully’ because up to this point debates of this kind existed but were not of the magnitude that they will acquire in the 1970s.

specifically within the Left, the struggle to make universities and the academic-intellectual more responsive to society were framed by longstanding debates going all the way back to Marx's *Theses on Feurbach*, and including Lenin's *What Is to be Done*, and Gramsci's idea of the organic intellectual. Positions in these debates varied along a wide arch that went from those academic-intellectuals who saw themselves as the natural and necessary leaders of the dispossessed and excluded masses to those who thought that more horizontal relations with them were key to achieve social change.

Independently of some variations and their foci -some were mostly concerned with ethnicity, others with class⁶-, the knowledge practices of those who embraced the latter view share enough commonalities to make them an identifiable tradition of 'committed intellectuals.'⁷ A common premise on which this academic-intellectual tradition operated was that dominant and dominated groups produce different kinds of knowledges. The knowledge produced by the dominant groups is necessarily self-serving and tends to hide the reality of exploitation. Established science is the science of the bourgeoisie and "therefore favors those who produce and control it" making it suspect of collaborating in maintaining relations of domination (Fals Borda 1991:5, see also Freire 1970:, Colombres CITA). The corollary of this premise was that the knowledge produced by the dominated (subaltern knowledge) can be critical to transform society and the relations of domination that characterizes it. In effect, the dominated groups maintain a memory of their struggles which can be critical for their own liberation because it delineates the fundamental arbitrariness of the established order (Fals Borda 1991:5, Colombres). In this sense, only their knowledge captures reality as it is and therefore, the committed academic-intellectual (trained in a class biased institution like the academy) needs them so as to get a clearer picture of reality. Yet, given the hegemonic power of dominant knowledge, the liberating potential of subaltern knowledge is submerged by the history of repression and humiliation through which the present order has been naturalized (Fals Borda 1979, Freire 1970). And it is here where the committed academic-intellectual, with his/her methods, is also necessary as a catalyst for the potential of memory to emerge through the layers of low self-esteem and distorted reality imposed by hegemonic knowledge upon the subaltern groups. The limitations as well as the potential of each, the dominated groups and the committed academic-intellectual, can be overcome in their dialogical collaboration, for as Fals Borda argues "the sum of knowledge from both types of agents ... makes it possible to acquire a much more accurate and correct picture of the reality that is being transformed (1991:4, see also Freire 1970, Colombres 1976).

At this point we can identify two noteworthy changes within the configuration of modern power/knowledge in Latin America, in particular with regards to the place and role of academic-intellectuals and academic knowledge in relation to social transformation and social agents.

A) There is a shift away, in some sectors of the academy, from a notion of academic-intellectuals as politically neutral technocrats, initially in the sense that not applying their

⁶Interestingly none was concerned with gender.

⁷ Prominent among these academic-intellectuals were Orlando Fals-Borda (Colombia), Adolfo Colombres (Argentina), Paulo Freire (Brazil), Darcy Ribeiro (Brazil), Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (Mexico), Stefano Varese (Peru????), and others.

scientific knowledge for liberation is itself an ideological refusal of true knowledge (as in some strong versions of scientific(ist) Marxism), and later, in the sense that, for historical reasons, their kind of knowledge come to be conceived as inherently biased (as in the committed academic-intellectual tradition).

B) With the committed academic-intellectual tradition there is a hint at a reconceptualization of how knowledge should flow in society in order to achieve the modern promises of equality, justice and inclusion: not longer a unidirectional flow from academic-intellectuals to the social actors that have to be transformed but a bidirectional communication between them. This repositions the academic-intellectual from a researcher *of* social movements to a researcher *with* social movements (see Freire 1970: 93).

While these changes are important because, from today's vantage point, they would contribute towards the conditions of possibility for the rupture we see currently taking place, there are also significant continuities. We pointed out that the committed academic-intellectual tradition just hinted at a reconceptualization of the flow of knowledge because in its intellectual armature there is an underlying assumption that re-introduces the privilege of academic/modern knowledge (and thus the modern project itself) through the back door. The underlying assumption is that there is one reality, therefore there is one knowledge which is the true liberating knowledge, i.e., the one that reflects this reality. The extent to which this assumption betrays the bidirectional flow of knowledge sought by the committed academic-intellectuals becomes evident when one asks, why is the academic-intellectual necessary for social transformation? The answer is, because the academic-intellectual already knows what the subaltern groups know yet are unaware of, and also knows that this knowledge will lead to the fulfillment of a series of promises, those of modernity. Thus, although the committed academic-intellectuals locate true knowledge in the subaltern groups, and notwithstanding their recognition of the inherent biases of academic knowledge, they implicitly claim a knowledge of a higher order (a kind of meta-knowledge) which allows them to identify the site of true knowledge (i.e., subalternity) and its quality (i.e., liberating). In short then, what remains unscathed is modernity's claim of universality (embodied in the higher-order knowledge of the academic-intellectual) and the invisibilization of other worlds (the possibility that what the subalterns know is something other than what the academic-intellectual attributes to them).

