

Damnés Realities and Ontological Disobedience

Notes on the Coloniality of Reality in Higher

Education in the Bolivian Andes and Beyond¹

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Decolonization up for negotiation

Lifting one's eyes from the noisy and crowded street-life in the commercial center of the “rebel city” (Lazar 2008) of El Alto, one can see a homemade black-and-red placard in one of the windows on the fourth floor of a smutty building. It says “Escuela de Pensamiento Pacha”. On Saturday afternoons a small group of indigenous Aymara university students and intellectuals gather there in a small, chilly room to discuss philosophical queries and concepts and to produce knowledge for a radical “indianization” of society and being. This is a space, I argue in this text, not only for *epistemic* disobedience (Mignolo 2009) but also for *ontological* disobedience in which historically subalternized beings and ontologically informed lifeworlds – “*damnés* realities” – are being unfolded and making themselves present through concrete and situated practices and conversations, by no means in isolation from a dominant world, but in spite of it, in defiance of it, in the face of it (cf. Blaser 2013). For more than a decade now,

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I have participated in these activities and maintained a continuous and deeply engaging and critical conversation with the two brothers who constitute the core of the group, the charismatic Aymara activists and intellectuals René Acarapi and Freddy “Pachakuti” Acarapi.ⁱ

In June 2015 I was invited to give a talk at the annual conference organized since 2010 by the Escuela de Pensamiento Pacha and the Acarapi brothers in their rural hometown of Tiwanaku under the motto “Reconstituting the State of Tawantinsuyu”. The conference has grown with each year and the last few years it has attracted indigenous Aymara, Quechua and Mapuche intellectuals and activists from Bolivia, Peru, Chile and Argentina as speakers and a nearly thousand-headed audience. Central themes of the conference are “indigenous knowledge” and “decolonization”, be that of political power, history, or higher education. At the inauguration Pachakuti spoke: “This is a special day (...) to strengthen the thinking, the knowledge (...) of the Indian nations of this continent.”

Though among the most radically critical, the Acarapi brothers are far from alone in discussing the decolonization of higher education in relation to indigenous knowledges. Rather, there is a diverse set of actors who play a role here, such as the Bolivian state and the Ministry of Education, indigenous organizations, activists, intellectuals, and university lecturers, but also ritual specialists and other knowledgeable indigenous men and women. Thus, this text deals with notions, practices, and – ultimately – realities that collide, coexist and coalesce in the colonial and decolonial dynamics surrounding higher education in contemporary Bolivian society.

Since 2006 and the coming to power of Evo Morales and the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), “decolonization” has been avowed as the ideological lodestar of governmental politics and “indigeneity” has been used as a rhetorical device and a legitimizing symbolic

capital in governmental discourse and state ceremony (Burman 2014; Canessa, 2014). From day one, education was identified as a key area for the implementation of decolonizing politics (Burman 2012). In the new Education Law, passed in 2010, Bolivian education – from kindergarten to postgraduate studies – was envisioned to be “decolonizing, liberating, revolutionary, anti-imperialist, depatriarchalizing” (Ministerio de Educación 2010, art. 3:1, my translation). In the same law, state-controlled indigenous universities were given the task of: “Developing processes of recovery, strengthening, creation and re-creation of the knowledges (...) and languages of the indigenous, originary [“*originario*”] and peasant nations and peoples” (ibid, art. 60:2, my translation).

Apart from such legislative measures and the rhetoric recognition of indigenous peoples and their knowledges, Evo’s coming to power also implied an “ontological opening” (de la Cadena 2014) in national political practices and debate; “earth beings” (ibid. 2015) that had been suppressed and subjected to colonial extirpation efforts since the Spanish invasion but had lingered on in stigmatized “Indian” rituals and agricultural practices and as suggestive political symbols of ancestral power evoked by the Andean indigenous *indianista-katarista* movement, were all of a sudden integral parts of governmental discourse and state ceremony (Burman 2011a). Lifeworlds and beings that supposedly had been, as it were, buried under centuries of colonial, Eurocentric, and racist dust, reemerged, were re-modelled and gained formal political relevance. Concepts developed by critical indigenous intellectuals, such as *suma qamaña* (Yampara 2011), and concepts of cosmopolitical significance (cf. de la Cadena 2010), such as *pachakuti* (see e.g. Ticona 2011), were acknowledged in state discourse and incorporated into formal counter-narratives against Eurocentric, reductionist notions of development, economic growth, and reform.

Likewise, higher education experienced an opening of the ontological and epistemological conditions for producing legitimate knowledge. Aymara *yatiris* and *amawt’as*

(“shamans”/“wise ones”) were not only positioned as key actors in the ceremonial protocol of the new Bolivian state (Burman 2011a), but were also invited as lecturers to the indigenous Aymara university, Universidad Indígena Boliviana Aymara “Tupak Katari” (UNIBOL “TK”) founded in 2008, and were, even in the eyes of many non-indigenous urban people, to a certain extent relieved of their historically ascribed depreciatory identity as superstitious witchdoctors and were rather regarded as knowledgeable men and women or, in more romanticizing and exotifying terms, as “guardians of tradition” or even “guardians of Mother Earth”. Conventional academic disciplines and scientific practices were contrasted with, and in certain contexts and to a certain extent even challenged by, other ways of producing knowledge. Over centuries of colonial oppression, such “knowledges otherwise” (Escobar 2007) or “Othered ways of knowing” (de Oliveira Andreotti et. al. 2015, 24) have persistently been generated from within concrete and situated practices, struggles, and experiences, but never before had they been embraced by state authorities and incorporated into formal higher education. In the eyes of many indigenous intellectuals and activists, state policies that aimed at the decolonization of knowledge production and the establishment of indigenous universities were indeed encouraging initiatives. Even radical *indianista* critics like the Acarapi brothers were moderately enthusiastic to start with.

