
“We Need Knowledge for Life, a University Free of Colonialism”: Reflections on the Decolonization of Knowledge, and the University, from Experience

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INTRODUCTION

We need knowledge for life, a university free from colonialism.

Aline Ngrenhtabare Lopes Kayapó,
Brazilian Indigenous poet and thinker

I conceived and wrote this text in response to the invitation from University of Louisville to participate in a meeting organized by the Watson Conference. Dr. Hilaria Cruz, an academic from the Chatino People of Oaxaca and professor at said university, as well as other Native American scholars, attended this event. I thank her for the invitation to

Abstract

This document reflects on the decolonization of knowledge and universities through reflection on the role of conferences as spaces of decolonization. The reflection emphasizes the recognition of the place of enunciation of the writer and from there engages in *sentipensar* about the importance and urgency of working for decolonization beyond conferences and beyond universities. The analysis is based on the idea that decolonization is more than a discourse or a metaphor; it is a project for life with both feet on the ground. Colonialism is today a daily and constant reality that racialized people are faced with more violence, but at the same time from these places of resistance, important reflections and actions towards decolonization are emerging. This text also analyzes the role of Indigenous scholars and the criticism of universities as a hegemonic place of the production of knowledge.

Keywords

decolonization, coloniality of knowledge, sentipensar, decolonizing the university, Indigenous scholars

this space since Abya Yala’s¹ “Indigenous” intellectuals are rarely called to these conferences at universities in the Global North.

It is important to say that I will not speak from “neutrality,” nor from the distance imposed by scientific objectivity. I will speak in first person, from my own experience, as a peasant academic native to Ñuu Savi, the People of the Rain,² south of what is now known as Mexico. I am interested in reflecting on university life and its relationship with the coloniality of knowledge, the implications and possibilities of its decolonization, the situation and the role of Indigenous researchers, as well as the possibilities of generating localized knowledge in the service of our peoples or communities, from other epistemologies and ontologies, which have profound differences from those of the hegemonic thinking of Western³/Westernized universities.

This text was presented at a conference that sought to reimagine conferences. Although conferences are valuable spaces of reflection within universities, the decolonizing project must go beyond them. Because I believe it is outside the university walls that we live and fight daily against a system of death, we must take the alternatives of resistance to the current modern/colonial system outside the university.

My reflections are deeply inspired by *sentipensares* of Southern men and women beyond the Rio Grande, who in some cases participate in sociology, anthropology, and rural studies academies. My intention is not to deny the existence of valuable reflections made by racialized people, mainly Native American, who have been working in a situated and committed manner from their territories. However, dialogue becomes difficult because their texts, undoubtedly important, are not translated into Spanish, an analogous situation to the fact that our reflections, not written in English, are very rarely studied in North America. For this reason, I really appreciate the intermediation of the Watson Conference to get this essay to those who do not read about it in Spanish, and in this way, establish the South-South dialogue.

WESTERN UNIVERSITY, COLONIALITY OF KNOWLEDGE AND SUBALTERNIZED VOICES

I do not carry innocence to the point of believing that appeals to reason or to respect for human dignity can alter reality. For the Negro who works on a sugar plantation in Le Robert, there is only one solution: to fight.

F. Fanon 1986, 224

The Western university system is colonized. The bases that sustain its claim for truth and universality are modern science and Eurocentrism (De Sousa Santos 2021; Lander 2011). The university is the privileged place of the coloniality of knowledge. Edgardo Lander (2011) coined this concept, inspired by the ideas of Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano (1992, 2011) about the coloniality of power. Coloniality is not the same as colonialism. It is very important to differentiate between the two terms because although coloniality does not deny the continuity of colonialism, this notion emphasizes the colonization of the imaginary of the dominated and the attempt of dominators to prevent the production of other forms of thought and conceptions of the world. Thus, coloniality is defined as

a systematic repression not only of specific beliefs, ideas, images, symbols, or knowledge, that were not intended for global colonial domination . . . repression [that] was directed, above all, on the ways of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of meaning; on the resources, patterns, and instruments of formalized and objectified expression, intellectual or visual. It was followed by the imposition of the use of the patterns of expression of the colonizers, as well as their beliefs and images referring to the supernatural, which served not only to prevent the cultural production of the dominated, but also as effective means of social control, when the immediate repression stopped being constant and systematic. (Quijano 1992, 12, translated by Montelongo González)

In this sense coloniality of knowledge operates by racializing colonized people’s knowledge in such a way that the knowledges of the colonizers were considered as the only valid ones, while those

1 Mother Earth, Living Earth, or Flourishing Earth. The Kuna people thus name the territory that today is known as the American continent.

