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Precursors of Decolonial Pedagogical Thinking in Latin America and *Abya Yala*

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Abstract

This chapter introduces the pedagogical thinking of an array of Latin-American and indigenous educators who dreamt of Latin America featuring more freedom and democracy. The works selected were from scholars who were born and had their intellectual upbringing, in the first half of the twentieth century. This is a “bibliographical essay” intended to highlight the predecessors of decolonial pedagogy, thinkers, and educators who formulated ideas and theories within a delinking philosophy. We place these thinkers in the context of building a Latin-American “awareness” and within the scope of active resistance from the people in *Abya Yala*.

Keywords: decolonial pedagogy, indigenous education, liberating education, biocentric education, Latin America, *Abya Yala*

1. Introduction

As implied by the title above, the key objective in this “bibliographic essay” is to make explicit the evidences of the crisis in the contemporary school system, and some of the response formulated by the Latin-American pedagogical thinking. We prioritized a generation of educators who achieved their degrees in the first half of the twentieth century and who had shared with society their intellectual production by 1990, a time preceded by a decade of social conflict and democratic liberalization.¹

¹Falklands/Malvinas War (Argentina vs. England, 1982), Civil War in El Salvador (1980-1992), Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement in Peru (1980-1990), and the end of military dictatorships in Bolivia (1982), Argentina (1983), Uruguay (1984), Brazil (1985), Haiti (1986), Chile (1988), Paraguay (1989).

We frame our study in the decolonial pedagogy field. The wording coloniality/decoloniality has been rendered theoretically systematic by a school of Latin-American thinkers, who have been formulating new knowledge bases for an epistemological theory of philosophy and liberation. From this school's stance, "modernity" was not a "pioneer" invention of Western Europe, and it is not presumed to be an evolutionary pathway for mankind. Such "modernity," currently expressed in its globalized capitalistic form, began to be built since 1492, with the invasion and colonization of the people in *Abya Yala*, historically becoming a Eurocentric modernity, with a universalistic discourse. To the world's eyes, the Eurocentric philosophy emphasizes the Renaissance look of modernity, the grinning face of progress in economy, arts, scientific knowledge, and individual freedom. However, modernity has also a shady and vicious face that has been traditionally concealed by the Eurocentric historical philosophy. It is the imperialistic, colonialist, and racist face. Decolonial pedagogy is committed to unravel the power and the secrets of modernity/colonialism, being the latter understood as the power contrivances rooted in the culture and mentality of colonized people.

Why is there Latin America and *Abya Yala*? "Latin America" is an identity concept for Latin-American (or Hispanic-American) people that came up in the context of imperialistic disputes between France and England, together with the internal disputes triggered by the struggle for independence in Spanish America (nineteenth century), and the political conflicts with the United States. Though the "Latin America" concept developed—throughout the twentieth century—a "forward" dimension toward the cause of oppressed people, it fails to consider the claims or rights to exist and live of the indigenous and Afro-American people, in this case, mostly the lifestyle of the quilombola communities. This is why it is necessary to see and think of the world also from the stance of the history and culture of the autochthonous people in the Americas. Therefore, *Abya Yala* is the term that has been used by the indigenous movement in the Americas to refer to the American continent from the native people's stance. Within the scope of critical thought, *Abya Yala* is an ethical attitude acknowledging the various original people's right to live, to exist, and keep their history. It is an instrumentally ethical attitude to build an intercultural dialogical relationship in the liberating outlook by Paulo Freire [1] or a face-to-face relationship according to Enrique Dussel's philosophy [2]. *Abya Yala* is an epistemological beacon of light that was not born in academia, "but from the guts of this land, the womb of the battered communities, by pooling together the Kuna people with another, just as ancient and rugged, the Aymaras [3]."

We have divided this chapter in four parts. In the first one, we set forth the precursors of decolonial thinking, which was expressed as an epistemological liberation philosophy. Next, we introduce the indigenous education in its way of living and resisting internal and external colonialism. In the third part, we introduce the pedagogical thought of two educators in the liberating popular education, and we close this chapter explaining the theories of two Chilean educators, who set the cornerstone for the pedagogical project for biocentric education.

2. Precursors of the liberating philosophy

Colonization in both America and Africa shares an ontological common feature: the modernity discourse disguised as Ulysses' siren song. In Latin America and the Caribbean, few intellectuals resisted the charm of this West European modernity, and fewer were unharmed by it. Nevertheless, we find a unique variety of poets and philosophers willing to unravel the mysteries of colonization and colonialism, formulating ideas and insights to create "enlightened subjects" for a "different" America. Among others worthy of being studied and known, we chose the Brazilian anthropologist-historian Manoel Bomfim (1868–1932), the Mexican philosopher Leopoldo Zea (1925–1961), the Caribbean poet Aimé Césaire (1913–2008), the Caribbean psychiatrist-philosopher Frantz Fanon (1925–1961), the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, and the Argentinean philosopher Enrique Dussel.

In Brazil, Manoel Bomfim [4] struggled against the hegemonic power of scientismic and racist thought that prevailed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was one of the Latin-American thinkers who did not succumb to the simplistic and racist arguments from Eurocentric modernity. He earnestly rebutted the theories attempting to justify the cultural and economical lag in Latin America with the conceptual instruments of scientific racism. Darcy Ribeiro became familiar with Bomfim's work while in exile (Brazilian dictatorship of 1964), in Montevideo, the time when he wrote his "Studies on the Anthropology of Civilization." It was during his exile that he broke with the "Brazilian imposed provincialism" and became aware that "we are part of a whole: Latin America." It was in exile that Darcy Ribeiro realized that "the overwhelming majority of Latin-American writers striving to understand our historical lag" was made up of "parrots repeating other people's wisdom or mountebanks." Some of them covered pages parroting what metropolitan thinkers had said about us with the intent of justifying European colonialism—as he pointed out—and others opposed it, referring to "innocents, with terrestrial forces, bronze races, and even Latin cossetting to lecture, feeling insulted, about superiority assumptions that our history fails to endorse." However, amidst the bibliographical flock of parrots, Darcy Ribeiro found a bright, albeit fickle, and spark of lucidity. He incidentally found "this extraordinary book titled *Latin America—Evils of Origin*, by Manoel Bomfim." From reading it, he discovered the singularity of an "original, fully mature Latin-American thinker in 1905," when the first edition of his *Latin America* [5] was published.