However, hardly had any serious state-endorsed decolonizing attempt at engaging other ontologies and epistemologies in higher education begun before a tidal wave of critical voices flooded the public debate, starting in 2010. Any attempts at seriously articulating a political or cultural critique in languages other than Spanish, using concepts other than those intelligible to non-indigenous intellectuals, or based on ontological or epistemological premises or pedagogical practices other than those sanctioned by modernity, were brushed aside as exercises in romanticizing exoticism without any “revolutionary potential” (according to the left) or as an expression of dangerous, dissident and irreverent indigenist tendencies

(according to the right); it was characterized as a quasi-esoteric form of Andean essentialist culturalism and was soon pejoratively labelled “*pachamamismo*”, in reference to the Andean deity Pachamama. To be sure, similar, but quite marginal, voices had made themselves heard ever since the coming to power of Evo and the government’s first efforts of incorporating indigenous ritual practices and concepts into governmental discourse and state ceremony (Burman 2011a, 239). However, this time the critique had serious repercussions, because this time it was articulated by actors who were identified as critical, leftist thinkers who were perceived to be seriously worried about the path taken by the MAS government, and who moreover managed to tap hegemonic social theory of its deconstructivist, postmodernist and anti-essentialist potential in a critique of any political project claiming “ancestral knowledge” or “indigeneity”. The starting point for this critical tide wave was Pablo Stefanoni’s short 2010 polemic piece “¿Adonde nos lleva el pachamamismo?”ⁱⁱⁱ (“Where is *pachamamismo* taking us?”) in which it is argued that:

the process of change is all too important to be left in the hands of *los pachamámicos*. The pose of ancestral authenticity (...) does not seem capable of contributing anything significant in terms of constructing a new state, of establishing a new model of development, of discussing a viable model of production or of new forms of democracy and mass [“*popular*”] participation. Rather, in a philosophy that would supposedly be an alternative to the Western one, *el pachamamismo* (...) dissolves the profound concerns for change which Bolivians nurture ...

(Stefanoni 2011, 261, my translation; see also Blaser 2013, 557)

Accidentally or not, more or less at the same time as Stefanoni scorned anyone who articulated political visions or made epistemological claims from other ontological premises than the ones embraced by himself and his likes, the semantics and semiotics of

“decolonization” in state politics and governmental discourse started to change. As I have argued elsewhere (Burman 2011b, 2014; see also de Oliveira Andreotti et. al. 2015, 22), “decolonization” is indeed a multivocal concept – something of a floating signifier in Bolivian political debate – which is filled with different meanings by different actors in different political and social contexts. A few years after Evo’s coming to power, the conceptualization of decolonization as a challenge to Eurocentric paradigms of development and forms of knowledge production and as a serious turn towards “indigenous knowledges” and subalternized social and economic practices in search for alternative societal paradigms was increasingly challenged by the conceptualization of decolonization as a project aimed at national sovereignty based on industrialization, infrastructural modernization, technological progress, and natural resource extraction. These two differing conceptualizations managed to co-exist in state politics and governmental discourse for quite a few years (Burman 2011a, 231-35). With time, however, the contradictions became overwhelming, and the latter conceptualization became dominant in state politics and governmental discourse directed at the national public, while the former lingered on in governmental discourse directed at the international community and in some spectacular events organized by, for instance, the Viceministry of Decolonization. This “turn” in state politics and governmental discourse – which Rivera (2014) in the subtitle of a recent book calls “the colonial turn of the MAS government” – became blatantly manifest in the conflict between indigenous and environmentalist movements and the Bolivian state over a projected highway in the Bolivian Amazon, i.e. the so-called TIPNIS conflict which materialized in 2011 (Burman 2014; McNeish 2013) and still agitates Bolivian politics. Moreover, this turn also had serious repercussions for higher education: Universities – be they indigenous, public, or private – were increasingly urged by state authorities to produce engineers with technological skills; an

emphasis on the production of nuclear physicists and oil prospectors replaced earlier rhetorical appraisal of “ancestral knowledge” and “indigenous wisdom”.

The “ontological opening” (de la Cadena 2014) transformed, I would argue, into an ontological *ch’akhi*, an ontological hangover, a backlash, a recoil. In order to understand how and why this happened, in this text I draw attention to how the MAS government have used certain representations of indigeneity to justify its hold of power and to legitimize its supposed identity as an “indigenous government”. Moreover, and especially so in relation to higher education, I situate this “turn” in the context of what I call “the coloniality of reality” and I discuss it in terms of an “ontological conflict” as rewardingly theorized by Blaser (2013). Last but not least, in a context in which the implications and the very nature of “decolonization” are up for negotiation, the decolonization of knowledge and the production of decolonial knowledges from ontological premises other than the ones sanctioned by a hegemonically modern university and a colonial, capitalist world-system, are discussed in terms of “ontological disobedience”.

Political ontology and the coloniality of reality

To assess the so-called “ontological turn” in social theory (see e.g. Carrithers et al. 2010) is far beyond the scope of this text. However, I use the concept “ontology” quite profusely throughout these pages and a few words on the rationale for this would not be amiss.

“Ontology” as an analytical category is used in different ways by different authors. On the one hand, drawing on Heidegger and others, “ontology” is used to discuss existential and phenomenological dimensions of being (or even “Being”) and to draw our attention to the nature of being in the sense of “being *qua* being” or in the sense of “the self” (or even “the Self”). On the other hand, it is used to discuss the nature(s) of reality in the sense of the world(s) in which the self exists and unfolds. While finding much of interest and inspiration in the former usage of the concept (e.g. as discussed in terms of “the coloniality of being” by

Maldonado-Torres 2007), my usage of the concept in this text is more directly related to the latter. However, in order not to forego the importance of lived experience, situated practice and the relational nature of existence and in order not to reify the existence of multiple realities as discrete world-objects, I employ the somewhat phenomenologically oriented concept “ontologically informed lifeworlds”.

Critics of the ontological turn (e.g. Bessire and Bond 2014; Hornborg 2015) have convincingly pointed out the meager prospects for theorizing power and articulating a radical critique of the capitalist world-system from within a seemingly relativist turn towards a notion of the multiplicity of realities and a “complete dissolution of the notion of an objective, universal nature” (ibid, 51). Indeed, how do we articulate a critique of fossil-fueled capitalism if the causal chains behind climate change as identified by science are no more objectively and universally real than, say, the autonomous agency of ancestral spirits in Andean mountains? Blaser (2013) addresses such problems by framing the debate as one of “*political ontology*” and by attending to ontological differences without losing sight of sociopolitical struggles and global asymmetric relations of political and economic power. While depending on one’s analytical objectives there might be, or not, a point in maintaining an *analytical* distinction between “nature” and “society” and thereby maintaining “an objective, universal nature” (Hornborg 2015, 51), current *political* dynamics in Bolivia and elsewhere reveal that any clear-cut distinction between material/political and cognitive/ontological conflicts is based on a moot dichotomy. Ontological and epistemological dimensions of human existence are at the center of struggles over resources and power and struggles against racism, sexism, ecocide, and exploitation, since these are simultaneously struggles over being, struggles over knowledge, struggles over reality, over “what there is.”