In spite of its shortcomings, the committed academic-intellectuals rethinking of their role in social movements constituted an important attempt to reconsider how knowledge was intertwined with power in the Latin American context. However, this reconsideration was soon truncated by the establishment of right wing military dictatorships in the 1970s, which brought along with them a new wave of modernization, now in the garments of neoliberalism. With the violent suppression of the Left and, later with the demise of the communist bloc, the neoliberal agenda found its way open to be applied with relative impunity, even by democratically elected governments, throughout the last quarter of the 20th century. The neoliberal modernization reconfigured in many ways the shape of Latin American societies, most importantly for our

argument, by creating a large sector of marginal people who found themselves expelled from the promises of modernity and with no prospects of reinsertion. Many committed academic-intellectuals were forced first into exile and silence and then into a profound reconsideration of their goals and methods. In a context of structural adjustment, universities becoming increasingly concerned with issues of efficiency and productivity, the state being reduced, and political parties quickly becoming empty shells without real alternative visions to the status quo, many of them channeled their politically oriented activities through NGOs with very specific and focused scope of action but also with a predominantly technocratic approach to social problems (Fals Borda 1991; Gill 2000:CHAPTER8). When poststructuralism reached these shores of the Atlantic, it contributed both to fuel an ongoing reconsideration of the proper scale of political action and to repoliticize the micro/local and what has been so far considered non-political.

Productive Tensions

While in Latin America the debate at the end of the 1960s was over the best path to fulfill the promises of modernity, in continental Europe these promises had begun to be doubted and even denounced. One of the most powerful and cogent critiques of modernity was articulated by what came to be known as poststructuralism. For the purpose of our discussion we will concentrate here on one of the main referents of this critique, Michael Foucault, for his work was more directly concerned with the relation between power and knowledge and the role that academic-intellectuals play on it.

Post-structuralism combined the Heideggerian notion that any revelation of truth is at the same time a concealment and the Nietzschean idea that the conditions of possibility of any truth are historically specific, thus producing a powerful form of critique (genealogy/deconstruction) which brought into light not only the historicity of the modern enunciative position (man/the subject), but also the exclusions and violences inherent to all claims to truth. On this basis, and in contrast with the Latin American committed academic-intellectuals' concern with accessing an ultimate reality or true knowledge that is hidden or distorted by power relations, Foucault was concerned with the reality-effects of power/knowledge. For him, the social or human sciences do not serve domination because they hide a reality but because they are able to define a field of empirical truths that inform programmes of intervention through which subjectivities are shaped. Hence the role of the critic is to investigate the genealogy of what is today defined as truth, that is the rules of formation of true statements, and to elicit how these truths are operationalized into forms of subjectivation (Foucault 1980:109-133).

As Foucault (1980:11) recognized, the events of May 1968 were very important in shaping the direction of his inquiries. Interestingly, as it was happening in Latin America, one of the targets of the students protests was the academy, yet the issue in France was not as much about how to redirect the academy to fulfill the promises of modernity but a more general denunciation of the power-effects that these promises/narratives, once transformed into specific localized interventions, have in shaping docile subjectivities. In effect, the events of May made visible that these operations of subjectification, and the struggles against them, were dispersed in a whole range of social institutions, thus foregrounding the notion that power has no privileged site but actually operates through diverse interconnected locales (Gordon 1980:PAGE) In this

context, Foucault distinguished the traditional 'left' (academic) intellectual from the specific intellectual. The former, as we have seen with the committed academic-intellectuals, claims to be the conscious part of society, who is able to grasp with clarity a universal truth "whose obscure, collective form is embodied in the proletariat" (Foucault 1980:126). The latter, in contrast, has "got used to working ... within specific sectors, at the precise points where their own conditions of life or work situate them (housing, the hospital, the asylum, the laboratory, the university, family and sexual relations)" (Foucault 1980:126). This academic-intellectual is not the bearer of universal values but a person occupying a very specific position which in modern society is linked to "the general functioning of an apparatus of truth,

"[T]he intellectual has a three-fold specificity: that of his class position ...; that of his conditions of life and work, linked to his condition as an intellectual (his field of research, his place in the laboratory, the political and economic demands to which he submits or against which he rebels, in the university, the hospital, etc.); lastly, the specificity of the politics of truth in our societies (Foucault 1980: 132).

For Foucault (1980: 132-133), it is precisely in relation to the last kind of specificity that the local, specific struggle of the academic-intellectual can take on a general significance for it is the general configuration of a regime of truth what makes a form of power/knowledge operating through the interconnections of a myriads of locales, into a system. "The essential political problem for the intellectual," Foucault argues,

"(...) is not to criticize the ideological contents supposedly linked to science ... but that of ascertaining the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth. The problem is not changing people's consciousness - or what is in their heads - but the political, economic, institutional regime of truth. It is not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time" (1980:133).