While hegemonic theories justified the lag in Latin America as an outcome of the presumed genetic legacy from the indigenous people and African negroes, the tropical climate and the Catholic religion, Bomfim identified the "European colonizer's parasitism" as "evils of origin." The European development model, Bomfim accuses, was built on the oppression and enslavement of the indigenous and African people; the colonizers' parasitism is the foremost cause of the lagging economy and social inequity.

In Mexico, philosopher Leopoldo Zea (1925–1961) proposed a philosophical itinerary to build an authentic American philosophy, free from the psychological contrivances from the

colonized frame of mind, empowered in terms of cultural reliance, and committed to solve the major inequity and injustice issues in America. In *America as Consciousness*, Leopoldo Zea (1953/1972) takes for an issue the cultural and philosophical dependency of American thinkers; America's "feeling inferior" to Europe issue. Zea develops his philosophical-historical thought projecting an evolutionary empowerment scenario, still following the epistemological coordinates from West European knowledge. He presents a critical diagnosis of the situation of thinking and reality that prevailed in Latin America during the first half of the twentieth century; he discusses the ranking America held within the "European awareness." Zea challenges the *History of Philosophy* by Hegel, a Eurocentric philosopher who failed to acknowledge the history of the original people, but took America merely for its future potential.

The Mexican philosopher makes explicit his interpretation of the political independence and the controversies between the "Two Americas," viz. Anglo-Saxon America and Latin America. Upon considering America's intellectual emancipation, he confers a strategic role upon *education as a cultural empowerment instrument*. Education steps up to a fundamental role, particularly after the events suggesting the failure to conquer political independence, when the social groups in the new independent nations faced each other with unrestrained violence: wars, conspiracies, and coups. Overall, Creole elites defeated metropolitan despotism and developed multiple American despotisms; they replaced the king with various regional dictators (warlords). First, people fought for the king; then they fought for the clergy, the militias, or the warlords: a dynastic and colonialist dictatorship by any kind of dictators: "conservative, constitutional, liberal, or personalistic." A dictatorship was implemented even under the guise of establishing freedom [6]. Zea confers an empowering role upon education from the awareness that in a colonized society, people are educated for servitude. In his dialog with the thoughts of Simón Bolívar, particularly regarding the *Jamaica Letter*, Zea observes that in the colonial regime from Spain and Portugal, the population was taught to serve the best interests of the metropolises; "such education stemmed from the presumed ethnic and cultural inferiority of the people colonized." Zea further points out that the notion of inferiority was extensive to all those born in America, "regardless of their ethnical and cultural origin." Therefore "anyone born in this territory, including indigenous, Creole, and mixed, was deemed inferior to their conquerors and colonizers." The colonized population was deprived of its human condition, being educated and disciplined to obey, to serve, and become a thing, an object, or a nonhuman animal. This is why Simón Bolívar insisted in pointing out the effects of colonial domination for human servitude, "educate to obey, to never be able to command" and much less to lead a nation, a new state [7].

In Colombia, Orlando Fals Borda (1925–2008) produced several works toward a "liberating society," committed to free the oppressed population, mostly peasants and Indians. Fals Borda's very intellectual upbringing is a path of intellectual liberation. He took his undergraduate and graduate studies in the United States (1947, 1953, and 1957), topping them with his doctoral thesis, *The Man and the Land in Boyacá*, at the *University of Florida* in 1957. He held governmental jobs and worked in study, research, and educational institutions, both stateside and internationally. In 1961, he published, in a partnership with Monseñor Guzmán Campos and Eduardo Umaña, *La transformación de América Latina y sus implicaciones sociales y económicas* [*The Transformation of Latin America and its Social and Economic Implications*], and in 1962 *La violencia en Colombia* [*Violence in Colombia*], which caused intense debate and some furious

response from the Colombian elite, including death threats [8]. This work drew attention from public opinion in Colombia, since it made explicit the structural nature of violence and suggested actions for social pacification, including ideas for an educational policy.

In 1970, Fals Borda launched the book where he set forth the Eurocentric issue in a sociological manner. In his *Own Science and Intellectual Colonialism* [9], the Colombian sociologist expresses the conceptual coordinates of the “sociology of liberation”, proposing the independence and valuation of Latin-American thinking. Fals Borda takes as issues the epistemological domains of Eurocentric, cultural, and economic dependency, highlighting the need to overcome our “inferiority complex”; he challenges the theoretical transposition of Euro-American scientific categories into the Latin-American reality. He proposes a liberating and creative intellectual independence, however devoid of ethnocentric xenophobia and scholarly hubris. At the same time, he emphasized the need to transcend the Eurocentric boundaries. Fals Borda also pointed out the importance of maintaining an intercultural dialog with the different schools of thought, including the European one. His proposed sociology would be committed to fairness to those oppressed and a *Participatory Action-Research* (PAR) for social transformation. Intellectual recalcitrance and subversion were liberating attitudes in Fals Borda’s *thinking & feeling* sociology [10].