2 “Currently, the People of the Rain’s historical and cultural territory, is divided politically and territorially between the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Puebla, in Mexico. Since the colonial period, Ñuu Savi has been divided into: 1) Higher Mixteca, a cold and mountainous region in the state of Oaxaca that exceeds 2000 meters above sea level; 2) Lower Mixteca, a warm and eroded region of northwestern Oaxaca, eastern Guerrero and southern Puebla below 2000 meters above sea level, and 3) Mixteca from the coast, a region that runs along the Pacific coast of Oaxaca and Guerrero” (Aguilar 2020, 23, translated by Montelongo González).

3 I think of the West as defined by Stuart Hall (1992), that is, as an idea, a concept, and a language to understand and imagine a complex set of stories, ideas, historical events, and social relationships. The idea of the West allows us to characterize and classify societies into categories, capturing complex images of other societies through a representation system that establishes a standardized comparison model, which in turn establishes an evaluation criterion to classify societies.

of the colonized peoples were condemned as “diabolical” and in this way destroyed without consequences. During the colonial period, the members of the different religious orders carried out this mission as if it were a divine mandate. On July 12, 1562, in Maní, Yucatán, Fray Diego de Landa Calderón, a Franciscan missionary, burned, in front of the entire population, the Mayan codices the inhabitants of those lands showed him after the friar earned their confidence. Diego de Landa, who later wrote the “Relación de las Cosas de Yucatan,” incinerated sixty tons of books that contained the knowledge of that millennial people (Meneses 2011). In this regard, Lourdes Arizpe and Maricarmen Tostado (1993) maintain that “the Spanish conquerors destroyed thousands of codices; Fray Diego de Landa burned one hundred thousand Mayan codices” (69, translated by Montelongo González).

Juan de Zumárraga, another Franciscan friar, ordered the burning of thousands of books considered dangerous: “Friars saw in the codices evil figures. They seized the archives of Tenochtitlán and Tlatelolco, and to end the idolatry of people, made a bonfire of the seized books, a mountain of them, which burned for eight days” (Rayón 1854, 979, translated by Montelongo González). The number of books burned is incalculable (Davies 1988; Polastron 2007).

In the 19th century, between 1850 and 1914, the emerging nation-states continued with the colonial project, institutionalizing the university as we know it today, promoting “objective reality” and scientific knowledge based on empirical findings. It should be noted that the first universities were located in just five countries: Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and the United States (Wallerstein 1996).

Since its beginning, the university has validated modern/colonial scientific knowledge, flaunting itself as a temple of “objective” and “neutral” knowledge. However, this knowledge is based on separations that establish a primary rupture between subject and object of knowledge in such a way that

only through the construction of the radical break between reason and the body was it possible to postulate a subject of knowledge totally separate from the object, a subject of knowledge that is not involved in any way with the object and therefore can produce uncontaminated objective knowledge. In this way, the separation between the subject and reason implies the possibility of objective and universal knowledge. (Lander 2011, 169, translated by Montelongo González)

For this perspective, universality is based on a notion of knowledge that depends neither on the place nor on the temporality of who produces it. But this is false (Lander 2004, 169). For the Westernized university, any knowledge situated in the body politic

of knowledge will be considered as unscientific (Anzaldúa 2015; Fanon 1986).

Coloniality of knowledge also refers to a form of epistemic colonialism, deeply related to what Gayatri Spivak (1998) conceptualizes as epistemic violence, that is, the presumption of the unscientific nature of knowledge based on epistemologies that recognize the place of enunciation and the researcher’s subjectivity. Epistemic violence perpetuates the oppression of those who generate this type of knowledge.

The Western university apparatus is closely linked to the coloniality of knowledge and its scientific systems, which are based on what has been called expert knowledge, which denies the existence of other knowledge or other ways of knowing (Restrepo 2018). However, I also consider that the university is a disputed field (De Sousa Santos 2021, 17). For many people and populations historically excluded from this hegemonic place of knowledge, access into universities implies a political act, as stated by the Maya-Kaqchikel thinker and teacher Aura Cumes (2018): “[The university] does not mean creating freely within a space, but rather, above all, a field of power where we must begin the struggle⁴ so that our voices are heard among legitimate voices” (136, translated by Montelongo González).

