

EXISTENCE (DE)SCHOOLED¹

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1 → This text was originally presented as a keynote talk at the 2018 LAPES Symposium in Philadelphia. In its revised version here, the text maintains its stance of political-epistemic militancy and decolonial proposition, a stance which, as the reader may note, often goes against—or at least ruptures and fissures—the academic precepts of objectivity, neutrality, and distance.

Not just education but also social reality have come to be schooled. . . . Not just education but also society as a whole need to be deschooled.

—Ivan Illich²

OPENINGS

The above words of the insubordinate priest and anarchist thinker Ivan Illich, written almost 50 years ago, could not be more true today. In his now classic book *Deschooling Society*, Illich argued for the need to take radical action against the modern capitalist “schooling” of our hearts, bodies, minds, and values, and for the liberation of “other” ways of learning and living. The problem, for him, was with the accelerated global degradation and modernized misery of society, existence, and life. And it was with the direct relation of this degradation and misery with the nature of modern social institutions and their practice of lifelong institutionalization.

“Health, knowledge, dignity, independence, and creative labor are all defined as little more than the performance of institutions that claim to serve these purposes,” Illich said.³ From this perspective, advances and improvements are dependent on the greater allocation of resources, on more and better services, more and better institutions, more and better administration, governments, policies, and laws, and more and better institutionalization.

Up against this reality, Illich’s hypothesis and argument were that society can and must deschool itself. For him, the path of change was not in institutional or educational reform. And it was not in institutionalized or educational alternatives. Rather, it was in the simultaneous effort of dismantling these institutions as a practice of freedom, and of building a radically distinct societal project. As he concluded, “deschooling will

2 → Iván Illich, *La sociedad desescolarizada* (Queretaro, Mexico: El Rebozo, 2013 [1971]): 17. My translation.

3 → Illich, *La sociedad*, 16.

inevitably blur the distinctions between economy, education, and politics, on which the stability of the present-day world order is founded.”⁴

Illich’s arguments were, without a doubt, grounded in the critical debates of his time in which the relation of politics, education, and economy was particularly central. Such relation was, of course, also present in the work of the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire. In the 1980s, I had the privilege to spend several years working alongside Paulo. Together we facilitated university seminars and popular education community-based workshops in Western Massachusetts.⁵ Together and with other colleagues, we formed the first network of critical pedagogy in the US. I never met Ivan but, through Paulo, I came to know him, his thought and praxis. In fact, the dialogue and friendship between Paulo and Ivan began in the 60’s in Brazil. However, it was in the 70’s that Illich began to reflect on their difference:

I went from the criticism of the school to the criticism of what education does to a society, that is, to promote the idea that people need to receive help to prepare themselves to exist or live. . . . Therefore, in spite of its good and solid tradition, I had to move away from the approach of concientization and adult education whose main spokesperson was Paulo during the 60s and early 70s, not only in Latin America but throughout the world.⁶

While the differences between Illich and Freire have been the subject of analyses and reflections, this is not the interest here.⁷ My interest instead is

4 → Illich, *La sociedad*, 139.

5 → See my reference to this relation in Catherine Walsh, “(Decolonial) Notes to Paulo Freire Walking and Asking,” in *Educational Alternatives in Latin America: New Modes of Counter Hegemonic Learning*, ed. Robert Aman and Timothy Ireland (London: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2019), 207-230.

6 → Illich, “Goodman y Freire: encuentros y desencuentros. De las conversaciones entre Iván Illich y David Cayley,” excerpts taken from David Cayley, *Ivan Illich in conversation* (Toronto: Anansi, 1992).

7 → In addition to the Illich and Cayley conversation, see Gustavo Esteva, Madhu Prakash, and Dana Stuchul, “From a Pedagogy for Liberation to Liberation from Pedagogy,” in *Rethinking Freire: Globalization and the Environmental Crisis*, ed. C.A. Bowers and Frederique Apffel Marglin (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2005).

with the ways that existence is schooled in these present times in Latin America, my place of life and work for the last 25 years. Here the historical continuities and the new strategies and practices of “schooling” constitutive of a continually evolving matrix of colonial power are central. But my concern is also with the ways that individuals, collectives, and communities are struggling to deschool; that is, to enact, construct, and create existence deschooled, which, of course, is *existence otherwise*.

I recall Paulo’s words in the book published after his death: *Pedagogy of Indignation*. There he spoke of anger, outrage and indignation, his own and that of the dehumanized, colonized and oppressed. His argument was that these are not just reactions and responses to injustice; more critically, they are also starting points and tools of rebellion, resistance, and political pedagogical action.

It is necessary to view the *resistance* that keeps us alive, the *understanding* of future as *problem*, and the inclination toward *being more* as expressions of human nature in process of being. They are the fundamentals of our *rebellion* and not of our *resignation* before destructive injury to being. Not through resignation, but only through *rebellion* against injustice, can we affirm ourselves.⁸

For Paulo, this affirmation was about existence: “existence is life that knows itself as such. . . Making the world ethical is a necessary consequence of producing human existence, or of extending life into existence.”⁹

In a world and region facing the collapse of the universalized western model of civilization and existence, its patriarchal-capitalist-modern/colonial system,¹⁰ and its social institutions, including, and most especially, education and schools, existence is necessarily marked by –and signified and grounded in– struggle. Enrique Dussel refers to this struggle,

8 → Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Indignation* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2004), 61.

9 → Freire, *Pedagogy of Indignation*, 98.

10 → I use hyphens instead of commas here in order to evidence the intersectional relation of patriarchy and capitalism, and with the system or matrix of modernity/coloniality.

in conversation with Freire, as actions that are conscious, ethical, transformative, and always becoming.¹¹

These are the actions and struggles that are waged from below, from the margins and cracks of the system; they are the struggles of those for whom existence has been dominated, subjugated, repressed, negated, and denied. As I have argued elsewhere, they are about existence and “re-existence”, that is, about the pedagogical and praxistal processes and practices, most especially of those historically excluded, racialized, stigmatized, and silenced, to construct and re-construct life in conditions of dignity.¹² As such, both existence and re-existence are marked by lived and situated contexts of concern that, as Lewis Gordon argues, have to do with “philosophical questions premised upon concerns of freedom, anguish, responsibility, embodied agency, sociality, and liberation.”¹³

Of course, the questions, meanings, and concerns of existence do not stop here. They also, and in a very different way, underscore the civilizing model of existence imposed by the West; a model, vision, and project that, for the last 527 years, has maintained the dominant geopolitical, raced, gendered, and territorialized order. Here the actions, apparatus, and devices of discipline and control, and of institutionalized schooling, have always had an essential function and role within the colonial matrix of power.¹⁴

This article takes as its base the persistence of and the ongoing struggles against this matrix, also referred to as the coloniality of power. The focus is two-pronged. First, it examines how existence –its idea, prospect, practice, and project–, is a component part of the complex present-day intertwines of schooling, modernization, coloniality, and civilization in Latin

11 → Enrique Dussel, *16 Tesis de Economía Política: Interpretación filosófica* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 2014).