From the Caribbean islands and in the resistance to French imperialism, two Martinica-born Caribbeans left a legacy for the utopia of a world free from colonization and colonialism. Aimé Césaire (1913–2008) was a poet, essayist, playwright, and philosopher. In his *Discourse on Negritude [Blackness]* (1950) and *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955), Aimé Césaire draws insights holding potential to transcend the epistemological boundaries of Eurocentrism. Using the concept of “blackness”, developed in the oppressive cultural environment created by the French colonial system, Aimé attacks racist thinking, rebuffs the cultural assimilation policy, and proposes epistemological tools for the self-esteem in “being black” and valuing the African culture. However, his liberating poetry is not limited to the unfair situation of the black population. Aimé places himself in the cause of the “oppressed races” upon expressing his humanistic conviction, “*Je suis de la race de ceux qu’on opprime*”. [*I belong to the oppressed race.*]. Upon analyzing the obscure dimensions of Eurocentric colonialism, Aimé makes a connection with the emergence of Nazism, suggesting that Hitler was not an unpredictable accident but the outcome and “punishment” to a colonialist Europe.

Where was Aimé leading to? His point is that a State promoting and practicing colonialism is the same that creates the conditions for the development of a Hitler. When European imperialism deemed it permissible to invade foreign lands and colonize non-European peoples, “it was Hitler who spoke”, says Aimé. In other words: “nobody colonizes innocently”, and neither colonizes unpunished, since “a civilization that condones colonization (...) is already a sick civilization, morally blemished, which unavoidably moves from one consequence to another, from one denial to the next, invoking its Hitler, i.e., its punishment [11]”.

Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) follows the same reasoning thread as Aimé Césaire. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon unveils the physical and psychological dimensions of colonialist violence. Using insights and psychoanalytical study of patients fraught with mental derangement conditions resulting from colonial violence, Fanon [12] demonstrates that, in the colonialist society, violence dehumanizes both colonizers and their subjects. Colonial society is divided into

explicitly racial and cultural fields, featuring the geography of Master and Slave, as termed by Aristotle. Post-colonial society melts the visible and legal boundaries of oppression and slavery; however, the colonialist culture is deeply rooted in the deepest “being” of colonized men, i.e., the oppressor’s shadow remains culturally and psychologically hosted within the oppressed ones, as Paulo Freire would put it.

In his conclusive—and to some extent desperate—narrative, Fanon leaves some warning to those “wretched of the earth” who conquer their independence, advising them to stay clear from the mistake of “mimicking” Europe, implicitly emphasizing the vigor of the Eurocentric colonialism domain in the epistemological and cultural scope: “Mankind expects from us something better than this generally demeaning mockery”; and “if we hope to transform Africa into a new Europe, America into a new Europe, than we’d better entrust the Europeans with the fate of our country,” as “they’ll know better how to do it than the best amongst us” (p.275) [12]. Hence, for Fanon, the conquest of political independence, ousting colonizers from the territory, is just the first stage of the decolonization process and maybe this is the most visible phase of the “liberating war,” since the enemy to be defeated is in plain sight beyond the trenches. The toughest and most complex challenge is to fight the shadow of the oppressor that is ingrained in the soul of the colonized population and in the minds of the “colonized intellectuals.”

One of the most efficient imperative rationales of European modernity is achieved through colonialism in knowledge, “driven” by Eurocentrism. Eurocentrism is both a vision of the world and a new form of power; it is an epistemological knowledge matrix that justifies and validates this new world standard for the power of modernity/colonialism. Eurocentrism, states Anibal Quijano, is the perspective of knowledge whose systematic compilation began in Western Europe during the first half of the seventeenth century, though its origins date from earlier times. Its ideology was built together with the “specific bourgeoisie secularization of European thinking, as well as the world’s experience and needs of the capitalist, modern/colonial, Eurocentric power, established from America” [13].

The philosophy of liberation proposed by Enrique Dussel is that one which stems from the ontological criticism to the normative moral of the prevailing social system, which also implies “unraveling” and decolonizing the Eurocentric epistemological knowledge geography, mostly the epistemological decolonization of human and social sciences. The “liberating” term evokes historical experiences and mythical reports referring to the liberating processes in oppressed people that deposed the domineering moral order and transcended their oppression and enslavement by means of a new and more equitable social order. In the past, there was the enslaving moral of ancient societies, the European feudal period servitude, the castes system in Eastern and Asiatic societies, and the modern and contemporary colonial order in America, Africa, and Asia; in the present, there was the neoliberal-grounded capitalist moral.

The liberating philosophy, therefore, is a philosophy born in and developed from the life conditions of the oppressed/excluded ones, a “pedagogy of the oppressed” as meant by Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Paulo Freire, aspiring to justice, equity, and life quality. More than a Western-style philosophy, Dussel expresses some radical criticism to the positivistic and illuministic vision of history, as reported from the Eurocentric stance. It demystifies the key arguments of the West European history of philosophy, evidencing a philosophy of

history purporting to be universal; and it further radicalizes its philosophical analysis upon uncovering the fetish of modernity, an ideology that creates a natural a locus of universal centrality for Europe, validating and hiding its imperialistic background as a presumed civilizing advance for the entire mankind [14].

3. Education in the indigenous peoples living and resisting

What was the life style and, particularly, education in the major civilizations in *Abya Yala* like? What was education like for the people in the forests? The entire epistemological reality of the original people was “covered” by the West European epistemological modernity. Our first pedagogical mission is to dig and “uncover” this immense world that was buried. When Spanish conquerors invaded the *Anáhuac* territory (currently Mexico and Guatemala) in 1519, for instance, the Aztec civilization was organized into 38 provinces. On top of a complex urban structure that impacted the Spaniards’ first impressions, there was a public education system and an erudite culture that valued the art of knowledge to be preserved and shared by means of books. The books, as Jacques Soustelle points out, “were regarded as very important by ancient Mexicans”; in the temples and more affluent homes, there were rich libraries, and the profession of painter-scribe (*tlacuiloani*) was particularly valued. Spaniards still had a chance to witness the existence of two public education systems: “the neighborhood schools, where male instructors taught boys and female instructors taught girls, to get them prepared for real life,” and the monastery-school (*calmecac*), “where teaching was performed by priests” [15].

