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Paul C. Taylor, Linda Martín Alcoff, Luvell Anderson



## Racism and Coloniality

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Walter D. Mignolo

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# RACISM AND COLONIALITY

## The Invention of “HUMAN(ITY)” and the Three Pillars of the Colonial Matrix of Power (Racism, Sexism, and Nature)

*Walter D. Mignolo*

### I

The issue at stake is social classification, which includes social class. Racism is not exactly what catches the eye. On the surface, racism is a question of content and identification based on biological markers (blood, skin color, hair, and nose shape, as well as language, religion, nationalities). Beneath the surface are the principles of classification and ranking that sustain and characterize racism. Racism is one fundamental aspect of the logic of coloniality: someone who has the privilege to classify and someone who has to endure classification.

The foundation of modern racism is tantamount to the foundation of sexism and the invention of nature to classify the marvelous multiplicity of life on the planet. I will refer to it as “naturism” in parallel with racism and sexism. The logic of racial, sexual, and natural classification is the same.

The logic of racial, sexual, and natural classification is the same. It presupposes a point of reference: the invention of the Human in relation to which lesser religious and ethnic human entities were identified and described. There were neither Human nor humans before the European Renaissance. Greeks named the species *Anthropos*, Chinese *Ren*, Quechua *Runa*. In the Persian version of the Qur'an there were *Bashar* and *Insan* (see below), and we can go on and on. We cannot say that all could be simplified by saying that we are all Humans for it may not be accepted to say that we are all *Ren* or *Runa* or *Bashar/Insan*. Reducing Human to size, divesting it from its pretense to universality, implies accepting it as a regional name in a pluriversal universe of meaning.

The idea of Human in Western civilization presupposes masculinity, which set the standards for classifying sexual lesser humans. Sexual classification had further ramifications. The invention of Women in Medieval Europe created a double hierarchy:

woman lesser than man and witches lesser than woman (Federici).<sup>1</sup> Sexual lesser humans are Women: both necessary women for regeneration of the species and unwanted and expelled women (witches, sexual workers). But sexual lesser humans are also Man and Woman with “abnormal” sexual preferences. Simultaneously Nature was invented and distinguished from Culture. Culture characterized Human/Man while Nature framed the realm of animal, vegetal, and mineral. The Chain of Beings located Human/Man at the top of the world created by God and so the classification established, while at the same time, a hierarchy among beings. By the same token, since Culture is what Humans do, Nature became the *facto* surrogated to Human cultivation and, later on, exploitation.

The foundational classification focused on entities, that is, on *beings* instead of on *vincularidad* (inter-relationship) facilitating the double operation of classifying and ranking. At the same historical moment, all civilizations in what would become the New World and then America lived in an ontology of *vincularidad* (better yet, in an oxymoronic [e.g., relations are not entities but connections and flows between and through identities] *vincul-ontology* or *inter-relation-ontology*) since everything was related to everything. “Nature” was un-imaginable, for what “existed” was the flow of energy among all living organisms, including rock and mountains. Co-existing ontologies presupposes co-existing cosmologies or, if you prefer, epistemologies. As we know one cosmology began to displace and delegitimize other cosmologies—first in the Americas and the Caribbean, then in Africa and in Asia. Human was the category at the center of a cosmology created by living organisms that conceived themselves as Human.

Both operations and their particular manifestation self-placing Human at the center and establishing racial, sexual and nature/culture frontiers, generated the effect of totality of knowledge building an image of the world through the disciplines of theology first and secular philosophy and science later. Art and literature were included in that totality, while aesthetics became a philosophical discourse to legitimize competency to admire the beautiful and the genius of the artist and the sublime spectacles of nature. Here nature maintains its separation from the human artist, although it is not only there to be dominated but to be admired. Understanding nature, in the sixteenth century, meant to understand the greatness of its Creator.<sup>2</sup> But by Kant’s age, the Creator was de-godded and the sublime was a business of the individual in front of majestic *nature*. All contributed to totalize knowing and sensing, which together with the theological Christian belief system from the previous century, covered all aspects of Human and the experiences that Human set up for himself. The rest was left in the dark or outside the totality. The same narrative continues today with different content: the beauties of economic growth and technological innovation are identified flying objects hiding the consequences of their flight.<sup>3</sup>

Where I am coming from and going with this argument? My argument here is decolonial. Albeit my training was in philosophy, literature, and semiology, the argument that unfolds requires un-disciplinary decolonial thinking. Otherwise, I would be trapped in debating the *content of the conversation* but leaving the *terms of the conversations* intact. Not only that decolonial thinking cannot be reduced to any given discipline; it is also the case that the disciplines are complicit in creating and maintaining the classifiers (enunciations, terms of the conversation) and the classified (the enunciated, contents of the conversation). Consequently, decolonial thinking to be decolonial has to constantly engage processes of delinking from disciplinary strictures and control.

Reasoning in this way (that is, reasoning decolonially) helps us (readers and myself) to understand the fictionality of Western epistemology behind its claims to truth; an epistemology that created the distinction between facts and fictions, fictions and truths, fiction and reality as if these pairs were two independent entities and not pairs that sustain Western cosmology (narratives of the creation of the world and of the species that tells the story of the creation of the world and of the species) and epistemology (basic assumptions and legitimization of knowing and knowledge within the cosmology of a species that imagine itself as universal). Once the mask is lifted it becomes understandable that ontologies are created by epistemologies (or in more general terms, by cosmologies), and that racism, sexism, and naturism are epistemic categories inventing ontologies (that is, entities).