Lingering in this formulation is the idea that there is no absolute and final truth, and that the assertion of some implies the exclusion of others. Although he did not make it explicit here, there are good reasons to take Foucault's assertion about the task of the academic-intellectual (i.e., detaching the power of truth from present forms of hegemony), to mean that this must be a permanent, ongoing task. This becomes evident if one considers the reasons for which Foucault consistently dodged questions about what order should replace the order under criticism. For example, in the context of addressing the question of whether his inquiries into ancient Greek ethics could provide an alternative to the modern ethics that had informed social movements so far, he responded:

No! I am not looking for an alternative . . . what I want to do is not the history of solutions, and that's the reason why I don't accept the word "alternative" (. . .) My point is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have

something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism ... I think that the ethico-political choice that we have to make every day is to determine which is the main danger (Foucault 1997 [1983]:256).

In a similar vein, we can also recall Gilles Deleuze's definition of 'being on the Left, as "a problem of becoming and never ceasing to become minoritarian" (see Peters 2001:33). Thus, the task of the academic-intellectual turns out to be an incessant genealogical/deconstructive work of revealing the exclusions and violences of established or emerging regimes of truth.

Far from being a surrender of political and ethic commitments, and as it is exemplified by many of them through their active involvement in diverse struggles (see Peters 2001), the poststructuralists' refusal to offer a blueprint of what has to replace that which is subjected to their critique, responds to their suspicion of the exclusions inherent to all established or emerging regimes of truth. As critics what they offer is a tool, genealogy/deconstruction, that breaks the naturalization of a given truth thus opening a space for other truths to be furthered. But, as Gordon (1980: 258) notices, here finishes the task of the critic and starts that of the activist who must choose and decide what order of truth will replace the one that is being criticized. For the poststructuralists there is no logical connections between critique and prescriptions, for critique does not (cannot) reveal a deeper truth that will inform moral conduct (what is the right thing to do, what is the right blueprint for a just society). Moreover, the academic-intellectual needs an ascetic work in him/herself in order to safeguard his/her critic persona from giving in and naturalize the prescriptive truths of his/her activist persona (see Bernauer 1990). Thus, at best, the poststructuralist as critic is an academic-intellectual *for* social movement insofar as he/she can open up spaces for other possibilities (other truths) to be furthered by them. Yet he/she might as well denounce those emerging truths because of the inherent exclusions they entail. This ambivalence when encountered by the Leftist academic-intellectual tradition in Latin America would generate a productive tension that has been, in our understanding, key to opening up sectors of the academy to the influx of the social movements that seek to enact "worlds and knowledges otherwise".⁸

For many academic-intellectuals in the Left (in the diaspora or not), poststructuralism appeared as a clever reactionary move. For an intellectual and political tradition that had sought to fulfill the promises of modernity, the poststructuralist attack on its central tenets seemed a little suspect, specially considering that these ideas reached Latin America as more and more governments heeded to the claims of neoliberalism of being the ineluctable path to modernity, all the while generating more inequalities and exclusions. It is true that genealogy/deconstruction could be used to take away the truth power of neoliberal discourses, yet as easily could be redirected to take away the truth power of proposed alternatives. Two other main, and

⁸ "World and knowledges otherwise' brings to the fore the double aspect of the effort at stake: to build on the politics of the colonial difference, particularly at the level of knowledge and culture, and to imagine and construct actual different worlds... At stake ... is the ability to imagine both 'other worlds' and 'worlds otherwise'—that is, worlds that are more just and sustainable and, at the same time, worlds that are defined through principles other than those of Eurocentric modernity (Escobar 2004:220).

interconnected problems were singled out, first the focus of much poststructuralist-inspired work was on specific/localized micropolitics (the prison, the school, the family and the like); second, insofar as poststructuralist critique denounced all metanarratives it did not produce an overarching theory of how the 'system' worked, how could it be confronted, and what would replace it. In short, it did not leave any solid ground (i.e., a metanarrative) on which to build a nation that fulfilled the promises of liberty, equality and fraternity. Hence, many of the 'Left's old guard' in one way or another dismissed poststructuralism (CITES).

Other academic-intellectuals, however, did not find the poststructuralist critique of metanarratives, and their regimes of truth, as easily dismissible, yet, given the brutal inequalities in the region, also found it inadmissible to give up on the project of building more just societies. Thus, the field in which they began to produce knowledge was explicitly or implicitly traversed by this seemingly intractable tension, a tension which has turned out to be quite productive. In effect, by questioning the project of modernity and its premises, poststructuralism contributed to redirect some academic-intellectuals' attention towards other silenced or invisible intellectual productions, or subjugated knowledges, to use Foucault's term. Thus, these academic-intellectuals have been particularly prone to be impacted by the resurgence of subjugated knowledges that has come along with the insurrectional social movements that have emerged at the turn of the 21st century.