The Inca civilization, differently from the Aztec, did not need written language to develop its complex urban architecture or its knowledge in astronomy and mathematics; they developed a recording and accounting method using a technique involving knots on ropes. When Spaniards invaded the *Tawantinsuyu* territory, they not only destroyed the “admirable” city of Cusco, *Tumipampa*, *Cajamarca*, *Huánuco*, *Jauja*, *Huaytará*, and *Vilcashuaman*, but also destroyed and covered the information and knowledge artifacts from this complex cultural diversity of the Inca civilization. In the State territory, for instance, there were two educational modes, one institutional, and another informal, “natural education” [16].

The *Tawantinsuyu* empire developed between the 12th and 15th Centuries, gathering within its domain millennial traditions from other people. The Empire’s social basis was strongly supported on an *Ayllu* network, a family and community organization created by kinship within a territory collectively shared by a number of families. At its climax, the Inca empire had its domains spanning from the present territory of Colombia to Argentina, covering about 1.5 million square miles, with an estimated population of 30 million inhabitants [17].

Education-wise, the Empire organized a system of educational agents in different tiers and roles, a system that privileged the male members and the higher classes, however including all communities that were part of the Empire. Teaching philosophy, practical moral, and literature were assigned to the *Amautas*, wise men who represented the higher knowledge of the Inca culture. Knowledge on poetry, nature, and good life was conveyed by the *Harávecs*, recognized for their knowledge and memorization skills. Priests also had their educational role, and one

of the most acclaimed was Willac Umu, a specialist in teaching philosophy and religion. The *Kupucamayoc* were specialists in the *Kipus* arts, the method used for recording and accounting with ropes, enabling knowledge in arithmetic, mathematics, and record-keeping in the Empire. The *Chasquis* were some kind of messengers of knowledge. Their role was in communication, transmitting information, usually performed by physically fit youngsters who had a good memory. Other educational agents, no less important than the previous ones, were the *Mitmacs*, some kind of cultural envoys intended to spread the Inca culture by replacing, in rebellious territories, those who opposed the sovereign's power, thereby performing this pacific occupation through the dissemination of the Empire's language and lifestyle in the occupied territories. The Inca government recruited *Mitmacs* from among the working population, selecting experts in varied occupations, such as shepherds, farmers, painters, masons, and goldsmiths [16].

In the early seventeenth century, the Peruvian Indian Felipe de Guama Poma de Yala (1534–1615) wrote his *First New Chronicle and Good Government*, a 1200-page document, denouncing the social injustice of the Spanish colonial regime and asserting the peaceful coexistence of the two worlds. He also implicitly advocated for the return of an educational system focused on the *Tawantinsuyu* cultures. In his chronicle, Guama Poma states that the Inca people had nothing to learn from the European colonizers, since these had nothing good to teach to the conquered people other than the art of violence and prejudice. Guama Poma's claims were not awarded [18]. In both the Spanish and Portuguese colonial systems, there was an extended process of culture assimilation imposed by military, judicial, religious, and educational action. In colonial societies, educating the indigenous ethnic groups was paramount, and priests and missionaries were the ones who performed the most durable colonizing educational work, with the purpose of “civilizing” and “acculturating” Indians.

In the nineteenth century, the colonizing elites—who fought for independence and spread the patriotic discourse and the colors of the new national identities—viewed both Indians and negroes as an obstacle to the intended advancement of the Eurocentric modernization. In this (in)dependent modernization context, three policies were found, relative to the indigenous people: the extermination policy for those Indians who resisted invasion of their territory; the confinement policy in reserves and schools for the ethnic groups who preserved their indigenous identity, aiming at social control and progressive acculturation to the national State; and the school education for the rural population, in regional realities (mostly Andean and Central America), where the prevailingly indigenous and mixed population had been born and survived within the colonial society's borders. Within the national States, the education the new republican nations offered to the indigenous people, during the first 150 years after political independence, was focused on assimilation and acculturation. That school education was conceived and organized by the State and the Catholic Church.

The schooling offered—and in many cases imposed—by local governments was an extension to the colonization effort, intolerant to the lifestyle of indigenous cultures. In the United States and Canada, after having “conquered the West,” many indigenous children were plucked from their families and sent to boarding schools. Yataco states that “in these schools, they were forbidden to speak their ancestors' languages, children were separated from their parents, their grandparents, and their cultures; they were psychologically, physically, and oftentimes

sexually abused”; and these boarding schools were “correctional facilities where boys and girls were tortured with extreme fierceness.” According to the civilizing process adopted by these two major modern North American states, Indians should be civilized and humanized, beginning with the younger children. Based on the mandatory education laws, state employees pulled boys and girls from their parents’ arms, to send them to boarding schools, “where the goal was to suppress Indians, however without slaughtering them physically [19].”

In Panama, this enforced cultural disrespect caused the Kuna² people to rebel in 1925. In this upheaval context, we see a scenario of interests and conflicts elicited by three major projects: the independence of Colombia, led by the colonized elites from Panama, in 1903, a situation that split the Kuna people territory and caused widespread discontent, since part of the Kuna families thereon would belong to Panama, and the other part to Colombia; the imperialistic US government project, which benefitted from the independence, and took over the construction of the Panama Channel (1904–1914); and the Kuna people autonomy project, which culminated in the 1925 revolution. Atencio López Martínez explains that, after independence, new issues came up for the Kuna people, among them the invasion and colonization policy by non-indigenous foreigners, fishing and hunting poachers, and explorers seeking minerals, coconuts, rubber, wood, and other natural resources. Martínez states that “Panama government took no action to placate those grievances, neither at that time, nor in the ensuing years, so the conflict in *Kuna Yala* escalated.” Furthermore, the situation got worse after Law #59 was passed, in 1908. It determined the “civilization of the Indians,” i.e., a legal instrument to use all “peaceful means” to acculturate into civilized life all “savage tribes” living in the territory of Panama. In order to render viable such “evangelizing” project, government sent missionaries and teachers as “civilizing agents,” making available “abundant land plots for non-indigenous settlers” [20].