One could certainly make a critical argument about coloniality – i.e. that which Mignolo once called “the less visible side of modernity” (1999, 236), or “the hidden face of modernity (...)

and the condition of its possibility” as de Oliveira Andreotti et. al. (2015, 27), drawing on Mignolo, succinctly put it – and the asymmetries of power involved in higher education without referring to “ontology”. However, I believe some fundamental aspects of the dynamics at work here are rewardingly discussed in terms of “political ontology”. Ontology is, after all, not “just another word for culture” (Carrithers et al. 2010), nor is the so-called ontological turn merely a sophisticated technique to get away with essentialist claims or homogenizing ethnographic narratives. A turn towards ontology does not by implication constitute the ideal paradigm for neoliberal social science, nor does it by definition imply a turn away from political economy – and even less so away from political ecology –, a dogmatic assertion of the multiplicity of reified realities, or a retreat into a Heideggerian version of “fundamental ontology”. I rather think of it as an intellectual project of serious engagement with “radical difference” (Blaser 2013, 549) and the situated practices that generate different ontologically informed lifeworlds – “ways of worlding” in Blaser’s words (ibid, 552) – and of taking seriously that which is serious to the people with and among whom we work. This implies acknowledging the real realities of our partially connected lifeworlds and existences. Hence, I would argue, it is a project – not the only one, not the ultimate one, but still – that, if combined with a serious attention to the power asymmetries instituted and reproduced by a colonial, capitalist world-system, may reveal dynamics of colonial domination that go deep into the very nature(s) of reality and being(s).

Elsewhere (Burman 2012), drawing on Mignolo (2000) and others, I have referred to the “coloniality of knowledge” in order to discuss the epistemic dimension of colonial domination and to draw attention to epistemic violence as an integral part of the colonial relations of power that characterize the world since 1492 (see de Sousa Santos 2010; Grosfoguel 2013). Nevertheless, I believe there is an essential dimension that is missing in many contributions (including my own) to the prolific debate on the coloniality of knowledge. What is missing is

the fundamental discussion about “what there is” and the mechanisms by which a dominant reality imposes itself on other realities in an ontocidal process of colonial ontological warfare, “not a war of words (...) but an ongoing war of worlds” (Viveiros de Castro 2014, 10). Or as Maldonado-Torres (2007, 260) argues: “Colonization and racialization are not only political and social events or structures. They also have metaphysical and ontological significance.” In other words, while “a review of what should be known, for what purpose, how to know it, and what should be the criteria to legitimize knowledge” (Restrepo 2014, 140) is an indispensable component of any project aimed at contributing to the decolonization of knowledge and decolonial knowledge production, it is not enough. I would add a number of other questions: What is there to know? What realities are unfolded/enacted/catalyzed into being by different knowledge generating practices and learning processes? Within which ontologically informed lifeworlds and in which relational fields are knowledges produced and by whom? How and by which mechanisms are the partial connections between different ways of producing knowledge and of generating and experiencing realities transformed into spaces of conflict, domination and resistance? These are questions of an ontological nature; questions dealing with “what there is”, with what kind of actors there are and what kind of beings compose the relational fields – the communities of being – within which knowledge production, learning, and political struggle take place.

Ontological conflicts could either be conceptualized as conflicts over what there is, i.e. conflicts over the nature of reality, or as conflicts between different realities (Blaser 2013, 548). These are two quite different things. While the former would imply a multiplicity of perspectives on one single reality, the latter would imply a multiplicity of realities, the existence of different worlds, in Strathern’s (2004) words a “pluriverse”, or in Viveiros de Castro’s (1998, 472) words “multinaturalism”. The concept of “realities” in the plural could easily lead one to think in terms of reified, discrete, and mutually excluding worlds

supposedly tied to likewise reified, discrete, and mutually excluding ethnic groups or “cultures”. However, if we think of ontology not as the hermetically sealed property of a neatly defined group, but as a formation of premises concerning the nature(s) of being or the nature(s) of reality and if we think of “being” and “reality” as transforming and transformative processes –biophysical and sociopolitical, sociophysical and biopolitical – generated by concrete and situated practices and in concrete relational fields, then there is nothing necessarily essentialist, static or reductionist in discussing intersecting, partially connected and partially overlapping different realities. Knowledge production and learning processes are, just like political activism or ritual practice, ways of coming into being in a world – and being brought into being *by* a world – that is concomitantly being brought into being by one’s practices, and, of course, those of others (and this is important, since otherwise “worlding” would be a solipsistic activity without any relation to the activities of powerful actors – be they transnational corporations, states, universities, or ancestral beings – in the sociophysical formation of our realities). In other words, if knowledge production and learning are ways of enacting and unfolding realities, they necessarily take place within and in relation to already enacted and unfolded realities. Knowledge production and learning are not only ontologically generative processes, i.e. processes in which the loose ends of practices, materialities, and knowledges are twined together to form realities; they take place in already ontologically informed lifeworlds and are therefore also ontologically cognizant. While it is true, as Restrepo (2014, 142) argues, that “[d]ifferent knowledges create diverse worlds, because they result in actions that shape the way in which cultures manage their materiality, time and space”, it would be deceptive to portray the relation between “knowledges” and “realities” as a one-way process of causality. Realities are generated in concrete and situated practices, and knowledge production and learning are indeed practices. However, as such they are embedded in concrete lifeworlds and are therefore ontologically informed, and materially

conditioned, practices. Hence, knowledges and realities are mutually formative, playing major roles in constituting each other. These are the power-infused dialectics of reality and knowledge/reality generation. Or in the words of de Sousa Santos, Arriscado Nunes, and Meneses (2007, xxxi): “The very action of knowing (...) is an intervention in the world, which places us within it as active contributors to its making”.

In relation to this understanding of “realities”, and if we understand ontological conflicts as conflicts between different ontologically informed lifeworlds over anything from “what there is”, the proper ways of engaging with the world(s) and the morally correct ways of acting in society and in relation to “the environment” (or, in terms of an other ontology: “Pachamama”) to the meanings and implications of social and environmental justice, exploitation and decolonization, it is evident that ontological conflicts involve severe asymmetries of power and that they cannot be understood in isolation from the power asymmetries that characterize the current colonial, capitalist world-system, or in Grosfoguel’s (2013, 89) words, the “Capitalist/Patriarchal Western-centric/Christian-centric Modern/Colonial World-System”.