Insurrectional Social Movements/Subjugated Knowledges

From the late 1980s onwards, a long brewing return of 'difference' has become increasingly visible in Latin America, first through a politics squarely based on identity, such as Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples' movements as well as women's and gay/lesbian movements, and later in a more expansive politics of autonomy including the previously mentioned movements but also peasants, pauperized urban dwellers and unemployed workers (Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1998; Warren and Jackson 2002; Assies et al 2000; Postero and Zamosc 2004; Chatterton 2005, Esteva 2001, Zibechi 2005; THE AUTONOMISTS READINGS). The politics of identity of the 'new social movements' was key in illuminating how 'culture' and 'politics' are intrinsically intermingled in struggles that, while addressing very practical concerns of survival, also constitute a "struggle over meanings" (Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar 1998). The direction that social movements have taken with their increasing focus on autonomy makes even more evident that while culture is politicized, what stands for the political is an issue of culture, making the Latin American political field a space radicalized by the emerging visibility of new, or so far disregarded, subjectivities and knowledges (Alvarez, Escobar, Danino 1998). In effect, we think that what we call insurrectional social movements' focus on autonomy brings forward the possibility and plausibility of a politics other than the one conceived within the narrow, yet until recently insurmountable, limits of modernity.

In a recent article, Raul Zibechi (2005), has argued that these insurrectional movements share in common: a) a politization and defense of social and cultural differences linked to the notions of autonomy and territory, and b) a form of political action that both eschews the logic of

representation and is non-statist.⁹ In brief, he argues that these movements emerge in relatively autonomous places where the presence of the state and of capital is weak or distant, either because they never fully reached to these places (like in some rural areas) or because they have renounced their presence in the wake of neoliberal reforms or in pursuit of better profits (like in urban slums and abandoned industrial towns). In any case, the point is that neither the state nor capital fully or at all organize the life of peoples in these places which, thus, become territories where the shape of social life and reproduction is to a higher degree than in other places in control of its inhabitants.¹⁰ Each place have its own singularities and therefore every constituted territory is different, a difference that is consciously embraced and defended against new or renewed attempts of deterritorialiation or reterritorialization, either by the state or capital (Escobar 2001). Interestingly, these movements ask little or nothing from the state, rather they dispute the state sovereignty to organize their own existence. The rejection of the state as organizing vector and model is also expressed in a rejection of representation as the overarching logic for politics.

In effect, as Zibechi (2005) argues, the state legitimacy rests on the claim of being the ultimate representation and suture of a fragmented social body, thus, representation “operates in the absence of social ties.” The presence of social ties, forged through communal life within the territory, provide an alternative vector and model through which the relation between multiplicities and the immanent organization of the social, political and economic can be imagined. For the new Bolivian minister of education and indigenous intellectual Felix Patzi (2004: 175), the communal system constituting aymaras and quechuas economies is central for imagining present day alternatives to the capitalist system. This type of economy is known in aymara and quechua societies as the *ayllu economy* (see Gilly 2005 for the role that this economy played in shaping the subjectivities that erupted in revolt in 2003). This communal system not only offers an alternative proposal to the neo-liberal economic system, but more generally to modern politics. In effect, in contrast to the modernist attempt to transcend fragmentation through representation, here the focus of political action is on the ceaseless co-adjusting of multiple experiences in co-existence.¹¹ Thus, the form of political action of these movements does not “correspond to the state-form – vertical and pyramidal – but rather is based on a set of ties that are more horizontal but also more unstable than bureaucratic systems” (Zibechi 2005:30). These ties, expressed in slogans such as “*entre todos todo*” (“among everyone, everything”), “*entre todos lo sabemos todo*” (“among everyone, we know everthing”), “*caminar preguntando*” (to walk asking) and “*mandar obedeciendo*” (to command obeying), underline the intention to avoid a division of both political labor and thought-action.

⁹These movements have been particularly visible in the Zapatista uprising of 1994, the Argentinian revolt of 2001 and the Bolivian revolts of 2003 and 2004 but also in other less strident processes of social organizing and mobilization like those of the movement of unemployed workers and sectors of the movement of recovered factories in Argentina, the movements of landless peasants in Brazil and Paraguay, sector of the Indigenous movements in Bolivia, Ecuador and Chile, and the Peace communities and movement of black communities in Colombia, among others.

¹⁰ Although it must be pointed out that many of this marginal places can also become ‘borderlands’ (Duffield 2002), places that ‘call for’ and ‘need’ humanitarian interventions (backed up with violence if needed) to bring some degree of (state and market) order.

¹¹ Following *Colectivo Situaciones*, Zibechi uses the term ‘composition’ to refer to this form of politics.

Important to our discussion here is highlighting the epistemological dimension of these movements' politics. But in order to fully grasp this dimension we have to retrace our steps to our point that qualifying the word intellectual with the site-marker 'academic' signals the existence of different, albeit subalternized, configurations of power/knowledge. To this respect, it is interesting that Zibechi (2005) depicts the insurrectional social movements we are discussing as being "born on the margins of established society," meaning by this, outside the reach of the state and capital. Yet, from our perspective the margins are defined within a configuration larger than, and inclusive of, the state and capital; the margins are defined in relation to modernity. Not surprisingly, it was in Indigenous communities and the countryside where the political forms that characterize these movements were first perceived before they moved to 'contaminate' the political practice of marginalized urban dwellers. If we recall that the locus of modernity in Latin America has been the city while the countryside and the Indians have been its margins (Rama 1996), we will be able to perceive that there are old and new margins and that the flow of political know-how/practice between these margins might be the embryo of a reconfigured regime of power/knowledge.