Faced with this invasion and colonization scenario, the leaders of the Kuna and other indigenous people assembled a general meeting on February 12, 1925, where they passed the Declaration of Independence of the Republic of Tule. The key issues in that Declaration to be negotiated with the Panama government were the administrative and political independence of the Kuna people in its territory; land boundaries defined for the San Blas jurisdiction (Kuna Yala); jurisdiction of the plantations in Armila and Mandinga bay, as well as the exploit of iron and manganese; and also the implementation of educational institutions that respected the Kuna people cultural traditions [20].

In Southern Colombia, other indigenous people also rebelled against the national State colonization and modernization project. This resistance can be found and understood from the path and work of Manuel Quintín Lame, a Colombian Indian from the landless Paeces people, who had to work in the farms of major landowners, like his father. He was born in 1883, in the Polindara reserve, currently located in the Totoró county, Cauca district, in Southern Colombia. According to his testimony, he dictated the book *Los pensamientos del indio que se educó dentro de las selvas colombianas* (*The Thoughts of the Indian Educated in the Colombian Forests*) to the Indian Florentino Moreno, who wrote very well and who finished it by December 1939. Nevertheless, its first edition only came out in 1971. A second edition was published in 1987,

²Different documents and works also use Cuna or Dule to refer to the Kuna people.

by The National Indigenous Organization of Colombia (ONIC), and a third one in 2004, by the University of Cauca and the Faculty of Humanities of Universidad del Valle [21].

What do we see in the “thoughts of the Indian educated in the Colombian forests”? Quintín Lame characterizes nature as a mother and master of divine origin; he explicits a conception of otherness, differences between Indians and white men. He learned the Spanish language as a strategy to accuse the oppression of his people. As Martha Elena Carvajal points out, *Quintín Lame, like the vast majority of American Indians, in tune with his legacy cosmic vision, feels, sees, and conceives nature, in itself and in the land, as his mother; and just like the actual Peace Indians, Nature is his “nasa kiwe,” his motherland* [21]. It explicits a concept of “natural education,” emphasizing the moral value of an educational philosophy ingrained in nature.

Quintín Lame says he did not receive the schooling intended for non-Indians; and he knew that this education represented prestige and access to the modern society knowledge. However, he observes that his “natural education” was and is at least as important as the formal education provided to non-Indians. Grounded on the indigenous people’s tradition, Quintín Lame conceives nature as the great master of life. He says that *the little Indian hasn’t seen or enjoyed these knowledge or educational principles*. However, he remarks that *Nature has educated me under its shadow, its warmth and its freeze; it has shown me idyllic poetry under those shadows; it has also shown me its three kingdoms—mineral, animal, vegetable; it has taught me to think; it showed me where my office was, in the desert loneliness had given me*. What is the cradle of knowledge, asks Quintín Lame? Nature. And what is nature? Nature, he says, *is the Book of God and the Science of God is infinite, while the Science of men is limited* [21].

Hence either North or South of the Americas, the indigenous people resist as much as they can to the modernity expansionistic project; and modernity/colonialism always comes from either the right or the left. In the scope of—private or public—schooling, school has been a national and global instrument for “shaping” modern subjects, implementing curricular disciplining practices that suppress the historical and cultural diversity of the people in *Abya Yala*.

4. The liberating popular education

What do we mean by “liberating popular education”? We conceived the idea of “popular liberating education” as a pedagogical concept articulated with a social and political reality transformation project, going beyond the two social paradigms of West European modernity—capitalism and socialism—though it might include some of the equity and justice principles from the latter. Popular education makes explicit a pedagogical concept committed to overcoming the oppression and inequity that prevail in popular classes. It is a pedagogical practice with the intent of building a pedagogical project of liberating a people (or a community) from its cultural or environmental reality, in a dialogically shared literacy-awareness educational process; a pedagogical practice promoting some liberating intellectual empowerment, enabling the subjects in the educational process to have a critical reading of the world, without resorting to ideological indoctrination, so that learners will be intellectually fit to

make their political choices for a world endowed with more fairness, solidarity, and welcoming, for a respectful intercultural and interethnic coexistence.

In Bolivia, our chosen educator was Elizardo Pérez (1892–1980), one of the pioneers of liberating pedagogy, in our opinion. Pérez was born in Ayata, Muñecas province, La Paz district. He died at age 88 in Buenos Aires (Argentina). In 1931, he led a “cultural revolution” through one of the most unique pedagogical experiences in Latin America. Under authorization from Bailón Mercado, Minister of Education, and in partnership with the Aymara native Avelino Siñani (1881–1941), he founded the *Ayllu* school in Warizata, an indigenous school whose pedagogical project was inspired in the ancient legacy from the Inca civilization. Pérez conceived the school project convinced that indigenous education should take place in the community and cultural environment where people lived; that the school should become a preservation center for indigenous traditions, and at the same time, it should create solid conditions for the socioeconomic development of the community.³

In his book *Warisata: The ayllu school* (1962), Elizardo Pérez refers to the book *Creation of the National Pedagogy* (1910), by Franz Tamayo (1879–1956), a Bolivian thinker who rebuked importing educational ideas and projects from Europe. Pérez believed that the spirit of the indigenous man had survived, and that the mission of the indigenous school was to bring it to life, “modernizing without giving away traditions, civilize without disrupting its ancient culture and institutions” [22]. His book is an invaluable historic document, as Elizardo Pérez describes one of the most liberating pedagogical experiences in Latin America. He conceived a pedagogical project aligned with the people in *Abya Yala*. His project became viable under the dialogical partnership with the Aymará indigenous master Avelino Siñani *who, with his own knowledge and understanding, and without any official backing, did a pioneer educational job with the children in that region*, as observed by Carlos Soria Galvarro (1981/2014). Elizardo Pérez, points out Soria Galvarro, *acknowledges Avelino Siñani as the true inspiration for Warisata, describing him as an apostle-like figure, an Andean “amauta”* [23].