In Bolivia, the decolonization of higher education was supposed to establish a shared middle-ground of knowledge production and learning at the university; different knowledges (“indigenous”/“ancestral” and “universal” as they tend to be labelled in policy documents) were supposed to meet and “complement” each other. However, the university is a logocentric, librocentric four-wall-institutionalized setting (Burman 2012) which in this context therefore constitutes a *colonial* middle-ground where not only one specific form of knowledge production is given preference, but also one specific reality – with its grotesque asymmetries of power; “a world with masters and slaves” (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 251) with “cannibal economies, consuming the lives of some for the luxury of others” (Fischer 2014, 349) – is naturalized and legitimized, generated and reproduced. Hegemonic academic processes of learning and knowledge production are not practices that simply describe a pre-

existing reality; they rather contribute to the *generation* of a specific reality. Academic institutions are thereby quite resilient to change, since they not only define reality, but are accomplices in generating it. This was made manifest in the 17th century when “New Science” created a new reality; God’s creation was transformed into brute biophysical matter and, with time, “nature” turned into “natural resources” and “ecosystem services”. The “realities” I refer to in this text, then, are not reified world-objects but rather realities-in-the-becoming that can be transformed, enacted and unfolded in relation to and by human knowledge producing practices.

It has been convincingly argued that universities reproduce and reinforce the “colonial difference” (Mignolo 1999) in an epistemological sense, and de Sousa Santos (2010) and Grosfoguel (2013) discuss this in terms of “epistemicide”. Relating this debate to Blaser’s (2013) project of “political ontology”, however, it could be likewise argued that the “colonial difference” is reinforced by the hegemonic university also in an ontological sense. Hence, the attention to the “coloniality of knowledge” would need to be accompanied by a critical attention to the “coloniality of reality”.

The coloniality of higher education and attempts at decolonization

“[A]ll Latin American universities, public and private, are predominantly white, segregated and racist institutions that reproduce exclusively the Eurocentric model of knowledge developed in the West in the modern period.”

(De Carvalho and Flórez-Flórez 2014,123)

This claim should be critically assessed, not in order to be dismissed, but rather to be nuanced, and to explore the prospects for a university otherwise and the assessment of factual concrete

attempts of doing things otherwise in higher education. De Carvalho and Flórez-Flórez have probably never visited the Universidad Indígena Tawantinsuyu (UTA), founded in the late 1990s by a group of radical Aymara intellectuals and activists in the small rural town of Laja but operating in the city of El Alto since more than a decade. But if they would have, they would have encountered a small and alternative institution that is quite far from the “predominantly white, segregated and racist” university (be that the Humboldtian university or the neoliberal corporate university) that reproduces “exclusively the Eurocentric model of knowledge”. They would have found an institution that offers academic programs such as “Andean Theology and Philosophy”, “Indigenous Rights”, and “Aymara Linguistics and History”; among its lecturers they would have found Aymara intellectuals, *indianista* activists and *yatiris* and *amawt’as* and among the students they would have found anything from young urban *indianista* activists and second generation rural-urban Aymara migrants, to *yatiri* apprentices and public school teachers; actually, they would have found many of the members of the Escuela de Pensamiento Pacha referred to above. Although a university, rather than a racist institution UTA is a reaction to colonial academia, a decolonial attempt in a racist world, an attempt at carving out an other epistemological and ontological space in the very coloniality of reality of higher education. Or in the words of a former UTA student in her late 20s, who also studied at the school of education (“La Normal”):

There is a huge difference between UTA and La Normal. UTA was like our own home (...); we treated ourselves (...) like in family, like we do in the community, but in La Normal the treatment was very different (...), it was like in the city: no respect. Because they always think that anything coming from the West or from the *gringos*, from “the intelligent ones” as they tend to think, that they are superior to us. (---)

As such, UTA is not the first, nor the most recent, critical attempt at establishing an institution of education otherwise in Bolivia, in which indigenous and other subalternized knowledges and practices are placed at the very foundation of the learning process. In 1931, the legendary “Escuela Ayllu de Warisata” was established in the heart of rural Aymara society (see e.g. Pérez 1963). The communities provided land, building materials and labor, while the state provided teachers and economic funding to a school project that would flourish and spread throughout the country, and that would become a quasi-mythical educational model that was not only *directed* at indigenous people (in itself a quite radical project at the time), but that also had as its pedagogical point of departure the harsh reality of rural Aymara people (i.e. racism, discrimination, poverty, serfdom) and their knowledges and practices. La Escuela Ayllu thrived less than a decade before it was closed down by the political regime; students and teachers were pursued and education was not to return to rural communities until the mid-1950s, but then not as an emancipatory initiative but rather as an assimilationist project of the new *patria mestiza*.

During the era of neoliberal multiculturalism of the 1990s and early 2000s, a quite defanged educational reform was implemented and policy documents were sprayed with buzzwords such as “*interculturalidad*” and “*educación bilingüe*”; nevertheless, “decolonization” was not on the agenda. Moreover, the reform targeted basic education and nothing or very little spilled over into higher education. It was not until the new educational law (*Ley de Educación “Avelino Siñani-Elisardo Pérez”*, named after the founding fathers of La Escuela Ayllu) was passed in 2010 that “decolonization” and “education” were formally combined in legislative measures and governmental discourse. However, many authorities of private and public universities alike saw with mistrust upon their new role as promoters of a higher education that would be:

“decolonizing, liberating, revolutionary, anti-imperialist, depatriarchalizing, and transformative of the economic and social structures; oriented towards the cultural reaffirmation of the indigenous, originary [*originario*] and peasant nations and peoples...

(Ministerio de Educación 2010, art. 3:1, my translation)

Most university boards paid lip-service to interculturality, decolonization etc. and then continued business-as-usual referring to their legally recognized university autonomy. By this time, though, in order to secure a space for decolonized and decolonizing higher education, the Bolivian state had already founded three indigenous non-autonomous universities, one of them (Universidad Indígena Boliviana Aymara “Tupak Katari” or UNIBOL “TK”) in the village of Warisata, in the very premises of La Escuela Ayllu. One of the intellectual authors of the indigenous Aymara university, Carlos Callisaya, explained its aims to me: “To us, the indigenous university (...) is the vanguard to transform higher education, and to turn education into the engine of productive development.”

UNIBOL “TK”, currently with its main campus in the village of Cuyahuani, offers four academic programs: Agronomy, Veterinary and Zoology, Food engineering, and Textile engineering. These are all oriented towards quite practical and technical professions. There is no sociology program, no philosophy program. And many critical voices have been raised against what is argued to be a reflection of racist, colonial stereotypes of “*indios*” as being “naturally fitted” for practical offices and manual labor, and less so for intellectual and theoretically abstract tasks. However, in the words of an *indianista-katarista* intellectual and former lecturer at UNIBOL “TK” in his early 40s:

In the Andes you can't separate practical manual work and technical knowledge from political issues. What we tried to do at the indigenous

university was to relate the technical education to political, ideological, religious issues.