The university, as we know it today, has reproduced colonialist, capitalist, racist, and patriarchal narratives and epistemologies deeply rooted in its bureaucracies, its hierarchical forms of decision-making, its administration, and its programs of study.

Universities have undergone important processes of change throughout their history. In some countries, the 1960s marked the beginning of the opening of higher education for lower-income sectors. However, although important, these transformations did not alter university structures in terms of its members, curricula or teaching, or the epistemology and ontology that sustain scientific knowledge.

Neoliberalism and the shift towards a business and bureaucratic model reinforced mechanisms of colonization of universities (Restrepo 2018, 17). Neoliberalism has strengthened instrumental rationality, training technocratic experts at the service of the market in both public and private universities. This situation deepens the exclusion originated not only by economic factors but also by race, culture, and gender. In that sense, the university has been not only elitist but also colonialist, racist, and sexist.

The struggle for decolonialization requires total dismantling of the fused systems of oppression present in the university. So, thinking about a decolonization process implies going beyond the simple recognition of dominant forms that involve universities and

⁴ “Struggle is simply the life of the people who are trying to survive on the margins, in search of freedom and better conditions, in search of social justice. Struggle is a tool for both social activism and theory” (Tuhiwai Smith 2017, 351, translated by Montelongo González)

that have sustained racism, exclusion, and dispossession. The recognition of oppression and exclusion is an important step, but decolonization implies dismantling the epistemic-ontological scaffolding that sustains the structure of the modern/colonial university.

Decolonization must necessarily be accompanied by concrete political practice because otherwise it is limited only to abstract theorizing. For the Nasa people of Colombia, the word without action is empty and action without word is ignorant. Words and actions alien to community spirit are death. In other words, if we only seek discursive decolonization, without linking ourselves to the territories where life is defended in the midst of exploitation, dispossession, and violence, ours will be an empty word.

THE “OBJECT” AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT IN UNIVERSITIES

Scientific objectivity was barred to me, for the alienated, the neurotic, was my brother, my sister, my father. I have ceaselessly striven to show the Negro that in a sense he makes himself abnormal; to show the white man that he is at once the perpetrator and the victim of a delusion.

Fanon 1986, 225

In Mexico, the presence of Indigenous people in universities was evident from the 1990s. Previously, it was very difficult to find Indigenous students or researchers in higher-level institutions. In that decade in Mexico, the majority of the continental population was Indigenous people. However, regarding higher education, it is estimated that Indigenous enrollment was only 1% (Barreno 2003).

For Indigenous youth, completing university studies implies a long process of struggle because it requires an enormous effort to stay away from family and community networks and pay fees, rent, food, books, and so forth. Universities have always been away from our communities. Graduating also requires a greater effort because Indigenous students have a disadvantage compared to young people who have ideal conditions.

In my case, I left Chila de las Flores, in Lower Mixteca, at 14 years old, to enter high school in Huajuapán de León, Oaxaca, the closest city, since there was no possibility of continuing to study in my village. Later I migrated to Mexico City, six hours from my community, to study for my bachelor's degree, knowing I would also have to work since my parents, landless farmers, could not pay rent in the city or cover my expenses. Facing that situation was not easy. In fact, many young people from Indigenous communities do not leave their villages to study due to the many difficulties involved.

Attending the university also implies challenging epistemic violence, which reproduces the idea that our community's knowledge is of no importance or use. Furthermore, during my bachelor's degree, master's degree, and doctorate studies, I did not have any Indigenous professors, which reinforces the idea that our presence is not compatible with the university.

The absence of Indigenous people in universities, both in Mexico and on the rest of the continent, explains the fact that most of what is known about us has been said by non-Indigenous researchers coming from universities in the Global North in many cases. Hilaria Cruz (2020, 40) reflects on the way in which academics external to the communities, mostly white, mestizo, or foreigners, handle the information generated during field work, jealously guarding it, even from the community itself. The researcher reserves the right to publish their “discoveries” or “findings” according to their own interests, preventing communities from accessing information.

It is also important to note that access to university education does not automatically imply a decolonization process (Aguilar 2020). On the contrary, universities have historically reinforced the deindianization and denial of who we are, as well as the abandonment of our knowledge, which arises from *milpa*⁵, backyard festivities, work, and peasant communal life.