12 → Adolfo Albán, “Interculturalidad sin decolonialidad? Colonialidades circulantes y prácticas de re-existencia,” in *Diversidad, interculturalidad y construcción de ciudad*, ed. Wilmer Villa and Arturo Grueso (Bogota: Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, 2008), 64-96.

13 → Lewis Gordon, *Existencia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought* (NY: Routledge, 2000), 10.

14 → For a detailed discussion of the colonial matrix of power see Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniaity: Concepts, Analytics, and Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

American countries of both the Right and self-professed Left. Here I consider the current ties between formal education, modernization, progress, and capital, explore the geopolitics of knowledge and language, and examine the ways that religious conservatism has taken a front seat in educational and existence-based policy and politics, most especially with regards to “gender ideology.” Second, the text brings into debate questions, pedagogies, and praxis of existence deschooled; that is, strategies, actions, reflections, and concerns that give credence, possibility, and force to re-existence, dignity, and learnings, unlearnings and relearnings for life, against capitalism-coloniality’s scheme of destruction, pillage, dispossession, and death.

EXISTENCE SCHOOLED

Gritos / Existence-based Cries

On September 26, 2014, municipal police along with other forces of Mexico’s narcostate brutally attacked three buses of students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teacher-Training School in the southwestern Mexico town of Iguala. Three students were killed, eight were wounded, and forty three made to disappear. In commemoration (against oblivion) of the first year anniversary of the Ayotzinapa massacre and disappearance, José Elizondo and Karla Aviles wrote the following words:

When thinking to question, to claim, to build, becomes a threat to the *guardians of silence*. When the bullets go through the insurgents’ throats by right. At this moment, ‘I think, then they disappear me.’ At that moment the jailers of thought shoot with live ammunition. And the words become the last breath of those who only know how to cry FREEDOM. Because no longer ‘I think then I am.’ Because reason does not find reasons to so much madness. Because I no longer ‘think then I exist’. Because thinking has become a revolutionary act. Because thinking has become a threat to the monitors of the single

thought. And for that, they disappear me. And because of that, they disappear us.¹⁵

“I think, then they disappear me” is a collectively anonymous phrase that first appeared as graffiti in protest marches in the days following the attack, later circulating in the social media, and on walls throughout Mexico, including in Mexico City’s Condesa Park where the British trip hop band “Massive Attack” projected it on screen at their huge concert the week following the occurrence. At my university in Quito, Ecuador, we also put this phrase on the walls in a “happening” of protest, memory, and support for the forty three disappeared, for those killed, and for those who managed to survive.

The phrase certainly does not need interpretation. However, its lived significance was made clear in the account of Omar García, one of the survivors, who by telephone recounted in detail to those of us gathered at the Quito event, the story of horror that began on the night of September 26 and continued on into the early hours of the following day. As García made clear, it was not a random attack. It was a conscious assault on the school of rebellion, resistance, and critical thought that has been and is the Ayotzinapa school of rural teacher education.

Ayotzinapa was founded in 1926 by the teacher Raúl Isidro Burgos as part of a state project for massive public rural education, a project that quickly became a tool for social transformation. In Mexico, probably more than anywhere else in Latin America, rural teacher schools have been —and continue to be— a place for thinking, rethinking, and giving action from below to education and existence understood as necessarily intertwined. From its outset, Ayotzinapa was a seedbed for revolutionary thought, social consciousness, and community-based struggle in this peasant region, one of the poorest in the southwestern state of Guerrero. Genaro Vázquez and

15 → José Elizondo and Karla Avila, “Pienso, luego me desaparecen,” *El Fardadio*, September 26, 2015, <http://www.elfaradio.com/2015/09/26/pienso-luego-me-desaparecen/>.

Lucio Cabañas, among other well-known revolutionary teachers and guerilla fighters, studied at Ayotzinapa.

In recent times, Ayotzinapa students have played crucial roles in the struggles against neoliberal education reform, educational commodification, and the alarming levels of institutional violence and repression in Guerrero. Moreover, in their teacher's college and well beyond, most especially in communities and community-based schools, these militants walk an education that challenges the system and its dominant institutional aims and frames. Education here is about existence and re-existence; it is about sowing dignity and life in these times of violence, war, and death. And this is precisely the reason for the disappearance, elimination, and extermination.

While many throughout the region dared to cry out in response, public educational institutions in Mexico, including and most especially universities, were complicit in their policies and practices of silence and of silencing. In fact, I experienced this myself several weeks after the incident. In an event organized by a large "autonomous" university in which I had been invited to speak, no mention was made of Ayotzinapa. When I publicly expressed my indignation at the silence, I was told by authorities to not speak out, to remain silent. As I came to learn later, my defiance of the discipline and silencing, my refusal to be hushed, had its consequences. This was the "coming out" of my own *gritos*, cries accumulated over many years including, as I will later evidence, in Ecuador during the 10-year reign of the so-called progressive government of Rafael Correa.¹⁶

Today and throughout Latin America, the *gritos* and existence-based cries of many are increasingly sonorous. They are cries against the lived realities of violence in its multiple forms and exacerbated proportions in countries governed by the Right but also the self-identified Left: feminicides and violence against women, sexual abuse and rape of children including in schools, and massive displacements, dispossessions, and deterritorializations caused by extractivism (mining, oil, agroindustry), projects of megaturism, narco-industries, interests, and wars, and the

16 → See Catherine Walsh, "Interculturalidad, transmodernidad y (des)humanidad(es). Una carta a Enrique Dussel desde Abya Yala/América del Sur", in *Del monólogo europeo al diálogo inter-filosófico. Ensayos sobre Enrique Dussel y la filosofía de la liberación*, eds. José Gandarilla and Mabel Moraña (México City: UNAM, 2018).

capitalist death project which is this and more all combined.¹⁷ Capitalism rules, and survival often takes precedence over school. Where formal education is possible, pacification, civilization, and modernization are both the tools and discourses of discipline and control of peoples, knowledges, and of life itself. Recalled is Illich's argument that "not just education but also social reality has come to be schooled."

"Schoolings"

Existence – its idea, prospect, practice, and project – frames much of the critical debate and situated embodied struggle in "Latin America," or what many of us prefer to name *AbyaYala*. It is at the center of state politics, economic interests and designs, and ideological-religious exigencies, on the one hand and, on the other, of grassroots and social movement battles for life against destruction, pillage, and death. The schooling of existence in this sense, and as I will argue here, is a manifestation and component part of a complex and continually evolving matrix of power. Its operation takes on multiple faces and crosses distinct spheres.