Key to the points raised is the idea of colonial difference, which brings to the forefront the recognition that there has always been an exteriority to modernity and that, in connection to this, there has always been knowledge "otherwise," often articulated to struggles for social transformation and social justice (Mignolo 2000; Dussel 2000; Escobar 2002). Thus, all liberating academic-intellectual traditions, from those associated to nation-building and modernization processes to those probing modernity from within the margins of the modern episteme (such as poststructuralism), have always run parallel to the muted and invisibilized contestations that "other" regimes of power/knowledge, exterior to the modern ratio, have posed to modernity. An indigenous intellectual such as Felipe Guamam Poma writing in the final decades of the 16th century a political indigenous manifesto at the height of the Spanish conquest, and a rebel slave such as Quobna Ottobah Cugoano (1999) writing at the final decades of the 18th century a radical manifesto against slavery, or mid 20th century indigenous leader like Quintin Lame, seeking to reinterpret liberation theology from within his 'Indian world' are early examples of this. In all cases what we have is a critique of domination from a logic other than the modern. We can think in similar ways of the wrongly labeled messianic movements among Indigenous peoples, these were political movements articulated according to another logic. Of course, from the perspective of modernity these critiques and these movements lacked proper rationality, they could not count as real and valid politics, hence their invisibilization as such.

While many of the insurrectional movements we are discussing here are new, the politics they embody is just newly visible, it has been there all along although invisibilized by the modern project. It is true that, as Zibechi (2005:31) argues, the forms of political practice of these movements are connected to the centrality that "bonds of a communitarian nature" play within them, yet his hasty dismissal of the role that 'cosmologies' may have on these political practices misses an important indicator of both the underlying continuity beneath the visible newness and the non-modern component of these politics. In effect, and as it happens with other analysts of the urban parts of these movements (see Chatterton 2005), in much of his exposition Zibechi stresses the new, the discontinuities that they reveal – for example, the communitarian bonds are *re*-constructed, meaning they were not there in the recent past. In this way, it is easy to

read the emergence of these politics a la Giddens (1990), that is, as being simply the unexpected consequences of modernity.

Attention to the cosmologies that have informed these newly visible politics, in contrast, allow us both to read them along a temporality that exceeds that of modernity, and to fully grasp them in their positivity as other than modern. Consider, for example, the role of the *caracoles*, a symbol heavy with Mayan cosmological resonances, have in the Zapatista political imagination and practice (Gonzales Casanova 2005). More generally, many of the political practices of the insurrectional social movements (particularly those that have been codified in the slogans mentioned above) have profound resonances with Indigenous relational cosmologies in which notions of situated and partial knowledge are intrinsically linked to the recognition of the worth and importance that the autonomy (and differences) of human and non-human others have for the well-being of the cosmos. A world in which many worlds fit is not a novel proposition for Indigenous relational cosmologies (see for example AFTE 2004; Cajete 2000; McGregor 2004; Viveiro de Castro 2004;).

But our point is not about the importance of Indigenous cosmologies because they are exotic, the point is stressing that certain peoples have been classified as Indigenous and forced into a subordinated/marginal position by the colonial difference because they embody other cosmologies. These cosmologies, while submerged and constrained, have been always operative (do not confuse with unchanging). Therefore the main discontinuity that we are witnessing now is not the emergence of something entirely new but the crumbling down of the modern blinders/stoppers that kept other worlds and other politics invisible and confined. This crumbling down is taking place amidst internal and external challenges to modernity. The new marginals, those who were to some extent incorporated into modernity by the welfare/developmental-state to later be expelled by the neoliberal wave of modernization, find that the promises of modernity are either empty or extremely onerous, becoming thus open to see in the practices of those who were never fully overcome by modernity, viable alternative worlds and politics not envisioned by their own (academically informed) traditions of struggle. Thus, a member of the Argentinian movement of unemployed workers would recount that, in trying to find long term answers to their marginalization, people in the movement “started to study Marcos and his Zapatistas, and from them we learned a new way of doing politics... We also went to places where there was a conference from the MST [Brazil’s movement of Landless Peasants]...” (MTD 2002:31). The new margins learn from the old margins. The ‘lettered city’ begins to see the so far invisible prose of intellectual Others.

Reconfiguring Academic-intellectual Power/Knowledge?