In universities, racism is expressed in discriminatory and exclusionary policies that include the low admission numbers of Indigenous students, and this is even more evident in the composition of the teaching staff, where Indigenous researchers are a minority, and, consequently, their thoughts and theoretical-epistemic contributions are not considered. A politics of knowledge based on epistemologies of the Global North predominates in universities around the world. World history is European history, Eurocentrism, Orientalism, and neocolonial supremacy (De Sousa Santos 2021, 229). Thus, knowledge and history are studied and learned from a perspective that places the West as the main reference, the measure of all things, while other knowledges and ways of knowing are denied or turned into objects of study.

The Western university transmits to Indigenous students a standardized knowledge, which is far from the realities, problems, and needs of their peoples. This means we are “formed” with the dominant theoretical-epistemic model that does not respond to the contexts from which we come (Cariño 2020, 270). Our access to university education occurs in conditions of disadvantage and exclusion from our ways of thinking and understanding the world.

Colonial epistemology, which promotes Western rationality, is based on the idea of the existence of only one way of knowing and only one valid knowledge, which contributes to the strengthening of the single history (Ngozi Adichie 2018) and to the nullification of other epistemologies. This is why, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2017)

5 *Milpa* is a complex and millenary cultural creation based on the ecological balance among corn, beans, chili, and squash.

puts it, “It is important to reclaim those spaces that are considered, by right, the possession of the West. Such spaces have to do with intellectual, theoretical and imaginative spaces” (357, translated by Montelongo González).

Although important, the presence of Indigenous academics in universities is only a first step for those of us who belong to subaltern peoples or communities since there is a field of power that prevents the recognition of the value of the epistemologies of our peoples for sustaining the web of life in relation to everything that exists.

Historically, access to the university has been a privilege of white men and women of the wealthy class, who have had the necessary conditions to carry out higher studies, and, in that sense, have had access to the possibility of producing knowledge. In this geopolitics of knowledge (Mignolo 2000),⁶ Indigenous peoples have been objects of study. When Indigenous peoples break into universities, not as objects but as knowledge-generating subjects, they can shake and question these structures, revealing the double discourse of “objectivity” and “neutrality” that sustains universities.

It is very important to recognize the university as a space of power-knowledge where the coloniality of knowledge and epistemic violence, which fuel epistemic extractivism, operate.⁷ We must fight so that our ideas are heard, and we must learn to express, orally and in writing, thoughts that can contribute to and accompany our peoples. *Sentipensar*⁸ is crucial, starting from our epistemologies, our ways of knowing, and the ancestral knowledge that arises in our territories, which is also renewed in the contexts and realities we must live.

UNIVERSITIES AS A SPACE OF THE SATURATION OF WHITENESS

I consider it necessary to question the saturation of whiteness since it implies discussing who has the power to name and generate knowledge in the universities of the Global North and South. I understand “white” as a way of thinking, not as a skin color.

As an Indigenous peasant, I consider it urgent that privileged people, who have had a monopoly on words and writing, keep silent and listen and learn about other ways of life that have been denied, ignored, or silenced.

The saturation of whiteness, a result of white privilege that prevails in universities, operates in such a way that it seems violence and aggressions against the population not privileged by race/class/sex/gender/nationality are unimportant exaggerations. For this reason, it is urgent to transcend the discourse of meritocracy and permanently question privileges, which will contribute to the appearance of cracks that allow the collapse of the structure that hierarchizes knowledge, voices, bodies, and inferiorized ways of life considered unimportant and, therefore, without theoretical-epistemic validity.

It is of vital importance to work daily and permanently to eradicate white supremacy in all spaces, including universities. I think it is urgent to build forms and processes of the decolonization of knowledge beyond conferences, which, although important, are not the places from which we will build other worlds, nor are universities, no matter how critical, progressive, or left-wing they may seem. We will have to go beyond university walls.

Many of us who come from the racialized peoples of the planet are aware that by participating in university academic spaces, we do not ask for opportunities to access the advantages or “advances” of the West, nor do we seek to “demonstrate” that our peoples have the capacity to think, or that our knowledge is also scientific. Many of us are not interested in claiming our knowledge and ways of life in terms of what the West holds as valid. What we want is to make a difference, certainly epistemic but above all ontological, insofar as our presence means a cry for existence, because we want to continue being what we are, living in dignity according to our way in the world in relation to the land-territory and everything that exists.