At UTA, the curriculum is rather different. There is more direct emphasis on critical theoretical knowledge and more explicit room for issues such as “Andean philosophy” and “Aymara history” as part of a radical ideological debate that permeates the learning process. However, both UTA and UNIBOL “TK” claim to be indigenous universities. This leads us to the question of what it means to be an “indigenous university”. In other words, in what does the “indigeneity” of these institutions consist? In a country characterized by a very large indigenous populationⁱⁱⁱ, the physical presence of indigenous students and lecturers is a quite poor parameter for defining an indigenous university, and if we add to that the changing semantics and semiotics of “indigeneity” over time in Bolivian society (Burman 2014), then “indigenous presence” is also an analytically problematic parameter. Moreover, one could arguably claim that even at more conventional public universities such as UMSA in La Paz and, even more so, UPEA in El Alto there is a very strong “indigenous presence”. The indigeneity of indigenous universities must, in other words, be sought elsewhere; one option would be to search for it in the institutionally expressed concern for “indigenous knowledges”. However, that would only postpone any definite understanding of the indigeneity of indigenous universities since the nature of the indigeneity of indigenous knowledges is far from obvious. Indigenous knowledge can hardly be defined in an essentialist sense as knowledge passed down from one generation to another in an unbroken chain that goes back to precolonial times. However, to define it as any knowledge held by an indigenous person would in this specific case take us back to where we started, i.e. defining indigenous universities by pointing to the presence of indigenous individuals. Rather than pinning down a clear-cut definition of “indigenous universities”, I would characterize them in a more open way, on the one hand, by pointing to a parameter as basic as the institutional self-

identification. This would allow for an understanding of the indigeneity of indigenous universities as diverse and dynamic as that of the indigeneity of “indigenous peoples” in Bolivian society in general. Simultaneously, it would acknowledge “indigeneity” as a space for negotiation and struggle and, in certain contexts, as a politically legitimizing device. On the other hand, I would draw attention to the way these institutions, to varying degrees and in various ways, deal with a certain kind of knowledges (not necessarily “*indigenous* knowledge” in the essentialist sense) and knowledge producing practices that are based on epistemological and ontological premises other than the ones embraced by more conventional universities; these are knowledges and practices that have been subalternized, disregarded and Othered by dominant institutions in Bolivia and by a hegemonic Eurocentric academia on a global level. Thus, “in the current era, an indigenous university must be a challenge to dominant academia and create alternatives for another society” as a former lecturer at the UNIBOL “TK” formulated it.

Moreover, both UNIBOL “TK” and UTA claim to deal with the decolonization of knowledge, and according to the new constitution all Bolivian universities should be dedicated to a general process of decolonization. This leads us to another essential question: What does “decolonization” mean in the context of higher education (cf. Oliveira Andreotti 2015)? In the Bolivian debate, there are two principal standpoints, articulated here in the quotes of two social science students at UMSA: 1) “To decolonize higher education would be to give everyone access to a high-quality university education, without any form of discrimination.” 2) “It would mean incorporating indigenous knowledges and knowledgeable indigenous men and women as lecturers and to transform the syllabi completely.”

While seemingly ingenuous, the former standpoint, i.e. that the ‘universal’ access to higher education would imply its decolonization, could on the one hand partially be corroborated by pointing to the effects within the university system of including formerly excluded sectors, in

this case indigenous people. The *indianista-katarista* student movement of the 1970s and -80s is an example of this. The national revolution of 1952 made it possible for Aymara and Quechua men and women to enter the university and to organize in students' organizations, some of which became radicalized *indianista-katarista* groups in which historical figures such as Bartolina Sisa and Tupaj Katari were recovered from the selective amnesia of dominant nationalist history writing and turned into potent symbols of indigenous liberation (see e.g. Pacheco 1992). However, the revolution did not eradicate the colonial structures of exclusion and the mechanisms by which the elites secured their privileged positions in Bolivian society and within academia. With time, however, some of these radical indigenous students turned into radical indigenous scholars (for instance Roberto Choque, Simón Yampara, and Esteban Ticona), who insisted on questioning some of the fundamentals of colonial academia and, as far as the system permitted, introduced new items in the colonial syllabi. Indeed, this had an effect. On the other hand, however, persistently colonial syllabi and the institutional structures of academia are predisposed to transform the subjectivities of those who access its environments and its knowledges; the Bolivian assimilationist post-revolutionary educational system is an example of this. Dominant Bolivian academia, while to some extent transformed by previously excluded actors, is still a profoundly colonial and marginalizing institution. Consequently, "access" can hardly be synonymous with "decolonization".

The latter standpoint, i.e. that decolonization of higher education would imply the incorporation of indigenous knowledges and indigenous knowledgeable men and women as lecturers, is likewise far from indisputable. However, in order to make an informed assessment of this understanding of the decolonization of higher education, the ontological and epistemological foundations of the realities in which such knowledges are produced would need to be assessed in relation to higher education and the coloniality of reality inherent therein.

Damnés realities and the ontological loci of enunciation

As I have argued elsewhere (Burman 2012), Andean epistemologies – in all their heterogeneity and historicity – are fundamentally experiential, relational, and “of engagement” (Ingold 2000, 216), and have an ontological point of departure in the existence of other-than-human subjectivities and actors, be they *achachila* (male ancestor, embodied in the landscape), *awicha* (female ancestor, embodied in the landscape), *wak’a* (“sacred” place), *uywiri* (local protector/breeder spirit embodied in hills and mountains) or – risen to fame through environmentalist discourses tapping Andean worlds of “authenticity” and “exoticism” – Pachamama. Knowledge is not produced inside the mind of an autonomous human knower who is detached from the known, but by a knower who is intimately involved in relational fields constituted by human and other-than-human beings – both categories of beings composed by knowledgeable social subjects and intentional actors with agentive efficacy – and within which knowledge is produced, generated or “grown” in situated practices and lived experience. Or as the *amawt’a* and writer Carlos Yujra responded to my question about what will happen to all his knowledge the day he dies and whether he was worried about not having a “disciple” to whom he could pass on his knowledge (see Burman 2012, 111):

You still don’t get it, do you? I can’t pass anything on to anyone. They have to sense it for themselves. I can only point to the places they should go...then they will go there and feel and think. If it’s a good place, they will think good thoughts.