Privatization is one sphere. In Brazil, Colombia, and Chile, for example, privatization is exogenous in that it links schools and education with transnational and corporate interests, political-ideological postulates, and the dictates of the market. In these countries as well as in Argentina, Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico and Peru, for example, "endogenous privatization" is also on the rise, advanced through standardized-universalized instruments and practices of teacher, students, school, and

17 → While this death project is present throughout the region, its manifestations in Colombia are particularly alarming. Colombia is number one in the world for internal displacements. Since the signing of the so-called peace accords in 2016, 620 Indigenous, Black, and peasant community-based leaders have been killed (www.telesurtv.net/news/colombia-lideres-sociales-asesinados-exterminio-marcha-20190726-0006.html). For an excellent analysis in Spanish, see "Territorio Nasa Sa'th Tama Kiwe frente al narcotráfico. Es el Estado: 'Acá resistimos entre todxs!'" <http://pueblosencamino.org/?p=7599>; "Terror corporativo está matando en toda Colombia," <http://pueblosencamino.org/?p=7542>.

university evaluation.¹⁸ Throughout the region, modernizing educational reforms apply market measures and assure state authority through standardization, quality control and the control over knowledge, social, cultural, and linguistic difference, as well as over politics and ideology in the classroom.

Certainly, the politics advanced in Brazil first by the coup-government of Temer and now by Bolsonaro are a case in point. Among other measures of discipline, control, and re-schooling, the government has endeavored to defame and eliminate the legacy and contribution of Paulo Freire. This has included, among other actions, the alteration in June 2016 of Paulo's biography in Wikipedia, an alteration that named him "assassin of knowledge", that is, the source of Brazil's backward education, and the origin of Marxist indoctrination in schools. *Brasil Wikiedits*, a group that monitors modifications in Wikipedia pages, identified SERPRO (the technical informational network of the Brazilian federal government) as the responsible source. While SERPRO denied direct involvement, it accepted that the alteration came from its network. In 2017, the government launched another attempt in the Senate to rescind Paulo's recognition as "patron of education" (*patrono da educação*), awarded by the national government in 2011. The attempt here was also to prohibit his texts and teachings in universities and schools. Of course, all this is a constitutive part of the evangelical majority extreme Right's movement and project *Escola sem partido* (Schooling without political party, that is without the Worker's Party) that aims to eliminate "ideological indoctrination" in universities and schools.¹⁹

In Brazil but also all over the region, the dismantling of public and community-based schooling, the disarticulation of community-based social networks and the elimination of all that challenges global capitalism's project (including schools, educational programs, teachers, students and critical thought and knowledge) are in full force.

18 → See, for example, Campaña Latinoamericana por el Derecho a la Educación, *Mapeo sobre tendencias de privatización de educación en América Latina y el Caribe* (Sao Paulo: CLADE, 2014).

19 → See Walsh, "(Decolonial) Notes."

The situation of higher education is not dissimilar. Today, and as I have argued elsewhere, the universality implied in “uni-versity” is increasingly more potent; thus my reference to UNI-versity with the prefix UNI each time in larger letters.²⁰ As the Colombian scholar Renán Vega maintains, we are up against the “University of Ignorance,” driven by academic capitalism, and the marketing of higher education.²¹ Such is the experience throughout the region: educational autonomy is dismantled while state, national, and transnational state discipline, vigilance, and control wrest and replace all semblance of socially relevant education. Critical thought is deemed both dangerous and non-useful, while intellectual production is measured not by content or contribution but by the number of articles in indexed journals (preferably in English and published in the Global North). Whether these articles are read or what they are about matter little; the interest is in one’s “stats” in the universal and universalized sphere of the “scientific” market. Meanwhile, among both faculty and students’ intellectual somnambulism, silence, apathy, and indifference are rampant. All this is part of the growing inhumanity and dehumanization of the Humanities (what I have called the “Dehumanities”) that extend throughout the human and social sciences including the field and practice of Education.²² Certainly the reader can begin to get the idea of what I mean when I say that both education and existence are increasingly “schooled”.

The trends and effects of the growing universalization of cognitive and academic capitalism are increasingly well documented, including from the perspective of the new and evolving frameworks and strategies of the modern/colonial matrix of power.²³ However, less discussed and known are the new and emergent modes of discipline, disciplining, and schooling in the so-called progressive countries of the region, where modernization, civilization, and capital take on new and unexpected faces and forms.

20 → See Catherine Walsh, “(Des)Humanidad(es),” *Alter/nativas. Revista de Estudios Culturales Latinoamericanos*, 3, (2014). <http://alternativas.osu.edu/es/issues/autumn-2014.html>

21 → Renán Vega Cantor, *La Universidad de la Ignorancia. Capitalismo académico y mercantilización de la educación superior* (Bogotá: Ocean Sur, 2015).

22 → Walsh, “(Des)Humanidad(es)”.

23 → See Mignolo and Walsh, *On Decoloniality*.

In Ecuador and Bolivia, for instance, the eradication of poverty is the named central objective. The statistics, in fact, are impressive. In Bolivia, poverty went from a reported 60% in 2005 to 39% in 2015,²⁴ and according to official data in Ecuador, close to 1.5 million people came out of poverty in the 10 years of Rafael Correa's "Citizen's Revolution" (2007-2017).²⁵ Of course, we can ask: What is understood by poverty? Who creates, constructs, and maintains this definition? Under what pretense and vision of peoples, progress, civilization, and existence are poverty-related policies and politics enacted? What are the practices employed, and how do they work to variously "school" (i.e. discipline, modernize, civilize) existence and people?

In a recent book that dismantles the discourse of poverty eradication in Ecuador, Miriam Lang engages a similar question, arguing that the politics of poverty reduction can be understood as a cultural construction intimately tied to the paradigm of western civilization and its apparatus of "development."²⁶ "Progressivism" has extended this paradigm in particularly nefarious ways, making the extractive industry the motor for poverty elimination:

In the context of neodevelopmental extractivism, environment justice and the transformation of predatory societal relationships with nature are sacrificed in the name of social justice and poverty eradication, exemplified in the recurrent phrase of president Rafael Correa used to justify the expansion of the oil frontier and the introduction of mega-mining in Ecuador: 'Misery cannot be part of

24 → "INE: La pobreza en Bolivia se ha reducido," *Instituto Nacional de Estadística: Estado Plurinacional de Bolivia*, July 10, 2019, <https://www.ine.gob.bo/index.php/ine-la-pobreza-en-bolivia-se-ha-reducido/>.

25 → "Gobierno Nacional expone cifras de la pobreza en Ecuador," *El Universo*, January 27, 2017, <https://www.eluniverso.com/noticias/2017/01/27/nota/6017392/regimen-expone-cifras-pobreza>.