Warisata was not a casual choice for the *ayllu* school. Elizardo Pérez selected an indigenous territory, far away from both urban centers and the countryside areas where chiefdom by landowners prevailed. The school was collectively and cooperatively built by that very indigenous population, with supplemental resources from the State, Bolivian society friends’ associations, Elizardo Pérez’s own funds, and building materials donated by the governments of Peru, Venezuela, and Mexico. The architectural design of the *ayllu* school drew admiration and conservative fear, as it was an investment for the indigenous population. It was a two-story building, having an 8000 sq.ft. yard, surrounded by trees and a garden. The design also included a boarding school, with five dormitories hosting 150 beds. Inside, there were five classrooms, five other rooms for offices and storage, plus six workshops for practical classes and production in carpentry, textiles, tapestry, and blacksmithery, as well as canteen, kitchen, and bathroom [24].

³The Bolivian indigenous people, like other countries having an expressive indigenous population, has had an endless struggling history. In 1780 there was the Tupac Amaru II rebellion (Tupac Katari), led by the native José Gabriel Condorcanqui against the Spanish colonial system, and in 2000 the Water War in Cochabamba, the first anti-neoliberal revolution in the twenty-first Century.

Since its foundation, the utopic and liberating dimension of the *ayllu* school caused hatred and fearful responses among the Bolivian society rural oligarchs. During all its 9 years of enlivening operation, the *ayllu* school was under permanent threat. Government resources were withdrawn; farmers conspired and connived to hamper the school's operation, cutting the water supply and rumoring slander that stimulated fear and hatred. Elizardo Pérez was charged of being a communist at the service of the Soviet socialist regime. In 1940–1941, the *ayllu* school in Warizata was dismembered from its original project and ostracized by Bolivian government. In spite of protests from Bolivian society, school management was handed over to men with corrupted moral character and, most of all, people had no respect for the indigenous. Construction work was halted, and parts were demolished; the roof shingles factory was dismantled and taken to La Paz; crop fields, orchards, and gardens were abandoned; livestock (lambs, pigs, poultry) were killed; tool and material storerooms were emptied; electricity supply was disabled, and the furniture vanished; the *Amauta* Parliament was suppressed, and its members were persecuted; the potable water system was destroyed; the new managers occupied the dormitories as if they were owners; natives were thrown out, and a hunting season began, chasing students and parents who were committed to the *ayllu* school's social project [24].

In the popular education field, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire is one of the most acclaimed figures worldwide. His thoughts and works are studied and discussed in many universities, academic conferences, and publications. His literacy-awareness method, conceived in the 1960s, is still used in several countries. All continents welcomed his pedagogical thinking, and many countries set up study and research centers as the Paulo Freire Institute.

Paulo Freire (1921–1997) was born in the city of Recife, capital of the state of Pernambuco, in the Northeastern region of Brazil, where the most exploited Brazilian population lives. His best-known book—*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968)—was written in Chile, where he sought refuge from the dictatorship that took over Brazil in 1964. He formulated the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* theory in the context of the Latin-American military dictatorships and the “Cold War” climate, a time of polarization with major geopolitical impacts, where the invention of Eurocentric-nature terms took place: capitalism and socialism; First World, Second World, and Third World; Developed Countries and Underdeveloped Countries. Paradoxically, the very dictatorship that ousted him from his country also created the conditions for Paulo Freire to get to know the world. It was during his exile that he was introduced to the reality of African and European countries and to the United States.

According to Paulo Freire, as history unfolds, human groups are subject to humanization and dehumanization. Man's ontological condition is humanization, however within an oppressing society that gets its self-affirmation from injustice, exploitation, violence, and domination, such condition is denied. This creates the need to develop a *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, making it possible “to recover the stolen humanization” [1].

In order to understand the liberating role of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire highlights two key points: the oppressors' violence also renders them dehumanized, hence “the major historical and humanistic task of the oppressed ones is to liberate both themselves and the oppressors”; and, in order to carry out this liberating role, the oppressed ones must become aware that they “host the oppressor inside themselves,” since “only as they perceive

themselves as hosting the oppressor, they'll be able to contribute, by sharing their liberating pedagogy" [1].

The oppressed ones' liberation process does not take place upon discovering their condition. In order to refrain from a naive and simplistic vision, Paulo Freire warns that "the structure of your thoughts is conditioned by the contradiction experienced in the actual, concrete, situation in which they come up." For this reason, "their ideal is, indeed, being men; however for them, being men within the contradiction they have always been in, and whose way to overcome is not clear, is achieved by being oppressors" [1].

The challenge of the Liberating Pedagogy is more complex than it seems. Oppressive mechanisms pervade the oppressed ones' culture and mentality, while the oppressor clings to material assets and to the politico-economical power that enables him to preserve his family's comfort and perks. In the oppressive cultural environment, the oppressed ones who "host" the oppressor's way of being fear freedom, because the liberating process requires them to fill the void—left after having expelled the oppressor from within—with some new content, i.e., "their autonomy." Therefore, for Paulo Freire, freedom behooves responsibility and autonomy; "it requires a relentless search that can only exist in the responsible act of who is performing it" [1].

Paulo Freire also expressed his criticism on conservative education, describing it as "banking education." In the "banking education" practice, the teacher is the subject of knowledge, and the student is the passive object, awaiting that knowledge to be deposited on his mind, empty of history and experience. In the banking school's architecture, students are disciplined to receive, memorize, and repeat content. In the "banking education" practice, there is no chance for intercultural learning, no dialog, and only communication from whoever is labeled as the owner of knowledge. According to Paulo Freire (p 58), "in this distorted view of education, there is no creativity, no transformation, no knowledge"; there is only significantly liberating learning "in invention, reinvention, relentless search, permanent impatience, which men do in the world, with the world, and with each other" [25].