Aymara epistemologies are relational because they are enmeshed in a relational world; they stem from a relational ontology where “being” is not primarily determined and conditioned by

essence but by relation, relation to other human beings and to other-than-human-beings, and fundamentally to “place”.^{iv}

However, relational ontologies and epistemologies of engagement are not rewarded within academia. While Aymara epistemologies are based on an ontological premise of oneness (Burman 2012, 107), the epistemology that has imposed itself as the hegemonic theory of knowledge stems largely from Cartesian metaphysics and its ontological dualism of two separate worlds: the intentional world of human subjects (the knower) and the world of material things (the known). This epistemology asserts detachment of the known from the knower and the process of knowing. Ingold (2000, 391) argues that this is an epistemology that “introjects a division between mind and world, or between reason and nature, as an ontological a priori”. Thus, the knower is supposedly able to know the world without being part of the world and to produce knowledge that is universal and independent of context. This hegemonic notion of knowledge engenders discursive scientific practices of knowledge production which generate a dominant reality which, in turn, makes it difficult to think of and from within other realities. There is no room in this hegemonic notion of knowledge for knowledgeable and intentional other-than-human subjects; concurrently, it suppresses anything that actually is produced from other ontologically informed lifeworlds. These suppressed lifeworlds are the *damnés* realities of the subalternized and racialized Other. Fanon (1961) coined “*les damnés de la terre*”, or “the wretched of the earth”, to describe the existential conditions of those who are situated on the darker side of what Mignolo (1999) calls “the colonial difference”, i.e. those who by way of colonial oppression and racist exploitation are positioned in the zone of non-being, “the being who is not there” (Maldonado-Torres 2007, 253). *Damnés* realities, then, are the realities that are not allowed to be, the ontologically informed lifeworlds that are denied and suppressed in the coloniality of reality that characterizes the current world-system and saturates higher education, in Bolivia

and elsewhere. Or in the words of an *indianista-katarista* intellectual and former lecturer at UNIBOL “TK”:

The university is exactly this: *university*, it’s “university” in the sense that it reproduces universal schemes, and what the university should be reproducing are not universal schemes, because according to dominant criteria what’s “universal” here is Eurocentric. (---) European rationality is denominated as “universal” here. (---) The Bolivian university is in this sense profoundly colonial.

Aymara ontologically informed lifeworlds have for centuries coexisted, and sometimes coalesced in creative constellations, with hegemonic ontological impositions. However, it has been a colonial coexistence in the sense that Aymara ontology has been recognized, not as knowledge of reality in its own right, but as one element in the Cartesian dualism, i.e. as the cultural component that projects cultural meaning onto the one and only real reality of brute matter “out there”. This way, “Aymara culture” can be reduced to folklore and cultural (mis)representations of reality, and universities can pay lip-service to interculturality and multiculturalism without having their epistemological and ontological foundations shaken by “worlds and knowledges otherwise” (Escobar 2007). In a serious process of decolonization, however, these *damnés* realities intend to carve out a space for themselves also in higher education – not as cultural projections but as ontologies – and the lecture room becomes a space of ontological conflicts, a space in which a politics of ontological location is enacted by actors who occupy not only different “epistemic loci of enunciation” (Mignolo 1999, 241) but also different ontological loci of enunciation. These actors are students and lecturers engaged in pedagogical interaction, but among them are also authors of textbooks and syllabi who are not there in person. Some of them speak from *damnés* realities, while others speak from a dominant ontology that is enacted and reproduced by academia as a conceptual-ontological

straightjacket. A fundamental part of the ontological disobedience referred to at the beginning of this text is to use any ontological opening, any cracks and fissures in dominant reality, to carve out an ontological locus of enunciation different from the one embraced within the coloniality of reality, and to do so from within institutions of higher education. One way to do so would be to claim a space for subalternized and Othered knowledges and subalternized and Othered knowledge producers, such as for instance *yatiris* and *amawt'as*, within academia. However, this is not unproblematic. While it is indeed paradoxical and simultaneously symptomatic that mainly “Western-based masters who embody the decolonial idea are so far present in academia as the authorities in critical thought against neo-colonialism” (De Carvalho and Flórez-Flórez 2014, 127), the incorporation of indigenous knowledges, pedagogical practices, and lifeworlds into colonial academia entails a risk. Instead of decolonizing higher education, there is a risk that indigenous knowledges, pedagogical practices, and lifeworlds are institutionalized, instrumentalized, and thereby colonized and defanged by colonial academia (Burman 2012, 116). Hence, incorporating indigenous knowledge and knowledgeable indigenous men and women into a colonial institution of higher education is not by implication a decolonizing act; there is also an urgent need for thoroughgoing structural and institutional transformations. Or in the words of Freddy “Pachakuti” Acarapi: “The university is colonization, whether it’s labelled ‘indigenous university’ or not.”

Likewise, though not intending to, separate “indigenous universities” may also play a role in conserving the colonial status quo at conventional institutions of higher education. Public universities may pay lip-service to their state-imposed “decolonizing” mission, but since there are state-managed indigenous universities for those who want to “recover indigenous knowledge” and get a technical and practically oriented profession and there is UTA for those who seek radical *indianista* ideological orientation and “ancestral knowledge”, conventional

public universities seem to be free to continue being “segregated and racist institutions that reproduce exclusively the Eurocentric model of knowledge” (De Carvalho and Flórez-Flórez 2014, 123). Thus, indigenous universities are used to justify and legitimize the status quo at conventional public universities. Moreover, public universities can always refer to their university autonomy, which leaves even the Ministry of Education quite toothless. Serious decolonizing initiatives in the lecture room are therefore not an institutional undertaking at public universities; it is rather up to individual lecturers to implement decolonizing initiatives, but in a conservative institutional setting such initiatives are seldom rewarded.

There is, indeed, much more room for decolonizing pedagogical practices and epistemological and ontological disobedience at UTA. It is a space, like Escuela de Pensamiento Pacha, for the production of knowledge from within a *damné* reality with an other ontological locus of enunciation. However, in present day Bolivian society, any serious engagement with knowledges and realities other than the ones embraced and reproduced by dominant modern academia runs the risk of being ridiculed and delegitimized by powerful actors using the epithet “*pachamamismo*”.

Pachamamismo and the colonial turn

As mentioned above, “*pachamamismo*” is used in a general manner since 2010 to criticize what is held to be a quasi-esoteric form of Andean essentialist culturalism, a smokescreen of multiculturalist ritual practices and ceremonial paraphernalia and an indigenist discourse peppered with supposedly enigmatic Aymara concepts. Initially, the criticism was primarily directed at the contradictions between governmental discourse and state ceremony and governmental policies and realpolitik, such as using Pachamama as an environmentalist rhetorical device in governmental discourse while implementing extractivist politics, or speaking of “*Vivir Bien*” as an “alternative civilizatory paradigm” (Autoridad Plurinacional de

la Madre Tierra 2015, 6) while executing standard developmentalist projects. According to Rivera (2014), the government has even made a “colonial turn”, and the contradictions and inconsistencies have augmented: “the rights of Mother Earth” have been legally recognized and the state agency called the Plurinational Authority of Mother Earth (“Autoridad Plurinacional de la Madre Tierra”) has been established to ensure that her rights are respected while the agricultural frontier is simultaneously pushed further and further into the Amazon by state incentives, and deforestation rates and CO² emissions have reached unprecedented levels; “ancestral knowledge” is praised by quite peripheral actors within the Bolivian state apparatus while nuclear physics and petroleum engineering are tightly tied to national development and sovereignty in the discourse of governmental representatives in the heart of power; Evo is in state discourse said to represent “the indigenous horizon (which is the negation of modernity)” (Autoridad Plurinacional de la Madre Tierra 2015, 6, my translation) while nuclear plants, highways, industrialization, and natural resource extraction in nature reserves are on the governmental agenda; Aymara ritual specialists give “indigenous legitimacy” to the government in official ceremony (Burman 2011a) while the president questions indigenous peoples’ right to prior consultation in any extractivist or infrastructure project that affect them and their territories, by claiming that such consultations are “delaying our development” (Correo del Sur, 2015).