26 → Miriam Lang, *¿Erradicar la pobreza o empobrecer las alternativas?* (Quito: Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar and Ediciones Abya-Yala, 2017). Also see Catherine Walsh, "Development as *Buen Vivir*: Institutional Arrangements and (De)colonial Entanglements," *Development* 53, No. 1 (2010).

our identity, and we cannot be beggars seated on top of a sack of gold.²⁷

Ecuador during the 10-year reign of president Rafael Correa and his “Citizen’s Revolution” is particularly illustrative. “The challenge for our ancestral peoples and for the entire country is to change in order to overcome poverty,” Correa said.²⁸ Here poverty eradication consistently references Indigenous peoples, while the cause of the poverty is blamed on Indigenous leaders. As Correa argued:

Indigenous leaders are the ones responsible for *atrasa pueblos* (backward villages and peoples), ...they are the ones who keep us in the past ...along with the infantile ecologists who put words in the mouths of the Indigenous, discourses that the principal problem is water, plurinationality or interculturality. No, let’s not fool ourselves! The principal Indigenous problem is poverty. To be Indigenous in this country almost always means to be poor and this signifies centenarian processes of exclusion.²⁹

The response of an Amazonian indigenous leader makes clear the battle over project and meaning: “We are not poor I always say that those who live in cities are poor, because they do not have territory and because they breathe contaminated air.”³⁰

In government discourse and politics, social justice and poverty eradication reference another project and term: “interculturality”. In Ecuador (and in contrast to most other countries of the region), the significance and meaning of interculturality first took form in the 80s and 90s with the political project of the Indigenous movement. The National Confederation of

27 → Lang, *Erradicar*, 17. My translation.

28 → Rafael Correa, “El capital domina el mundo: Discurso de posesión presidencial”, Quito, May 24, 2013. My translation.

29 → María Paula Granda, *El macho sabio. Racismo y sexismo en el discurso del Rafael Correa*. (Quito: Ediciones de la tierra, 2017).

30 → Lang, *Erradicar*, 64.

Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE) named interculturality as a political, ideological, epistemic, and existence-based concept, process, practice, and project aimed at the radical transformation of social relations, institutions, and structures.³¹ I have referred to this as “critical interculturality,” distinguishing it from the “functional interculturality” which has become part of the policy and politics of government and state. The latter now enables a kind of naturalized association and articulation: interculturality-poverty-inequality; here the eradication of poverty means modernization, specifically the modernization of Indigenous and Black peoples, communities, territories, and traditions.

There are many examples of the operation of this functional interculturality. Here I will consider three especially illustrative of “existence schooled”. The first has to do with the government’s “transversalization of interculturality” with respect to knowledge and education. Here I reference two interrelated ventures. One is the National Secretariat of Higher Education’s project: “the dialogue of knowledges:”

The dialogue of knowledges is a process of permanent interaction... Its objective is to strengthen the revitalization and protection of traditional knowledges, while at the same time promoting their incorporation in scientific work, technological development, and social innovation from a multi- inter- and transdisciplinary focus, this in order to generate dialectical processes between academia and communities, in the framework of the Plurinational State and in correspondence with the principles of justice, interculturality, *sumak kawsay*, and the decolonization of knowledge.³²

31 → For CONAIE this included the transformation of education and state. See Catherine Walsh, “(Post)Coloniality in Ecuador: The Indigenous Movement’s Practices and Politics of (Re)signification and Decolonization,” in *Coloniality at Large: The Latin America and the Postcolonial Debate*, ed. Mabel Moraña, Enrique Dussel, Carlos A. Jáuregui (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

32 → Catherine Walsh, “¿Interculturalidad? Fantasmas, fantasías y funcionalismos,” in *Ecuador. Desafíos para el presente y futuro*, ed. Fernando Balseca and Cesar Montúfar (Quito: Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar y Ediciones de la Tierra, 2015), 271. My translation.

In practice, however, dialogue and decolonization were never present. In the years preceding and following the announcement of the Dialogue of Knowledges Project, universities were forced to take on a more universal form. The 2010 law of higher education, established regulations and evaluation measures aimed to improve universities and their scientific-academic endeavors. A model was forged that discredits national education, reifies the universalized model and knowledge of the Global North, and concretizes the university's practical, productive, and utilitarian function *vis à vis* the government's modernizing, neodevelopmentalist political project. Arturo Villavicencio, former head of the country's Higher Education Council of Evaluation and Accreditation, described the law and the related state project as reflective of a kind of "academic capitalism" that negates the university as a space of analysis, critique, and public discussion and debate, and a kind of "academic colonialism" that disavows the experience and history of the Ecuadorian university, including as a space of autonomy and struggle.³³

Here the "UNI" of "university" and of "universal" knowledge (read: Western, Eurocentric) are exalted. The "hard" sciences are supported over the humanities and social sciences, including through a massive government-funded scholarship program, the largest in Latin America and the third largest in the world after Germany and Denmark. Scholarships as high as \$250,000 supported (until 2017) graduate-level study in those foreign institutions listed in the Academic Ranking of World Universities, in which Latin American institutions are few. In 2013, a maximum of 10% of the scholarships was destined to the humanities and social sciences; by 2014 these fields of knowledge were all together eliminated. Relatedly, the government established in 2011 the Prometeo Project with the goal of incorporating 5,000 foreign professors and researchers principally from the Global North into the nation's system of higher education by 2017.

A subprogram here was Prometeo Wise Elders, which sought to incorporate older international experts as a mechanism of social inversion in order to generate knowledges that could foment economic development,

33 → Arturo Villavicencio, *¿Hacia dónde va el proyecto universitario de la Revolución Ciudadana?* (Quito: 13 Ediciones, 2013), 8-9. My translation.

competitiveness, and strategic national production. The National Secretariat of Higher Education's description is telling:

From the reference in Greek mythology that inspires the name of this project, in this case, knowledge is positioned as the object to be recovered because it is the most powerful and direct mechanism to achieve *el buen vivir* or "*Sumak Kawsay*" (i.e. well being, life in plentitude), that is the national aspiration consecrated in the foundational norm of the Ecuadorian state and executed in the public and private everydayness of this country. The Project Prometeo Wise Elders is one of the most lucid and visionary programs. In short, it is necessary to postulate academic and inverse scientific mobility, that is, one that receives talents instead of exporting them, as has been the case in Ecuador.³⁴

Similarly, efforts were made to hire professors from the Global North, temporarily and in all universities through the related project *Ateneo*, and more permanently and contractually in the state's four new "emblematic" universities conceived and planned to meet the state's economic productive matrix. In this frame and through the International Plan for the Capturing and Selecting of Educators (a name quite telling in and of itself), an ad was placed in Spain's principal newspaper *El País* in 2013 announcing 500 jobs for the soon to open National University of Education. Included in the announcement was the projection of the opening of another 5,000 positions for primary and secondary teachers of Spanish origin over the next several years. According to the Ministry of Education, Spain was the first country to receive this offer both for the high level of Spaniards, and the "affinities of language and history between the two countries."³⁵ The pretension it seems was to bring people that know to teach those who do not precisely because

34 → Juan Morales Ordoñez, "El Proyecto Prometeo Viejos Sabios o la movilidad inversa en Ecuador," *Portal Enlaces Instituto Internacional para la Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe-IESALC*, May 2, 2013. My translation.