With its own specificity, the academy-site has also gone through a similar process as the ‘new margins,’ increasing disaffection with modernity from within has been coupled with increasing visibility and viability of alternatives from without. Recognizing that the epistemological is a central dimension of the operations by which difference is turned into inequality, step by step many of the insurrectional movements have brought their own ‘traditional’ or ‘local’ knowledge practices to bear into the debates about societal projects (Rappaport 2005; Fernandez Osco FULL CITE; Lajo). Many of these knowledge practices,

connected in some way to relational cosmologies, seem particularly suited to address the poststructuralist critique of metanarratives without being disempowered by them. In effect, similarly to the poststructuralists, there is here a heightened suspicion of the exclusionary powers of metanarratives plus a concern with keeping open the processes of articulating and enacting temporary and partial truths.

Yet, in contrast to poststructuralism rather than trusting this task to the ‘ascetic’ intellectual, it is the collective who must carry it on. Furthering the mutual encounter of multiple situated truths helps (not always successfully, though) to reveal these situated truths as partial while keeping this diversity from being glossed over by emerging, negotiated (but temporary) truths. In a way these movements enact what the poststructuralists could only envision as a program of action, a new politics of truth in which specific prescriptions for localized actions are furthered while the wider project of building ‘a world in which many worlds fit’ gets to be enacted. Given the highly performative character of these movements politics, its success does not measure in terms of goals achieved in relation to a blueprint but in terms of the extent that it contaminates with its logic more sites and practices. To the extent that at bottom what these movements enact is a relational way of understanding and relating to others, we argue their intellectual production can be understood as an anthropology, in the widest sense of the term, that is as an active and creative exploration of commonalities between different worlds. Through their practices, the problem they address is that, to use Latour words, “*no one* has the answers - this is why they have to be collectively staged, stabilized and revised” (Latour 2005:138).

Not surprisingly, the insurrection of subjugated knowledge has found among academic-intellectuals who took poststructuralist critiques seriously an audience prone to be enrolled as interlocutors. This has translated into a series of interconnected developments that, we believe, are indicative of the possible directions in which a reconfiguration of the dominant regime of power/knowledge might proceed. These developments include the relative equalization of diverse knowledge practices through the proliferation of sites of encounter between them but also a certain disposition to allow for the contamination of academic-intellectuals’ knowledge practices by the insurrectional movements’ non-modern knowledge practices.

The relative equalization of knowledge practices is evidenced by the tendency among some academic-intellectuals to engage in dialogue with intellectual Others. This is taking place in sites such as the Universidad Intercultural in Ecuador, Universidad de la Resistencia in Colombia, the joint workshops held by Colectivo Situaciones with diverse social movements in Argentina, the Encuentros Zapatistas in Chiapas, the Social Forums and even academic research programs such as the modernity/coloniality and decolonial thinking, among the better known to us. In the following pages, we want to bring more texture to our narration by briefly discussing two sites where these provocative processes are taking place. These examples, coming from the margins of society and the victims of neoliberal structural adjustment policies and the coloniality of power in general, share a questioning of the dominant modern epistemological table embedded in state bureaucracies, expert knowledge, official discourses, etc. They have declared their autonomy through a very delicate and complex relation with a State that has been responsible for their own persecution or marginalization. These are examples that illustrate how current struggles are currently operating and struggling on the *epistemological terrain*.

Knowledge production and more than that, *knowledge otherwise*, transverses these necessarily political and epistemic subjectivities. The examples below of the University of Resistance in Colombia and the Intercultural University Amawtay-Wasi in Ecuador precisely operate on these terrains. One brief commentary: This is certainly not an ‘outside’ of modernity, since many of them uses strategically typical modern formations such as the one of the *University*, others like the Zapatistas even mention the *National Constitution*. This is an exteriority that demands a permanent work of co-adjustment between different subjectivities and formations.

University of Resistance-Colombia

The history that lies behind the *University of Resistance* is the violent dispute over the extraction and monopoly of legal and illegal resources the region of Apartadó by different actors since the 1980’s (Uribe 2004). Today, a very rich region for the industrial extraction of commercial banana along with the introduction of illegal coca crops, has turned what was a frontier region four decades ago into a strategic area for actors ranging from international and national investors of capital, guerrilla groups (FARC and EPL), paramilitaries and the Colombian State.

The violent struggle has led in the 1990’s to one of the most tragic cycles in the recent history of Colombia. In certain rural areas, in 1997, for example, military combats between the armed forces, the guerrilla and the paramilitary groups forced more than 4,000 peasants flee to nearby urban settlements looking for survival. Assassinations of community leaders by anonymous hands and crude violations of human rights were common, as well as the negligence and incapacity of authorities to investigate and prosecute anyone. It was precisely in this violent environment where several communities, accompanied by religious organizations and NGO’s, declared themselves *Peace Communities* through a the year (Uribe 2004). In these collective pacts, they didn’t only declare neutrality in the middle of the conflict, but also proclaimed horizontal and participatory models of society for the recuperation of their autonomy and sovereignty over their actions and decisions (Memorias del SeminarioTaller con Comunidades de Riesgo 2003). But the violence didn’t paused or even terminated. The assassinations, disappearances and displacements didn’t go away and since then, have been permanent in the region.