Universities must break down the symbolic and real walls that separate them from communities, peoples, and multiple realities. This separation is characteristic of the northeurocentered Enlightened⁹ University, which reproduces the hierarchy and fragmentation of life.

6 For Mignolo (2000), the “history” of knowledge is geohistorically marked and also has a value and a place of “origin.” The geopolitics of knowledge proposes that knowledge is not abstract and delocalized but rather a manifestation of colonial difference.

7 This happens when people from subordinate groups access university spaces, although I recognize some of them uncritically assume rationality, epistemology, and hegemonic methodology. However, I am interested in focusing on the experiences of colleagues with whom we share the interest and importance of recognizing our origin and place of enunciation as a political commitment to our peoples, from whom we do not want to disassociate ourselves.

8 This concept was proposed by Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda, inspired by reflections of San Martín de la Loba fishers, in Bolívar Department, Colombia; these fishers explained to him the importance of thinking with the heart and feeling with the head. A *sentipensante* person combines reason with love, body, and heart, speaking honestly to eliminate all distortions that destroy said harmony (Moncayo 2015, 10).

9 Enlightened or erudite in relation to the legitimizing discourse of European colonialist expansion of the 17th century: According to Santiago Castro-Gómez (2005), enlightened scientific discourse presupposes a universal language of reason located in a neutral and objective place, the zero point of observation, to transcend vulgar language and generate knowledge of universal validity.

Conventional academic practices understand Indigenous peoples as objects of study or intervention, never as producers of knowledge or epistemic subjects. Whiteness, that is to say white privilege, is the epistemic, and mainly ontological, presupposition of colonialism that invaded these lands 524 years ago and in which the dominant groups sustain themselves to this day. White privilege continues to determine being and not being, which lives matter and which lives don't, which knowledge is valid and which is not.

In this sense, the point is not about **supporting** Indigenous peoples, communities, and nations, or dismantling white-supremacist structures, but about questioning and taking actions to tear down material and symbolic structures, transforming colonial power relations in both the objective and the subjective spheres (Fanon 1986). This implies dismantling the colonizing salvationist discourse, which reproduces the idea that racialized peoples are waiting for “someone,” an outsider researcher, to come and save them.

It is not like this. We, the racialized peoples, exist and resist the multiple forms of colonialism and coloniality that have always sought to impose themselves through violence. Our intention is to see beyond the university, and that in any case, as a temple of coloniality of knowledge, the university self-destructs and contributes to overthrow from within the anthropocentric patriarchal modern-colonial racist capitalist system that today has our planet on the edge of the abyss.

As Native university students, we are committed to the problems our peoples and communities face, unlike external researchers, who mostly arrive in communities, stay for a while, leave, and most likely will not return (Cruz 2020, 23). But they are experts due to their class/race/nationality/gender privileges, even if they have only been in the community for a day or a few months. Our commitment is not to reproduce the ways that, historically, have denied the epistemologies of our peoples. Thinking with feet and heart in the land-territory is part of this responsibility. Our academic-ethical-political work does not seek to detach itself from the root that sustains it. We try to build knowledge committed to the web of life that, as stated by Indigenous thinker Aline Ngrehtabare Lopes Kayapó, contributes

[to] rethink[ing] anthropocentrism, the actions of human rationality, and the idea of progress carried out by the world community. The human development project generated a situation of utter disenchantment and crisis, further aggravated by ambition, vanities, and the search for power at any cost. This civilizing behavior has dehumanized our peoples, historically labeling us as heartless, unfaithful, lazy, liars,

barbarians, and enemies of progress. (n.d., translated by Montelongo González)

For this reason, we say that a recognition policy is not enough to change the colonial relations of our societies and their universities if the current colonial matrix in our territories is not questioned. The politics of recognition is a very limited strategy, even if it is presented with a decolonizing intention. The demands of Indigenous peoples, on practically all continents, revolve around the right to land-territory and self-determination, which means a struggle for existence.