35 → Juan Carlos Bow, "Ecuador ofrece salario, comida y vivienda a profesores españoles," *El País*, July 22, 2013, http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2013/07/22/actualidad/1374496004_364310.html.

they are from the Global South. More than 500 years after their first “arrival,” the Spaniards are now invited and well paid. Of course, we can ask: What does this suggest about new configurations of the coloniality of knowledge in a government self-defined as progressive and of the Left?

In its 2008 Constitution, Ecuador took an unprecedented step in as far as Political Charters go, by recognizing knowledges, sciences, and technologies in the plural. Here ancestral knowledges are named as also technological and scientific, and required material in universities and schools. Yet despite this constitutional recognition and the Dialogue of knowledges’ pretension of decolonization, another new configuration of coloniality has taken form, this one tied to the idea, logic, and law of the “social economy of knowledges” which in 2016 became law. Amongst other aspects, this legislation gives attention to ancestral knowledges, considered as fundamental, useful, and appropriable elements to generate value, and patrimonial property of the state. Effectively, the state became the protectorate and owner of millennial knowledge. Also opened by the law (and advanced in the discourse of Correa), is the possibility for ancestral Indigenous and Black communities to sell their knowledge as a monetary good as a way out of poverty and into modernity, development, capitalism, and civilization. This is what I have referred to in Spanish as the new TLC (the initials in Spanish for Free Trade Agreements): now the *Tratado de Libre Conocimiento* (the Agreement of Free Knowledge), that is, the right of Indigenous and Afro-descendant individuals to participate in the market of millennial and sacred knowledges, and the right to receive a good economic compensation.³⁶

The second venture of transversal interculturality is the re-naming of the national education system as intercultural education. Here integration is the announced intention. Concretely, this has meant the elimination of culturally and linguistically differentiated educational programs and experiences, considered by the government as counterproductive to the modernization of the nation and the modernization (read: universalization and westernization) of sciences and knowledges. “Utility” is the new orienting axis; efficiency, standardization, and quantitative evaluation are postured as the new

36 → Walsh, “¿Interculturalidad?”

universals that will bring modernization, and the discipline and disciplining that modernization and universalization require.³⁷ The closing in November 2013 by the Correa government of the Intercultural University Amawtay Wasi —an educational project of the National Confederation of Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Ecuador conceived as a “Pluriversity” and recognized by the state system of higher education since 2002— is a clear example. In an evaluation based on national standards established by the Council of Higher Education Evaluation, Assurance, and Accreditation (and developed in consultation with higher education evaluation companies in the U.S.), Amawtay Wasi was found to “lack academic quality” and, as such, was permanently shut down. Of course, the determination of “quality” here presupposes a set of beliefs about “scientific” knowledge, disciplinary organization, language, teaching approaches, infrastructure, and about the institution of higher education itself. What knowledge, whose knowledge, taught by whom and to whom, how and where, and with what vision, perspective, and practice of social reality, life, living, and existence?

Intercultural “integration” works in theory and practice to elevate the system over students and communities; to individualize, deculturalize, and dispossess them of the languages, knowledges, and existence-based practices that, for the system, are indicative of underdevelopment and backwardness. The goal and practice is to disengage and break vital communitarian and collective ties. In this new scene, interculturality is emptied of its radical transformative meaning constructed “from below,” becoming a top-down functional tool of a state that does not negate diversity but uses it to advance state interests and the state project in the name of “equality.” Is it not clear what I mean by *existence schooled*?

The motor towards “integration” has been “educational “fusion””; that is the accelerated elimination of Indigenous bilingual education, and the massive closing of community-based schools, places not only of formal education but also of community organization. Between 2013 and 2014, more than 10,000 community-based, bilingual, and/or alternative schools

37 → Arturo Villavicencio, “Hasta dónde va el proyecto universitario de la Revolución Ciudadana,” in *El correísmo al desnudo*, ed. Juan Cuví, Decio Machado, Atawallpa Oviedo and Natalia Sierra (Quito: Montecristi Vive, 2013), 216-32.

were closed, many in operation for decades, some, such as *Inka Samana* in the Kichwa community of Saraguro, recognized nationally and internationally for their innovative curriculum and pedagogy.³⁸

The “fusion” here is, in essence, inclusion within a mainstream model of education in new large, modern “Millennial Schools,” sometimes with a thousand or more students. A standardized curriculum is taught in Spanish, with English and sometimes even Chinese added; all semblance of instruction in students’ native languages is gone. As of 2019, 104 Millennial Educational Units or Schools are in operation, primarily in zones with large Indigenous, Black, and peasant populations. While the present government has called for the conversion of many of these Units into technical schools,³⁹ this has not yet occurred.

For Sisa Pacari, Kichwa indigenous educator and former head of the National Teachers Union, “The centralist State massifies education and develops cultural ethnocide. . . assimilating Indigenous cultural practices to the state sphere, folklorizing the sociopolitical proposal of Indigenous peoples and nations. We do not want the massification of education in one colonial system.”⁴⁰ The concerns here are multiple. Among others they include the elimination of the semi-autonomous system of bilingual intercultural education (a right won by Indigenous organizations in 1988 after decades of struggle); the destruction of collective, communal, and communitarian life-visions and practice; the dismantling of the social, cultural, and political bases of community organization; and the establishment of filters of control, vigilance, pacification, and extermination.

38 → Rosa María Torres, “Adiós a la educación comunitaria y alternativa,” *Línea de fuego*, November 14, 2013, <http://lalineadefuego.info/2013/11/14/adios-a-la-educacion-comunitaria-y-alternativa-por-rosa-maria-torres/>.

39 → Due to the ongoing critique of these schools by various social sectors and their inoperability as “white elephants” of sorts, the present government called this year for the conversion of many into technical schools; however, this still has not occurred. See “Las Unidades Educativas del Milenio se convertirán en colegios técnicos,” *El Telégrafo*, April 3, 2019, www.eltelegrafo.com.ec/noticias/sociedad/6/unidadeseducativasdelmilenio-colegiostecnicos-estudiantes.

40 → Sisa Pacari Bacacela, “Etnocidio cultural desde el Estado,” *Diario El Universo*, January 2014. My translation.

The fact that many of these schools are strategically concentrated in geographical zones that have historically maintained strong bases of resistance and social, political and cultural mobilization, and that are close to areas of present or potential extractivism is not fortuitous. It is also not fortuitous the addition, in many of the schools in remote and strategic areas, of a boarding school model, replicating and reproducing in many ways the missionary experiences of the past. Made evident here is *existence disciplined, regulated, ordered, and controlled, and also in route of extermination*.