As a reaction to the general spread of violence in the region and to the passive reaction of authorities (which the communities blame for their action or omission in these same actions), twenty of these Peace Communities formed the *University of Resistance* in the year 2004, as a node for exchanging knowledge on how to survive amidst violence. This *University* has no fixed classroom or space, no fixed professors, does not gives any diplomas to its participants and is organized on sessions that take place in areas of conflict including the Chocó region and others as well. They refrain of having their sessions outside the places of conflict. Through a “cartography of hope”, they attempt to identify the resources, actors and projects that make these places into contentious territories over official maps. They also have sessions of “Philosophy and Politics” where they discuss “autonomy” and read contemporary political theory. The “students”

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are precisely the victims of the widespread of violence in Colombia: the afro-Colombian communities of Chocó, indigenous communities, internally displaced peasants, others whose crops have been fumigated by eradication policies, etc. There is not a single subjectivity here. This is an articulatory node of different subjectivities victims of violence that are producing knowledge to survive, interpret and name the violence in the country.

Intercultural University Amawtay-Wasi -Ecuador

The Intercultural University Amawaya-Wasi stems from the first steps taken by the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) in 1987 to create a system of intercultural and bilingual education (Universidad Intercultural Amawtay Wasi 2004). The project of interculturality, as an ideological principle of the indigenous movements political project, is different from the project of multiculturalism (Walsh 2005). Interculturality is key in the construction of a new democracy “-“anticolonialist, anticapitalist, anti-imperialist, and antisegregationist” in nature; a democracy that guarantee “the full and permanent participation of the [indigenous] peoples and nationalities in decision making” and in “the exercise of political power inn the Plurinational State (CONAIE 1997, 11, quoted in Walsh 2005). The fforts started in 1998 by the CONAIE to create the Intercultural University of Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples bore fruits in 2003 with the creation of the Intercultural University Amawtay-Wasi.

Here, we just want to mention briefly that the conceptual architecture of the intercultural university has been designed by indigenous principles and cosmologies. Thus, one finds that the principles and paradigms that inform and orient the curriculum are related to the indigenous concept of interculturality, *Abya Yala*, which includes as its foundational myth the notion of relationality, a notion of both the implicated and explained world (parallel worlds) producing reality as a tapestry that is woven in complete interrelationality. The academic years structures along five Centers of Knowledge (*Centros de Saber*) that all “students” have to go through and that relate to domains of experience such as living in the community, reconciling humans and technology, and constructing the intercultural project, among others. There are also three cycles of knowledge, *Runa Yachay*, related to ancestral knowledge, *Shtkatk Yachay*, related to western knowledge and finally, the *Yachaypura*, related to intercultural knowledge. The “class sessions” move between different places and they even integrate with the original communities from which the “students” come from, since they too, are also learning communities (*comunidades de aprendizaje*). The *Amaytay Wasi* conceive these communities as a “strategy for multiplying and potentializing the opportunities to have access and participation in collective processes of culturally and socially significantly learning processes for young and adults of all ages, from their communities-territories, based on the principle of a life lasting process of learning.” (Intercultural University Amawtay-Wasi 2004: 230).

Some concluding remarks on academic-intellectuals

As we can see, what makes these sites of importance is the tendency of the engagements they foster to mimic, with varying degrees of success, the knowledge practices/politics that characterize the insurreccional movements. That is, an awareness of the situatedness and transitoriness of knowledge, the effort to avoid the imposition of truths, and an emphasis on

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horizontality [we need to reinforce how this relates to the notion of other flows i.e., equalization, contamination]. Thus, to the extent that they reproduce and expand non-modern knowledge practices, and within their specific conditions, these sites tend to generate neither intellectuals *with* the movements, nor intellectuals *for* the movements, but intellectuals in the movements.

However, it is important to stress the degree to which the equalization and contamination of knowledge practices is relative. Perhaps the best way to illustrate the point is by reference to a site of encounter that is located at the heart, so to speak, of the still dominant configuration of power/knowledge, the academic research program of modernity/coloniality and decolonial thinking. In effect, we find here some evident limitations that are extensive in diverse degrees to the other sites. In a way, the modernity/coloniality research program, of which we consider ourselves to be part of, ends up in a position that resembles that of the committed academic-intellectual position, we identify a site of knowledges otherwise in the exteriority of modernity, we suspect that recognizing them and opening the space for them to become visible again has liberating potentials, but we cut ourselves short of truly engaging with them in their own terms, and thus remain entrenched in our position of authority, reproducing the current configuration of power/knowledge. In effect, we do not contaminate our modern knowledge practices with knowledge practices otherwise. We go as far as denoting their existence, their visibility in the works of intellectual Others, but we do not produce knowledge otherwise ourselves. This is evident in two ways: our ways of understanding the world are not thoroughly transformed by the contact with the categories with which intellectual Others understand the world (but see Rappaport 2005) and, more importantly, we miss from sight the most compelling aspect of insurrectional knowledge practices, their eminently performative rather than denotative nature.