Arguably, to veil these contradictions in an essentialist staging of indigeneity and in rhetorical and instrumentalist references to Pachamama is to invite criticism. However, accusations of *pachamamismo* are not only directed at the government, but at nearly anyone who refers to *damnés* realities, beings and knowledges, not least at actors who try to carve out a space for knowledge production and learning founded on other epistemological and ontological premises within higher education. De Carvalho and Flórez-Flórez (2014, 125) argue that “[f]or every area of Indigenous (...) knowledge, Western knowledge has developed a specific

mode for dismissing its intrinsic value.” Accusations of *pachamamismo* are, I would argue, one such mode of dismissal in which certain knowledges, realities and producers of knowledge are delegitimized while other knowledges and producers of knowledge are legitimized and a certain reality is naturalized and reproduced.

Interestingly, accusations of *pachamamismo* are articulated from radically different political positions: right-wing conservatives, middle-class liberals, Marxists of all kinds, and even certain actors within the *indianista* movement who see no use whatsoever for references to Pachamama and “ancestral knowledge” in their activism directed at the seizure of political power. Their ontological loci of enunciation, however, are quite vicinal. They are, in one way or another, modern. And “modernity itself has conditioned the responses available to its own violence by naturalizing a grammar (i.e. interlinked ontology, epistemology and metaphysics) that captures and reinscribes our attempts to interrupt and resist it” (Andreotti et al. 2015, 22).

When Slavoj Žižek visited Bolivia in 2011, invited by Vice-president Álvaro García, he articulated a critique of what he saw as New Age elements in Evo’s discourse and argued that “if there is anything good in capitalism, it is that there is no Mother Earth there” (Žižek 2011, 61, my translation). He was quite widely applauded by political actors who see no room for, or no need for, anything like Pachamama in “the revolution” and his critique became a plea in the debate on *pachamamismo*, a debate that thrives and divides not only *indianista* activists and intellectuals – on the one hand the *indianista* student organization MINKA, the constituents of which tend to see anything that is not directly related to the seizure of power as a culturalist disturbance, and on the other hand the equally *indianista* Escuela de Pensamiento Pacha who posit “ancestral knowledge” as the very fundament of political action –, but also Marxist thinkers, on the one hand, for instance, the abovementioned Stefanoni who see no revolutionary potential whatsoever in a “cataract of words in Aymara” (2011, 261), and on the other hand J.J. Bautista and Rafael Bautista who claim to have discovered an other Marx by

taking their analytical point of departure in the realities of indigenous peoples (see Bautista 2015). Rafael Bautista recently argued:

The economists (...) call their own madness “rationality”, and they call us crazy (...). We who say that we must retain development and progress, they call us crazy (---); they call us (...) *pachamamistas*.^v

However valid the criticism of *pachamamismo* may be when directed at the contradictions in governmental politics and discourse and the essentialist staging of indigeneity and “ancestral spirituality”, if everyone would comply with the idea that coloniality/modernity can only be criticized from within its own ontological assumptions and that any criticism based on knowledges produced from within other ontological and epistemological frameworks – from within *damnés* realities – is by definition illegitimate New Age rubbish or culturalis (mis)representations of reality, we would end up in a situation of grotesquely reactionary proportions; a situation in which a critical debate about the colonial, capitalist world-system is reduced to an exclusive fuss of modernity on modernity’s own terms. Fortunately, there are those who do not comply, neither with hegemonic academia on a global level, nor with those who try to impose a modern/colonial conceptual straightjacket on critical thinking in Bolivian academia. Fortunately, there are those who disobey.

Confronting the coloniality of reality: Ontological disobedience

While, as discussed above, there are attempts at confronting the coloniality of reality from within one of its very strongholds – the university –, be that by founding an other university (such as UTA) or by introducing other knowledges, realities, and actors into established higher education, there are also many critical actors working outside of the dominant academic institutions, creating their own spaces for critical knowledge production. One such

initiative is the Laboratorio del Pensamiento Indio, a group of *indianista* students and intellectuals in El Alto who, among other things, publish critical texts (see for instance Mamani, Choque, and Delgado 2010 on “rebel memories”) and participate in public debate. Another initiative is the aforementioned Escuela de Pensamiento Pacha, the members of which meet in their small and cold El Alto premises to sketch out the political and philosophical strategies for the indianization of society and being. Sometimes, however, they meet elsewhere, as for instance in the kitchen of my small adobe house on the slopes of La Paz, to discuss “knowledge”, “truth” and “reality”. One such evening, poring over a bag of coca leaves, Pachakuti said:

Our grandfathers were not researchers, but they were knowledgeable. It’s *pacha*^{vi} that teaches us everything (...). According to Western logic, man makes theory. And the dominated tries to liberate themselves in the logic of the dominant. But these are only arguments between humans; there is nothing of *pacha* there. (---) To overcome all this, we cannot use the same logic.

Indigenous ontologies and *damnés* realities may indeed be used as a folklorist smokescreen to cover-up the contradictions and incoherencies of governmental politics and discourse. However, in Escuela de Pensamiento Pacha something else is going on. A radical criticism of modernity/coloniality is being articulated from a relational ontology; epistemological and ontological disobedience is practiced, defying the dominant notion that there is no “revolutionary potential” in indigenous ontologies. They are confronting the coloniality of reality from within the entrails of modernity, but also from its margins and from beyond its tentacles. They are carving out spaces for the decolonization of reality through other ways of knowing and being, and spaces for the reemergence – within the zone of being – of *damnés* realities through the cracks and fissures of dominant reality. This is “the affirmation of

another world” (Rastrepo 2014, 142); neither a position “of pure negation” (ibid.), nor of radical epistemic relativism. At the most, they put “Truth”, with a capital “T”, within quotation marks and thereby question powerful actors’ claims to absolute truth. Reality is not “de-realized” by such an act, it is rather “re-realized” from within other relational fields, from other ontological premises, and from other ontological loci of enunciation.