Interestingly, with the new Millennial Schools, attendance has dropped. In many cases, this has to do with the long distances that students must travel on foot, by river, or with makeshift transportation to get to the schools. In other cases, the drop-in attendance reflects family and community decisions to once again place education in the communities' hands; that is, to reject, resist, and rebel against the state's model and practice of "existence schooled." As the self-named "de-professionalized" educator-intellectual Gustavo Esteva argues with respect to Mexico:

The people in the villages know very well that school prevents their children from learning what they need to know to continue living in their communities, contributing to the common well-being and that of their soils, their places. . . . In many communities in Oaxaca and Chiapas, Mexico, parents no longer delegate their children's learning to school.⁴¹

The third venture and example, related to the one above, is the construction in the Amazon of "Millennial Cities" adjacent to strategic oil reserves. These new "Cities" of cement block houses (one connected to the other), with indoor plumbing, paved roads, on a completely deforested terrain accessible only by river, and with a wall to keep the jungle out, impose a new modality of existence-based organization modernization,

41 → Gustavo Esteva, "Reclaiming Our Freedom to Learn," *Yes Magazine*, November 7, 2007, <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/liberate-your-space/reclaiming-our-freedom-to-learn>.

urbanization, pacification, and “schooled” extermination. In the government’s words, the “Cities” offer to the Indigenous peoples historically excluded and forgotten, the possessions of the “good life:” development, technology, and access to high quality public services, including education, housing, and a dignified way of life. Moreover, and as the state oil company Petroamazonas states, “the millennial communities have functional housing, Millennial Schools, a market, coliseum, cemetery, and all the facilities of a modern city.”⁴² Of course, the question that follows is: What more could the poor Indigenous people want?

With their clean, white, ordered construction, and with the Millennial School in the middle, the cities portend to leave all that is “savage” behind, including knowledges, customs and traditions, plants and animals, small plots of gardening and farming, ancestors, spirits, life-philosophy, and cosmological relationality and vision. Recalled are the missions of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, well known throughout Latin America for its ties in the 1950s and 60s with Nelson Rockefeller and the CIA.⁴³ There the school was at the center of a reorganization aimed to advance processes of sociopolitical, educational, religious, and existential control, pacification and civilization. The territorial strategy then and now is clear: concentrate disperse populations in controlled riverside settlements from where civilizational disciplining, control, and schooling can be easily executed and taken to fruition.⁴⁴

Forest peoples who for generations have lived free, in clans and not communities, in ample and open spaces, and always in relation to and in harmony with the cosmos and nature and all of its beings, are forced to relocate, abandon their spaces and rhythms of life, their means and modes of production and reproduction. “Here they prohibit us from everything,” a

42 → Cited in Lang, *Erradicar*, 92.

43 → See Gerard Colby and Charlotte Dennett, *Thy Will Be Done. The Conquest of the Amazon: Nelson Rockefeller and Evangelism in the Age of Oil* (NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995).

44 → Manuel Bayón, “La urbanización de la Amazonía como estrategia continua de la acumulación por despojo capitalista-extractiva,” December 12, 2013, <http://www.laciudadviva.org/blogs/?p=20229>. My translation.

Millennial City resident said.⁴⁵

As if that were not enough, the Indigenous inhabitants are required to participate in courses on urbanization. A critical clergyman and longtime resident of the Amazon describes this “schooling:”

All of the residents have to participate in various courses or workshops where they are trained to be citizens and live in these cities; how to manage and separate trash, how to pull out the weeds from in-between the cement and stone walls and pavement, how to be authentic pioneers of the Citizen’s Revolution. The courses and workshops are obligatory, and at the end they receive a certificate that makes them qualified to live in the Millennial City. Without the certificate, they are excluded.⁴⁶

Of course, the project here is not simply one of urbanization and modernization. By effectively emptying strategic zones of the Amazonian forest and redistributing the population, the Cities give open access to the exploration and exploitation of nature and its resources. “It is a type of development and urbanization of the Amazon that complements the accumulation of transnational capital through territorial dispossession and the pillage of the common property of Indigenous peoples.”⁴⁷ So are the existence-based projects of Correa’s Citizens’ Revolution and their strategies, mechanisms, and politics of functional intercultural “schooling.” Interestingly enough, these Cities today are for the most part abandoned. Their populations have “escaped” back to the forest, leaving behind the now deteriorating housing and grounds of the “millennial” cities, and the westernizing modernity of the millennial schools. *Deschooling is, without a doubt, part of the way back to existence.*

Schooling without Gender

45 → Cited in Lang, *Erradicar*, 98. My translation.

46 → Cited in Lang, *Erradicar*, 98. My translation.

47 → Bayón, “La urbanización de la Amazonía.” Also see Walsh, “¿Interculturalidad?”

In addition to the disciplining of modernization, civilization, and capital described above there is another focal point of “existence schooled” present and growing in Latin America today, that is the attack on the so-called “gender ideology.”

Latin America is the region with the highest level of femicide and violence against women in the world. The statistics are terrifying: a woman is killed because she is a woman every four days in Peru, every three days in Bolivia, every 50 hours in Ecuador, every 31 hours in Argentina; 54 women per month in Honduras, 4 per day in Colombia, more than 2,000 per year in Mexico and 5,500 per year in Brazil (15 per day, of which 60% are Afro-descendant women, with Brazil having the fifth highest rate of femicide in the world).⁴⁸ Those were the reported figures in 2017; the reality is much worse today.

At the same time that violence against women and against gender diversities is on the rise, so too are efforts to prohibit the discussion of gender and sexual diversity in education at all levels. “Gender ideology” is the new term used by evangelicals, conservatives, governments (of the Right and Left), and the Catholic Church, to label feminisms and the promotion of gender and sexual diversity.

In an opinion piece in the *New York Times* focused on the new marriage between evangelicals and conservatives in Latin America, Javier Corrales explains in clear terms the perverse logic at work:

When experts argue that sexual diversity is real and gender identity is a construct, evangelical and Catholic clergies respond that this is just ideology, not science. Evangelicals are keen on stressing the word “ideology” because this gives them the right, they argue, to protect themselves, and especially their children, from exposure to these ideas. Ideology of gender allows them to call for the protection of children as cover for homophobia. The political beauty of

48 → Colectivo Geografía Crítica, “Manifiesto geográfico contra la violencia hacia las mujeres,” August, 8, 2017, <https://geografiacriticaecuador.org/2017/08/08/manifiesto-geografico-contra-violencia-hacia-las-mujeres/>; “Latinoamérica tiene mayores tasas de femicidio en el mundo,” *El Tiempo*, November 26, 2016, <http://www.eltiempo.com/mundo/latinoamerica/cifras-de-femicidio-en-america-latina-46362>.