5. Precursors of biocentric education

As an outcome of the ontological and biological condition of mankind, the human being's vision of the world is "naturally" anthropocentric. However not always, and not in every culture, has man placed himself as a "superior species," relative to nonhuman animals. This is why we consider it important to explicitly trace back the path of such anthropocentrism, and the place this way of thinking occupies in the contemporary process of devastating our planet's environment; at the same time highlighting the new ethical sensitivities, with the intent of overcoming the colonialist dimension of anthropocentric pedagogy.

Both anthropocentrism and speciesism are ideologies that justify and legitimate the human species' violence and domination relative to all other nonhuman life forms on our planet. Modern society's "evolution" was paved by speciesism and anthropocentrism. In the ancient Greco-Roman tradition, some philosophers expressed their vision of the world without bestowing a superior position on humans. These ancient philosophers—Pythagoras, Seneca,

and Porphyry among others—conceived men within a “web of life,” shared by all live beings. Had the Western humanity followed Pythagoras’ ethical conception, the tyranny that has been established ever since, to the present day, regarding other live beings would not have found its place morally in the cultural upbringing. However, “our moral format endorses the Aristotelic, anthropocentric, and hierarchic concept, typical of the slavocratic rationale” [26]. In the Western cultural upbringing, the Aristotelic conception has been taught by the anthropocentric pedagogy.

Biocentric education, therefore, is a pedagogical proposal built from the criticism to eco-colonialist anthropocentrism. This is why we consider it relevant to introduce the theoretical contributions from two Chilean educators, biologist Humberto Maturana, creator of the *autopoiesis* theory and the *biology of knowledge*, in partnership with his former pupil Francisco Varela, theories developed since the 1960s; and the professor, psychologist, and poet Rolando Toro (1924–2010), creator of the Biodance Pedagogy, a theory also developed from the 1960s. The *autopoiesis* theory states and claims that live beings are biologically autonomous, i.e., they are self-sufficient in producing their own vital components while living and coexisting in interaction with their life ecosystem. In their research and philosophical interactions, Maturana and Varela [28] developed two other conceptual breakthroughs: the biology of knowledge and the biology of love (currently biology of loving). The first milestone in this new epistemological outlook is very simple: “life is a knowledge acquisition process,” which is why knowledge is the condition for a live being to be alive, and the condition of living is the condition to be building a world that is in a permanent process of change.

Maturana and Varela undermine the modern rationale that became dominant since the West European Renaissance. These Chilean biologists challenge the idea that there is an “objective reality” independent from the beholder, a reality that supposedly could be known and manipulated. According to such rationale, Humberto Mariotti explains, “our brain passively receives finished information from outside,” like data are fed to a computer. Thus, “when the way it occurs is scrutinized (i.e., by cognitive science), objectivity is privileged, and subjectivity is discarded as something that could compromise scientific accuracy.” This way of seeing and getting to know the world is named representationsm, says Mariotti, and “its main tenet is that knowledge is a phenomenon based on the mental representations we make of the world.” Therefore, “the mind would mirror nature” and “the world would contain information, our task being to extract it through cognition.” In Maturana and Varela’s theory, however, “the world does not precede our experience.” According to the research and experiments carried out by the Chilean biologists, “our life path leads us to build our knowledge of the world – however it also builds its own knowledge about us.” Therefore, “albeit we fail to notice it immediately, we are always influenced and modified by what we see and feel” [27].

Summarizing, the basic assumptions posed by Maturana and Varela are the following: *a priori*, there is no reality to be discovered or known, there is a world under construction in the condition of getting to know, living, and coexisting of live beings; “living is getting to know—living is an actual action in existing as a live being [28]”; and “Everything that is said, is said by one observer to another, which might be him or her self,” i.e., “the observer is a live human being, and anything said about live beings or human beings, or generally organisms, applies to the

observer”; live beings live like autopoietic systems “in a systemic molecular dynamic that continuously produces its self.” The primitive condition for mankind to exist followed the line *Homo sapiens-amans amans*, a condition where shared well-being relationships prevailed. This is “the founding and fundamental line in our evolutionary history, and it is still predominates in our biological-cultural present,” coexisting with the *Homo sapiens-amans agressans* and *Homo sapiens-amans arrogans* trends. So, contrary to what positivist, liberal and Marxist fundamental theories say, “we, human beings, are loving mammals, bipedal primates belonging to a culturally evolutionary history centered in the Biology of Loving, coexisting in sharing and collaborating, not only in competing or attacking,” since “if our biological basis were not amatory, if the human baby were not born on the implicit confidence of bringing love within, the concern of one for the other’s well-being would not be possible” [29].

The “Biology of Loving” may be the most controversial among Maturana’s theories and also the most liberating them. It is through this theoretical point of view that Maturana and his research partners refute the idea that “competition” is an essential component of life. The “biology of loving” is a vital component of the biological structure of live beings, since every live being is born in a natural or cultural environment that requires loving care and the acceptance of coexisting with other live beings. In the human beings’ realm, “love, or, if such an intense word is undesirable, **the acceptance of the other together with us** [our emphasis here] in coexistence, is the biological basis of the social phenomenon.” Without love and without the acceptance of the other with us, the authors point out, “there is no socialization, and without it there is no humanity.” For this reason, “anything that voids or constrains acceptance from the other, from competition to ownership of the truth, to ideological certainty, voids or constrains the occurrence of the social phenomenon.” Thus “it also voids the human being, as it eliminates the biological process that makes it exist.” Maturana and Varela (p. 268–269) make it clear that they have no intent of moralizing, much less making an apology to love. Their intent is to demonstrate “the fact that, biologically, without love, without acceptance of the other, there is no social phenomenon”; and that “if coexistence so survives, life is hypocritical in indifference or active denial” [28]. What educational paradigm do Maturana’s theories suggest? An education based on the principles of acceptance and respect to ourselves and others, living and coexisting in a way to build knowledge, developing life and the world. This calls for rethinking the school curriculum idea, the way to conceive mistakes and the role of reassessment, the relationship between teachers, students, and school managers, consciously integrated to our respective communities for good living and to “compete” for a job in the marketplace.