It is not too difficult to see that the liberal discourse of recognition is very limited. And even worse, that the states, their institutions, and their policies have made it their own without questioning the foundations of colonial relations. Mexico is only one of many examples in relation to discourses of recognition. Laws have not guaranteed the peoples autonomy and self-determination. Recognition is not the point of arrival, but rather the starting point to demand reparation and restitution of what has been stolen, including land, territory, and a dignified life. This discourse has not challenged the structures that sustain the colonial state and, in the case of universities, the politics of recognition has not disrupted the racist foundation of the coloniality of knowledge.

I agree with Fanon (1986) on the importance of self-recognition and recognition in strictly instrumental terms, that is, only as a starting point in a struggle that seeks deep and radical transformations. Hence, “inclusive” claims are not enough, since inclusivity does not guarantee the elimination of racist, sexist, and xenophobic structures that exist in universities. Language certainly creates and destroys, but it is not just about language but also about the deeply racist and violent structure that sustains it.

Decolonization must consider the university system as a whole, its structures, policies, the way decisions are made, and its students and teachers, as well as its programs of study, theory, practice, and the educational system as a whole. This requires incorporating other methodologies, epistemologies, and ontologies, which put at the center Mother Earth, the great pedagogue, through a knowledge that does not separate reason from heart, as stated by Abadio Green Stocel, Gunadule theologian, philosopher, and ethnolinguist.¹⁰

FINAL REFLECTION

It is a matter of speech and its time. The present is spoken individually, the past and the future collectively. Death, then, only has power individually, and life is only possible collectively. That

10 Abadio Green Stocel is Coordinator of the Indigenous Education Program and professor of the bachelor's degree in Pedagogy of Mother Earth at the University of Antioquia, Colombia.

is why we say “I die” and that is why we say “we live” and “we will live.”

Memoirs of Old Antonio, Mayan sage (qtd. in Comisión Sexta del EZLN, 2007, translated by Montelongo González).

As descendants of peoples inhabiting Abya Yala for millennia, traversed by the colonial wound, we can say our historical-cultural heritage was and continues to be denied and expropriated simultaneously. From this logic of dispossession, it is generally external researchers who study our peoples, without the participation of our members as researchers of our own history; our knowledge is taken into account to the extent that we serve as informants (Aguilar 2020, 58; Cruz 2020). This is how a form of knowledge construction is perpetuated that permanently reproduces the colonizer’s gaze, the imperial gaze (Tuiwai Smith 2017).

Epistemologies, ontologies, and voices of the members of colonized peoples continue to be denied.

All this has generated a disconnection between past and present, a disjunction between the living heritage of Indigenous peoples (language, oral literature, rituals, social organization) and their historical-cultural heritage (codices, colonial maps, colonial texts, and remains ancient precolonial) as a whole. So, can we also speak of an academic-epistemological extractivism? From a colonized and at the same time colonizing academy? (Aguilar 2020, 58, translated by Montelongo González)

The answer is yes.

I consider the role and contributions of racialized peoples as fundamental in decolonizing the knowledge process; it is urgent to take the floor to reconstruct our own narratives. Fortunately, many Abya Yala peoples already are doing this work. In the words of Aline Ngrenhtabare Lopes Kayapó, Aymara writer and academic:

Our struggle is not to be included or integrated into the academies of letters. First of all, those words, “inclusion,” “integration,” produce what dentists call bruxism, teeth grinding. We, the Indigenous people, will never be integrated, because if we integrate ourselves into the national society, we will separate ourselves from our original culture and vice versa. What we propose is an interaction, because when we interact we manage to share what is ours and absorb what belongs to the other without forgetting that we belong to our peoples. (n.d., translated by Montelongo González)

However, even though I consider the dispute within universities important, I am skeptical of the idea of the Westernized university as a space for decolonization of knowledge. In fact, I believe that decolonization of knowledge walks on the margins of the university, and mainly outside it, standing on the margin, understood as a place of struggle and resistance (Anzaldúa 2015), a border that is not an empty space but a place of great epistemic power to dispute the narrative of the single story.

In this process, the descendants of the peoples who have inhabited Abya Yala for millennia try to walk towards the reconstruction of our epistemologies and our ontologies, which have as their main reference the reconstruction of the network of life and the worlds in relation that coexist and reexist. It is essential to cause cracks as well as to build bridges that repair the broken ties with those people who are willing to question the modern/colonial system of domination and its privileges. People who are willing to fight side by side by listening, learning, and recognizing the multiple ways of knowing, understanding, and making worlds—and in this way dismantle the colonial structures that support the system of death, exploitation, and dispossession that subjected the nonmodern worlds—generate knowledge at the service of life and build learning spaces without any form of colonialism or coloniality.