“ideology of gender” is that it has given clergymen a way to recast their religious stand in secular terms: as parents’ rights. In Latin America, the new Christian slogan is, “Don’t mess with my kids.” It is one of the results of this evangelical-Catholic collaboration.⁴⁹

Laws now prohibit the discussion of gender issues and sexuality in education systems in eight Brazilian states with national legislation gaining ground. In November 2017, Judith Butler was viciously attacked in Brazil by a group who identified as anti-gender.⁵⁰ National anti-gender laws now exist in Panama, Paraguay, and Peru, with active campaigns in Ecuador, Colombia, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic, to mention only some countries.⁵¹ In 2013, Rafael Correa gave credence to the campaigns, dedicating one of his weekly Saturday’s TV broadcasts to “gender ideology” as a tool that destroys the family. The critical journalist Sandra Correa documents the continental character of the campaign:

In early 2017, anti-gender campaigns flared in the context of the Mexico District Constitutional Reform and right after an anti-gender bus began circulating across the country. Two months later the same bus was traveling in Chile, right before the final voting of the law reform that left behind the total prohibition of pregnancy termination promulgated by the Pinochet regime in

49 → Javier Corrales, “A Perfect Marriage. Evangelicals and Conservatives in Latin America,” *The New York Times*, January 19, 2018,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/17/opinion/evangelicals-politics-latin-america.html>.

50 → Sonia Correa, “Gender Ideology: Tracking its origins and meanings in current gender politics,” *Engenderings*, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2017. <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/gender/2017/12/11/gender-ideology-tracking-its-origins-and-meanings-in-current-gender-politics/>

51 → Eva Brunner and Ricardo Grande, “Los enemigos de género en América Latina,” *Esglobal* (November 7, 2017) <https://www.esglobal.org/los-enemigos-del-genero-america-latina/> (last consulted September 27, 2019).

As the attack on “gender ideology” in education grows, so do the cases of violence against children. In 2017, the same year that Peru passed its law against gender ideology in schools, there were 25,000 reported cases of sexual abuse against children. See Patricia del Rio, “Nada más queda,” *El Comercio* (Lima), February 8, 2018, <https://elcomercio.pe/opinion/rincon-del-autor/violacion-ninos-menor-edad-violadores-miedo-queda-patricia-rio-noticia-495575>.

the 1980's. Coinciding with Judith Butler's visit to Brazil, a campaign against 'gender ideology' in public education curricula erupted in Uruguay, a country known for its deeply grounded secular culture. And, in Ecuador, a law provision aimed at curtailing gender based violence was viciously attacked by anti-gender conservative religious groups. As the media coverage of the attack against Butler began waning, the Bolivian Constitutional Court struck down the recently approved gender identity law arguing that the dignity of the person is rooted in the natural sexual binary of the human.⁵²

In Colombia, the anti-gender campaigns have linked "gender ideology" with the peace accords between the government and the FARC; the argument is that these accords give emphasis to feminist rights and the rights of the LGBT community and, therefore, should not be supported.

These campaigns and laws are also part and parcel of new alliances between evangelicals, the conservative arm of the Catholic Church, and rightist political parties. The almost successful candidacy of Fabricio Alvarado in Costa Rica in 2018, the 2017 reelection of Sebastian Piñeira in Chile (who had four evangelical pastors as his campaign advisors), the presidential campaign of Duque in Colombia in which he promised to defend and promote Judeo-Christian thought, the strong evangelical support for López Obrador in Mexico, and of course in Brazil the coup-government of Michel Temer in Brazil (with a Congress composed of 90 evangelical members), followed by Bolsonaro now in power, are concrete examples. Latin America is certainly not alone. Lest we forget the evangelical-Christian alliances present in Trump's campaign, and now in the US government itself represented by vice-president Mike Pence.⁵³

What existence and what kind of existence are being schooled?

52 → Correa, "Gender Ideology."

53 → Corrales, "A Perfect Marriage."

EXISTENCE DESCHOOLED

Towards Educations Otherwise

Education and schooling are not the same, explained Janja, a Black Brazilian feminist, university educator, and capoeira master. “Schooling is taking over education. Schooling is destroying our ancestral essence, our being, our knowledges. It is schooling, not education, which we need to end; it is schooling that we, as Black peoples, need to take distance from.”⁵⁴ Moreover, she added, “there are spaces of education that defy schooling, and some of these spaces are in the buildings that we call schools.” An example she shared is a school in the south of Bahia that organizes the entire curriculum around the postulate of learning in and through Angolan capoeira, an African cultural and religious matrix and philosophy of existence. Janja’s words and example give lived and situated context and resonance to what I refer to here as “existence deschooled.”

However, for Janja, for the Afro-Brazilian activist and community educators with whom I conversed with in 2018 in Bahia, as well as for many others, including myself, the project is not simply to *deschool*. More broadly, it is towards the building, weaving, and articulating of *educations otherwise*,⁵⁵ that is, of experiences of learning, unlearning, and relearning that affirm rather than negate, that enable modes of thinking-feeling-being-living that schooling (as system-institution and/or systemic institution) works to decimate, civilize, and conquer, and that proffer re-existence, this

54 → Words spoken by Janja at the opening panel of the IV Latin American Colloquia on Coloniality/Decoloniality of Power, Knowledge, Being, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, March 9, 2018, and in personal conversation. My translation.

55 → By “otherwise” I mean those other ways of being, thinking, knowing, sensing, feeling, doing and living in relation that challenge the hegemony and universality of capitalism, Euro-centered modernity and the Western civilizing logic, including its anthropocentrism and binary-based foundation. The “otherwise” here, and most especially in the Andes, denotes and constructs a lived pedagogy and praxis that is not human-centered or humanistic, but instead grounded in the interrelation of all of nature of which humans are only a part. As I have come to recognize and comprehend it, the otherwise is that which exists in the borders, edges, fissures and cracks of the modern/colonial order; it is that which continues to be (re)molded, (re)constituted, and (re)shaped both against and despite coloniality.

understood as the construction and reconstruction of life in conditions of dignity.⁵⁶

These experiences —situated and lived— are increasingly present in Latin America/AbyaYala today. Some are conceived and constructed as autonomous, outside the confines of formal education, and without the state. The most well-known example is that of the Zapatistas.⁵⁷ Other experiences work from the cracks or fissures of the system.⁵⁸ Here the fissuring or crack making is a constitutive part of the deschooling and of the pedagogies and praxis of an education —or educations— otherwise, what I understand as decolonial pedagogies and praxis.

Decolonial Pedagogies and Praxis Rising

I left the field and discipline of Education more than two decades ago. The principal reason was the increasing weight in universities of both the North and South of “existence schooled.” As I have described elsewhere, I also put to one-side Paulo Freire’s texts sensing then that his class-based and male-oriented perspective afforded little for understanding the existence-based struggles of Indigenous and African descended peoples, and most especially of women.⁵⁹

However, as my attention and energy have moved toward the “decolonial how and hows,” pedagogy and praxis have, for me, taken on newfound significance. Here I find resonance with Paulo’s idea of pedagogy as indispensable methodology in and for social, political, ontological, and epistemic struggles of liberation and with his comprehension of these struggles as pedagogical enclaves for learning, unlearning, and relearning,

56 → Albán, “Interculturalidad sin decolonialidad.”