For example, we can read the works of intellectual others but do not find ourselves compelled to mix, meld and bridge ours and theirs categories to understand coloniality, for example. To a large extent this is because border-thinking and decolonial thought (arguably the political vectors/categories off this academic-intellectual project) is still mostly shouldered by intellectual Others.¹² In effect, these intellectuals do most of the work of bridging, mixing, and melding categories from different traditions of knowledge (modern/academic and theirs).¹³ Moreover, from the perspective of most academic-intellectuals, the visibility of these intellectual Others depends on their capacity to do this bridging, mixing and melding. Total illiteracy in the language of academic-intellectuals would imply complete invisibility. Indeed, with the exception of Old Antonio, the Mayan shaman often cited by subcomandante Marcos (2001), intellectual Others who do not speak their language seem to be out of the radar screen of academic-intellectuals.¹⁴ Of course, this speaks of power differentials. Academic-intellectuals do not face invisibility if they do not speak the language of intellectual Others, at least if they are not intending to be relevant for the movements of which we speak here. And this brings us to the

¹² Border thinking and decolonial thought definitions

¹³ In our examples, they merge concepts such as the University with their horizontal practices (i.e., not having students or professors as is the case with the University of the Resistance), or reconceptualizing it through indigenous cosmologies, principles and paradigms like in the *Amaytay-Wasi*.

¹⁴ We think similar problems of language must arise in different degrees in other sites closer to the academy, for instance nothing indicates in the highly academically informed language of Colectivo Situaciones' publications that a two way melding, blending and mixing is taking place there.

issue of missing the most compelling aspects of these movements' knowledge practices, their performativity.

To fully grasp the point we need to stress the centrality of territorialization/autonomy in these movements. We pointed out before that this was tied to the capacity of specific places to organize social bonds according to a vector and model that is the communitarian experience, which implies the ceaseless co-adjusting of multiple experiences in co-existence. Knowledge in this context, is relational, emergent and contextual, its truth value goes hand in hand with its conduciveness to such co-adjusting of multiplicity. Keeping this in mind we wonder, in what sense do our academic-intellectual knowledge practices are conducive to this when they reproduce power differentials that force other to adjust to us without a similar gesture on our part? Are we contributing to produce a common world in which many world fits, or are we still imposing our world? The knowledge practices of the insurrectional social movements are what they do, and we completely miss this point when we just try to capture in the form of plain description what they are without letting them do with us what they do. Taking these knowledges practices seriously necessarily implies a transformation of our knowledge practices in a way that will make them relevant for the politics of these social movements. In other words, our knowledge practices also have to become conducive to the co-adjusting of multiplicities.

We want to finish by opening up the discussion of the specificity of our situation as academics. We would like to signal that our claim of being academic-intellectuals in the movement does not glosses over power differentials. Quite contrary it is exceedingly clear to us that if our situation/site is of any relevance to these movements, this goes hand in hand with the role of universities as key nodes for the reproduction of power relations in the present socio-epistemological regime. The challenge here is how to deploy this centrality and specificity in a way that erodes the inequalities currently associated with this regime. And here lays the crux of what seems an intractable problem for academics, the authority of academic knowledge, its status as expert knowledge appears to be marred to inequality. This is evident in the issue of expert language: we are often said that in order to be really democratic and horizontal our intellectual production has to be accessible to the non-expert, otherwise we protect our exclusive authority and therefore the inequality that separate the expert from the non-expert. But here several things get confused, expertise does not always imply inequality, and authority does not always connote imposition.

Perhaps a good way to think about this issue is through the example of the Yshiro people's konsaho (shaman) with which one of us is familiar. The konsaho is an expert and as such he/she manages a language that is not accessible to just anyone but only to those who are themselves konsaho or in the process of becoming one. No Yshiro would have the idea that everyone should be a konsaho, this is something determined by particular vital trajectories, yet konsaho are indeed vested with authority to the extent that they prove themselves to be beneficial (in their function) to the community of humans and non-humans that co-form the yrho (cosmos). Interestingly, being beneficial depends largely on the konsaho's capacity to co-adjust the multiple 'threads' (social bonds) that come to meet in his/her persona. Precisely because a person is recognized to have a talent to do this co-adjusting consistently well is that he or she becomes and is recognized by the community as an expert konsaho. But this is not someone who looks the world from above and from a distance, rather it is through his/her disposition to entangle their

selves in open-ended relations with unforeseeable consequences (both in identitarian and bodily terms) that the konsaho gains authority and respect. In other words, the konsaho is an institution in a permanent state of becoming. May be the university and the academic-intellectual might be construed in this way, where our expertise becomes such to the extent that we open this (personal and institutional) site to become one of the nodes where multiplicities meet and co-adjust in co-existence, always keeping in mind that we cannot be everywhere (and nowhere), that we (us all) operate in the specificity of our sites. Hence, for us is not so much in the simplicity and accessibility of language (which assumes un-diference) where the possibility of eroding inequalities rests but in the kind of articulations/translations that the 'university site' can allow within itself and with other sites of practices.

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