My community¹¹ is under threat from extractivism and poultry megafarms, among other projects that threaten life in the territory; for this reason, I believe that a decolonizing project entails the responsibility and commitment of defending life. Talking about decolonization in an auditorium or investigating problems that afflict society is useless if information does not go beyond a book or publication far from peoples who see their means and ways of life destroyed or converted into merchandise. If we do not fight together with peoples to face the dispossession of their lands, water, and knowledge, simple recognition of the problem is useless. I’m not talking about help but about responsibility and commitment, putting knowledge at the service of peoples who resist patriarchal, colonial, and racist capitalism, inside and outside state borders. I’m talking about denunciation and destruction of the capitalist hydra, the multiheaded monster, as described by Zapatistas of the Mexican southeast. I’m talking about denouncing operating mechanisms of this death system as a way of assuming collective responsibility in the struggle for life.

In my opinion, the place where we are is precisely the ideal place to construct other worlds. There we can organize resistance thinking with the heart and acting at the service of life, not capital. Solidarity as a fellowship, not as loot to make an academic or political career, or as “a personal stairway to power” (Comisión Sexta del EZLN, 2007).

11 In Chila de las Flores, a southern Mixtec municipality located in Puebla, Mexico, there are lithium deposits. In November 2020, the Mexican Geological Service was notified of the existence of this mineral, considered as “white gold.” Since then, we have felt uneasy due to the danger its exploitation would generate for the ecosystem as a whole. Poultry companies constantly harass authorities and people to consent to the installation of megapoultry farms in their territory. Their interest is based on the importance of the municipality’s location, land, and water for their profits.

I think it's not about taking peoples' pain as an investment for individual purposes or academic careers, but thinking by doing and doing by thinking, as a decolonizing political project, from the land in which we were born and/or grew up or to which we migrated because that's where we are. My words agree with Zapatista and the *Sentipensar* way of doing from southern Mexico:

We have learned that seeds are exchanged, planted, and grow daily in our land, together with the knowledge of each one. . . . The commotions that shake human history begin with an isolated, almost imperceptible “That's enough!” A dissonant note in the middle of noise. A crack in the wall. That is why we have not come to bring magic formulas, to impose visions and strategies, to promise bright and instant futures, massive rallies, or immediate solutions. Nor do we promise wonderful unions. We come to listen to you. . . . Zapatista communities refer to a cause, a motive, a goal: life. We are not talking about abandoning convictions and struggles. In contrast, we think that struggles for women, for gender diversity and equality, and for indigenous workers should not stop but deepen their radicalism. Each one faces one or more heads of the Hydra. (Palabras de los Pueblos Zapatistas, 2021, translated by Montelongo González)

The project consists of consolidating resistance from the corners of the world in which we live and settle. Let's build stories of resistance against a system of death, the capitalist system. The challenge is to crack the walls to promote life where apparently only death, individualism, desire for consumption, destruction, and wealth accumulation are possible.

Decolonizing knowledge implies *corazonar*, that is to say, cracking and opening furrows for the seeds to grow, as the Tojolabal Mayans of the Mexican southeast do, thinking with the heart and putting a dignified life and good living at the center. This is how the members of the Government Council of the Kitu Kara People, in the Ecuadorian Andes, express it: “*Corazonar*: think with a liberated heart, nurture thought with the impulse of life and our will” (Guerrero 2010, translated by Montelongo González). *Corazonar* the meaning of dominant epistemologies to displace the hegemony of reason. This horizon points towards the construction of other epistemic proposals and meanings of existence (Guerrero 2007, 97). The proposal is to decolonize and *corazonar* everything, inside and outside the academy.

Many of us who belong to Indigenous peoples and are in the university maintain that our decolonization work cannot be separated from the needs and problems of our communities. When speaking of decolonization, I'm not referring to decolonization of power, being, nature, and gender as an epistemic, theoretical, or abstract question, but as something very concrete, daily, and long term. I talk of a life project, for the land and with the Earth,

for reconstruction and defense of the worlds of life threatened by modernity/coloniality and its *racionalidad descorazonada*.¹²

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12 A rationality opposite to *corazonar*, that is, incapable of thinking with the heart and putting reproduction of life at the center.

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