57 → See for example in English, Angélica Rico, “Educate in Resistance: The Autonomous Zapatista schools,” *Roar Magazine*, January 2, 2014, <https://roarmag.org/essays/zapatista-autonomous-education-chiapas/>.

58 → See, for example, the experience of community-based secondary schools in Oaxaca: <http://oaxaca.me/secundarias-comunitarias-modelo-educativo-intercultural-de-oaxaca/>

59 → See, for example, Catherine Walsh, “Decolonial Pedagogies Walking and Asking. Notes to Paulo Freire from Abya Yala,” *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 34, no. 2 (December 2014).

and for reflection and action. I find resonance as well with the pedagogies of indignation that he described in one of his last texts, in his calling forth of rebellion as self-affirmation, and his cry for and from the resistance that keeps us alive. Yet again, Paulo was, and is, not enough. I continue to explore in depth the pedagogical contributions of Frantz Fanon, extended in the work of Nelson Maldonado-Torres and most especially Sylvia Wynter. And I continue to read and re-read Jacqui Alexander's potent text *Pedagogies of Crossing*. However, it is most especially in the pedagogical thought and practice of community-based intellectuals, activists, collectives and others outside the academic canon, that I encounter the seeds and possibilities of existence deschooled, educations otherwise, and the "hows" of decolonial praxis.⁶⁰

The examples are many and growing. In Mexico, the Illich-inspired experiences of the Universidades de la Tierra (mentioned above), especially in Oaxaca and San Cristobal, come to mind. Here autonomy and freedom reign. Professors, students, curriculum, textbooks, and degrees are deemed unnecessary for learning. As Gustavo Esteva of Unitierra Oaxaca explains, by "deschooling our lives...in this real world, where the school still dominates minds, hearts and institutions," and by building conditions of apprenticeship, of decent living, social fabric, and of the regeneration of community, we are shaping and enabling an "internal and social structure that is a fundamental condition for real freedom ...and for learning. What we are doing is highly subversive," Esteva says. "In a sense, we are subverting all the institutions of the modern, economic society. In packaging our activities as one of the most respected sacred cows of modernity –education– we protect our freedom from the attacks of the system."⁶¹

Similarly, the Escuelita Zapatista (the Zapatista "Little School") organized in 2013 and 2014 by the EZLN in collaboration with Unitierra Chiapas opened an "other" ethical, epistemic, political, and educational space, an "other" decolonizing praxis, and an "other" social condition of

60 → See the two volumes of Catherine Walsh, ed., *Pedagogías decoloniales. Prácticas insurgentes de resistir, (re)existir y (re)vivir*, (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 2013 and 2017).

61 → Esteva, "Reclaiming our Freedom to Learn."

knowledge that turned capitalism/modernity/coloniality on its head. La Escuelita invited people of all ages to learn to unlearn in order to relearn, from the collective lived practice, experience, thought, and knowledge of Zapatista communities and from these communities' ongoing struggle for autonomy and liberation. I have shared in several published texts some of my experience as a first-grade student in the Escuelita.⁶²

In villages and barrios throughout Latin America/Abya Yala, communities (especially Indigenous and African-descended communities) are increasingly reclaiming the freedom to learn, regenerating traditional and ancestral forms of learning outside and in the margins and fissures or cracks of state-controlled education and schooling. I am thinking of the recently formed *Escuela de Pensamiento Crítico Juan García Salazar* (Juan García Salazar School of Critical Thought) in Esmeraldas, Ecuador, focused on African descended collective memory and ancestral thought, and of the schools of Black oral tradition formed by Juan García before his recent passing.⁶³ Here the lived concept-praxis of existence weaves modes, knowledges, and philosophies of life and living –of collective well-being– that rupture capitalist and anthropocentric frames and turn modernity/coloniality on its head.

I am also thinking of the regeneration of practices and processes in Bahia, Brazil focused on *quilombola* (maroon) pedagogies and on the connected histories and existence-life-based philosophies of Angola and Afro-Brazil. Here the efforts of Mille Fernandes from the Valencia campus of UNEB (the State University of Bahia) particularly stand out. Through her work with teachers, students, and *quilombola* communities, Mille is assembling a praxis in and out of school that defies the dictates of schooling and state.

In a very different context, the community of Saraguro in Ecuador responded to Rafael Correa's closing of its community school Inka Samana by opening Yachay Kawsay, a deschooled school outside the frame,

62 → Walsh, "(Decolonial) Notes to Paulo Freire."

63 → Juan García Salazar and Catherine Walsh, *Pensar sembrando/Sembra pensando con el Abuelo Zenón* (Quito: Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar-Cátedra de Estudios Afro-Andinos and Ediciones Abya-Yala, 2017).

dictates, and control of state. Similarly, the Intercultural University Amawtay Wasi, also closed by Correa's government, continued, until recently, to exist as a "Pluriversity" without the state.⁶⁴

The examples of decolonial pedagogies and praxis are many and diverse. Some, like those described in my edited two-volume collection *Pedagogías decoloniales* (2013 and 2017), aim to construct conditions and possibilities for survival (against capitalism-coloniality's scheme of destruction, pillage, deterritorialization, and death) while at the same time giving credence, possibility, and force to re-existence, dignity, and learnings, unlearnings and relearnings for life.

I am thinking here not only of that which occurs outside the system, but also the pedagogies and praxis of existence otherwise present and emergent in the system's margins and cracks. Fissuring and crack-making is, in fact, a component part of my educational-life project, including in the international doctoral program that I began in in Quito in 2002.⁶⁵ It is what has kept me, up until now, working within the educational institution, opening and expanding the cracks, and planting and cultivating seeds of deschooling, of educations and existence otherwise, and of decolonial praxis.

While there is much more to say, I will close here with the cracks and with the seeds of hope, both of which point to the possibilities and urgencies of action in these times of increasing despair in Latin America, North America, and the globe. This action returns me to Illich; to paraphrase him: *not just education but also existence needs to be deschooled*.

So, I end with the open question: What does all this suggest for you the reader, for those who define themselves as educators, and for what we understand as schools?

64 → In 2018-2019, Ecuador's government began a process of negotiation with some sectors of the Indigenous movement to re-open Amawtay Wasi as a public state university.

Despite the controversies surrounding these negotiations and the plan, now in operation, to effectively discipline and "school" Amawtay Wasi within the same frame of functional interculturality that I criticized earlier in this text, protest and debate have been virtually nil.

65 → See Catherine Walsh, "The Politics of Naming: (Inter)cultural Studies in De-Colonial Code," *Cultural Studies* 25, no. 4-5 (2011).