De Sousa Santos, Arriscado Nunes, and Meneses (2007, ix) have convincingly argued that “there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice”. While “cognitive justice” has been rewardingly discussed in terms of “epistemic justice” (e.g. Restrepo 2014) and the recognition of the plurality of knowledge, I would argue that cognitive justice is not only about epistemic justice, but also about ontological justice. Or in other words, epistemic justice, in order to be anything but a disembodied, logocentric project of modern academia, ought to be anchored in ontological justice, since epistemic justice is inconceivable within the coloniality of reality. Moreover, drawing on de Sousa Santos’ (see e.g. 2012) “sociology of absences and emergences”, I would argue that “reality” cannot be reduced to that which powerful actors in a world of grotesque power asymmetries allow to exist; also that which is not allowed to exist is there, as potentially emergent present realities. These are realities that are re-generated through ontological disobedience and in which the criteria to validate knowledge stretch beyond the insular, closed system of academia. These are realities, the *damnés* realities, not without Europe, but rather, in Blaser’s (2013) terms, realities in spite of Europe; realities with the potential to resist coloniality/modernity and generate alternatives. Or in the words of a *feminista-indianista* activist in her 40s:

Resistance and alternatives have always come from the indigenous peoples and our worlds. It hasn’t come from Europe. Look at the Zapatistas! If it wasn’t for these other worlds, we would have destroyed the planet completely by now!

Nevertheless, ontological disobedience does not imply the reinvocation of a hermetically sealed precolonial indigenous world; rather, ontological disobedience is a *ch'ixi* practice in a *ch'ixi* reality. If you consult an Aymara dictionary you will find that “*ch'ixi*” means “grey” or “spotted”. When put to theoretical use by Silvia Rivera (e.g. 2012), however, this seemingly dull concept reveals intriguing dynamics by which elements from different cultural and cosmological contexts coexist in one and the same lifeworld or in one and the same practice. They do not completely fuse or meld; to the human eye they may seem one greyish blend, but they exist side by side as though they were tiny spots of black and white. In this sense, in current Bolivian society the disembedding and decontextualizing forces of modernity are present alongside the embedding and contextualizing relational forces and ideas of “community”. When I speak of reality as *ch'ixi* or of a *ch'ixi* ontology, it is to draw attention to the miscellaneous nature(s) of reality and the coexistence without complete fusion of elements from different realities in one and the same practice. The *damné* reality reinvoked by Escuela de Pensamiento Pacha and the dominant reality generated and reproduced in hegemonic academia are neither two discrete realities that people move between, nor a complete hybrid fusion; they are rather elements that are simultaneously present in people’s practices, experiences, and lifeworlds, overlapping and interconnected in a myriad of power-infused ways.

However interesting indigenous knowledges and lifeworlds may be to the anthropologist, the framing of the issue in terms of “ontologies”, as in “multiple realities”, may obstruct the theorizing of power and global inequalities. “Rather than immersing ourselves in alternative ontologies and denying the reality of ‘a common world’”, Hornborg (2015, footnote 19) therefore argues, “anthropologists would do well to contemplate [global] material inequalities”.

While sympathizing with Hornborg's appeal to anthropologists to abandon intra-disciplinary navel-gazing and instead put our analytical tools to work in order to make global power asymmetries critically manifest and while sharing his concern for the poor prospects for theorizing power if we follow Latour in arguing that there is no such thing as "society" or "capitalism", I cannot help asking if there is *necessarily* a contradiction here. Do we *necessarily* need to abandon the project of immersing ourselves in other ontologies in order to contemplate global inequalities? And more fundamentally, do we need to accept and reproduce the coloniality of reality in order to address the concerns of political economy? I think not. I would rather argue that Hornborg's and others' badly needed critical attention to power asymmetries as expressed for instance in unequal ecological exchange within the capitalist world-system may be fruitfully combined with a critical attention to the ontological power asymmetries, i.e. the coloniality of reality, underpinning such unequal material flows, since the former are a condition for and a justification and naturalization of the latter, and the latter are a material expression of the former. The coloniality of reality goes hand-in-hand with the commodification of reality and the emergence and reproduction of consumer society since modernity, coloniality, and capitalism produce certain subjectivities and a certain dominant reality within which certain subjectivities unfold. A fundamental part of the ontological disobedience – as practiced by Escuela de Pensamiento Pacha, UTA and others – is to produce other realities within which other subjectivities are allowed to unfold together with other social organizations of production and consumption.

Hornborg (2015, 63) is most likely right in arguing that "appeals to the virtues of animism [or "indigenous ontologies"] are not likely to turn the tables on capitalism". Apolitical ontological rumination is probably not what the world needs the most at the moment. Nevertheless, it is questionable if a radical critique of the world-system necessarily must be articulated according to the ontological premises underpinning the mechanisms of that very world-

system. This is why I propose to ontologize (i.e. sensitize to the coloniality of reality) – and thereby decolonize – political economy, and simultaneously politicize (i.e. sensitize to material inequalities) – and thereby decolonize – the so-called ontological turn (a project already initiated by Blaser 2013 and de la Cadena 2015, among others). This parallel movement of ontologizing politics and politicizing ontology may engender the critical tools necessary for the production of knowledges that *simultaneously* challenge ontological/epistemological and political/economic power asymmetries, i.e. addressing the coloniality of reality and knowledge and the concerns of political economy as interconnected and overlapping dimensions of global injustice. However, without disobedience of different kinds – ontological and epistemological, political and pedagogical, within and beyond academia, within and beyond Bolivia – such a combined project has gloomy prospects.

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ⁱ I mention René and Freddy Acarapi's names here, not in order to disclose the identity of any such thing as "my informants", but in order to emphasize my great intellectual debt to them. Carlos Yujra is another knowledgeable friend, *amawt'a* and writer, without the collaboration and support of whom I would have been able to write very little of value.

ⁱⁱ First published in 2010 in the Bolivian newspaper *Página 7*, later republished in *Tabula Rasa* 2011.

ⁱⁱⁱ Whether or not indigenous people are a majority of the Bolivian population seems to depend primarily on the phrasing of the questions about ethnic identity in the national census of population (see Kaijser 2014, 72).

^{iv} For a more thorough ethnographic account of these epistemological and ontological premises, see Burman (2012).

^v Museo de Etnografía y Folklore, La Paz, July 9 2015.

^{vi} Depending on context, "*pacha*" may mean "time", "space", "season", "earth", or "cosmos".