Rolando Toro (1924–2010) developed his theory from dancing activities with patients in the Santiago Psychiatric Hospital, in Chile, while he was a professor at the Medical Anthropology study center in the School of Medicine of the University of Chile in 1965. Initially, the therapy was defined as psychodance, and a decade later, Toro attempted to transcend the anthropocentric vision toward a biocentric vision, creating an epistemological framework for the “biocentric education” paradigm, which began to widespread in the 1980s. Toro [30] defines the biocentric principle as the way of feeling and thinking in the existential living and coexisting of live beings. His epistemological assumption is the idea that “the universe exists because there is life”; and that all components of the universe, from the physical elements and live

beings, are part of a larger living system that gets organized to generate life. For the Chilean educator, education is the darkest expression of the crisis of Euro-Western civilization:

- I would like to be extremely sincere in reviewing the energy background of our civilization and its darker expression: Education.
- The contemporary education, in almost everywhere in the West, does not fulfill its task of providing the individual with internal guidelines for development.
- It neither provides the natural germs of vitality nor the values of the intimate. It does not develop creative potentials, intellectual freedom, or the uniqueness of skills. It does not foster the splendor of human relationships.
- Its task is at the service of political and economic power and, to fulfill this mission, it organizes magnificent programs of psychological sterilization.
- The current education tends to produce servile adaptation to the established. It seeks to create a sense of duty and an attitude of respect toward things that are not respectable [30].

Rolando Toro mentions 15 assumptions of the biocentric theory, including the following: biodance is oriented by “an ecological concept of human and cosmic relationships”; biodance postulates a prophylactic action that transcends the borders of conventional therapy, attempting to prevent diseases to manifest; it postulates a community-centered social change system and not client focused; biodance is a theory based on Human Sciences (Anthropology, Etiology, Biology, Medicine, Psychology, and Sociology), and “does not stem from any special ideological, religious, or psychological system”; “biodance is an evolutionary—not revolutionary—system” [30].

Why biodance? Rolando Toro was born in the territory that, before 1492, was occupied by a wide diversity of indigenous people having (and they still have) dance as an existential practice to connect with the natural and spiritual world. Furthermore, Toro lived through the crisis of social, political, and epistemological paradigms that would get expressed in a more striking manner in the rebellions of youngsters, in several countries through the 1960s, against the materialistic, destructive, and consumerist rationale of West European modernity; a rationale that fosters competition, war, and deaths. Biodance theory is hence a theory aspiring to promote life and the peaceful and respectful coexistence of humans and nonhumans alike; it is an approach proposing a new educational/upbringing paradigm for subjects that are capable of feeling, coexisting, and connecting to the life beings community, be it at local level or in any other living environment in the universe; it is a systemic and holistic vision of the world, based on a dialogical interaction between the tradition, wisdom, and knowledge produced by contemporary science.

Rolando Toro says that the “biodance” concept gets close to the idea of *Dancing Your Life*, from the French philosopher Roger Garaudy, who expressed his dance philosophy as one of the vital components of live beings, humans included; to live and interact with nature dancing for life. Dance, according to Garaudy, “is a complete way of living the world; it is knowledge, art, and religion, all at once.” So dance “shows us that what is sacred is carnal as well, and the

body may teach what a spirit without a body doesn't know: the grandeur and beauty of the act when man is not apart from his self, but wholly present in what he does"; it is through the dance of life that a man develops his admiration for the sea, the clouds, the fire, or for love, because "love, like dance, preceded man in blossoming," since "among insects, birds, and many other species, dance is part of the love act." For this reason, "dance is not merely the expression and celebration of the organic continuity between man and nature; it is also an accomplishment of the living community of men" [31].

6. Final thoughts

Overall, we found that Latin America reached the end of the twentieth century having accomplished a significant part of the educational ideals proposed and claimed by the generation of educators born and graduated in the first half of that same century. All countries implemented a national public education system "for all." Literacy includes the wide majority of the population. Elementary education has become an obligation of the family and a duty of the state. There are school buildings implemented in all regions, cities, and small villages. Each country has developed its university-level teacher qualification policy. New universities came up, as well as a new breed of educators-researchers. Science and scientific knowledge have been absorbed by the school culture. "Liberal democracy" has become the dominant (and practically only) paradigm of a State, with the exception of Cuba and occasional "Coup" attempts, which are still a political practice fostered and validated by conservative sections of Latin-American countries and imperialistic Northern governments.

Many conquests and few victories—The metrics of violence against the poor, Afrodescendant, and indigenous populations are ingrained in what is known as the "banality of evil." Social disparity between the rich and the poor is shamefully staggering. The national educational system has made significant improvements to the living conditions of many families; however, it is a bureaucratic system that perpetuates the "banking education" rationale and develops a schooled population deprived of intellectual autonomy and critical thinking, as intended by the educators who dreamed about and believed in the transforming role of modern education. Elementary school teachers' working conditions and compensation are still in indigenous and demotivating situation in most countries.

From either left or right, Latin America has adopted the developmentalist model from the West European modernity. The educational system and professional training for teachers were both adjusted to match this model. The inter-ethnic plurality of national States only began to be acknowledged in fact during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Some states dignified the rights of their autochthonous people; however, in most, their situation entails hostility, violence, and exclusion.

Eurocentrism still dominates the curricular structure of national education systems at all levels. Most scientists and educators in Latin America have not yet noticed or acknowledged the effects of the epistemological domain of Eurocentrism in its way of seeing "problems" and "solutions" for Latin America. However, a new generation of educators has undertaken the

challenges left by the generation that designed the initial framework of liberating education, of the decolonial education, of the pedagogy of the *Abya Yala* people, and of the education that values the life and the well-living of all live beings.

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