The complicity of racism (as well as of sexism and naturism) with coloniality will subsist as far as knowledge and understanding is secured by the *Human* control of the enunciation. The question is not to de-humanize the *human* but shifting from the historical, economic, legal, philosophical languaging that secured the belief that the world is composed of *beings* (entities) instead of *vincularidad* of life (inter-relationality of the living), but shifting from *Being* to *vincularidad*. Once *vincularidad* displaces *Being* to the background, the lines traced by Human/Man to project Himself as the standard and the model to which all racially and sexually lesser humans shall aspire (to gain Heaven after death or the heaven of Material Possessions) and nature is no longer seen as a place to be superseded by culture, racism, sexism, and naturism would vanish simply because they would no longer be necessary.

At that point Human would become human (without a capital h) and Man would be dissolved in the complementarity of feminine and masculine dimensions of all living organisms and in the cultural pluriversity of languaging living organisms. And at this point ontology is no longer necessary because ontology refers to *entities* and not to *inter-relationality* (*vincularidad*). Ontology (the discourse on entities, on beings) is displaced and relation-logy (the discourse on relations) comes to the foreground. For, to conceive *vincularidad* ontologically would be to kill inter-relationship and reduce it to an entity rather to a constant movement.

## II

In what follows I examine several instances to reveal the logic underlying the invention of racial, sexual (among human beings) and natural differences (naturalism) among the species of *languaging living organisms*<sup>4</sup> and the difference that a numerical minority of these organisms, through languaging, separated themselves from nature.

The English word “human” is one among many in the world of linguistic diversity to name the entity with which the one who names identify him as such. It was not someone “lesser human” who invented the concept of Human for two reasons. One because lesser humans cannot exist without Human as the point of reference and two because whomever identifies him or herself with a given entity would not identify himself or herself as lesser. “Human” is not the name for an already existing entity but a noun that in the act of naming creates the entity that is so being named. It was only for Latin speakers and their future fellow speakers of vernacular European languages, that “Human” will remain the standard from where to name lesser humans and a separated entity, nature, upon which culture was and continues to be built. “Human,” from Latin “humanus,” was the translation of the Greek “anthropos.”

anthropo—

—, anthrop—a combining form meaning man, human being, as in *anthropology*, *anthropomorphic*; borrowed from Greek *anthrōpo* -, combining form of *anthropos* man, human being.<sup>5</sup>

What is crucial to understand here is that both, “Hu/Man” are European Renaissance concepts that appropriated (and “westernized”) *anthropos*. With time, *anthropos* came to denote the *differences* within the same living organism species with lesser “hu/mans” and that for a multiplicity of reasons (e.g., blood, skin color, religious belief, nationality, languages, sex, sexual preferences) sustaining narratives that created and replicate differences: *humanitas* and *anthropos* are two Western concepts and we see in them the deep structure of racism, sexism, and naturism. The seed of racism (one among the multiplicity of differences that allowed Human to stand tall and manage) was planted and the belief in that *human* was the universal name for the species was established: epistemology surrendered to ontology and ontology was assumed to be independent of epistemology. This was and still is coloniality of knowledge and of being. Those who established the *terms of the conversation* did not place themselves either among the *anthropos* or closer to *nature*, but, obviously, among the *Humans* who had the epistemic privilege of classifying and ranking themselves among all imaginable entities and preventing, at the same time, being classified.

nature (n.)

About 1275, bodily processes, restorative powers of the body; later, innate character or disposition (about 1380), and inherent creative power or impulse (about 1385); borrowed from Old French *nature*, and directly from Latin *nātūra* birth, character, from *nasci* be born: see NATIVE.

*The meaning of the material world, the features and products of the earth is first recorded in 1662. The use of nature in the sense used inhuman nature is found in 1526. (Italics mine, WM)*<sup>6</sup>

“Restorative powers of the body”: but not only Man/Human have bodies, plants have bodies, fish have bodies, birds have bodies, vegetables have bodies, and fruits have bodies. That is, every living organism has a “body” that lives and dies. It is the materiality of the living that constitutes the “body.” And the second definition of “nature” refers to “creation, the universe.” I bet that Man/Human have been also created with the universe but many times “they” (Man/Human) act as if they are only “observing” (with telescopes or experiments) the creation of the living.

But “nature” which certainly was there much before “human” did not come to the world with its own identification. It was identified by the type of organism that “nature” itself created! “*Cria cuervos y te sacaran los ojos*” (“Nurture crows and they will peck your eyes out”) goes a popular dictum in Spanish.

“Nature” and “human” were born at the same time, even if life on earth and the universe and living organism walking on two extremities were there much before the invention of “human” and “nature” obtained. The need to uncouple the name from the referent is always already a basic decolonial epistemic and philological move. For it was the invention of the category “human” that prompted the category “nature” to distinguish “human culture” from the “natural world.” The trap had been set up during

late European Middle Age and the imperial/colonial expansion of Western Europe and Renaissance ideas.

It all amounts to the fact that if you control knowledge, you can allocate meaning; and if you are able to allocate meaning you can also control the economy and allocate money. If then you belong to the sectors that control meaning and money, you are set up to believe that you are Human and those you consider equal are Human too, but the rest are not quite. So that the rhetoric of modernity consists in constantly producing “the rest”; and coloniality is the mechanism that secures keeping the rest beyond the dividing line. If you assume, for instance, and your assumptions are legitimized by ethical, philosophical and political discourses that *life* on the planet could be classified as *nature*, and nature is something you are not and it is irrelevant to your life and self-interests, then you could go ahead and extract all *natural resources* you need to maintain your privileges and to allocate meaning and money.

### III

Following the same logic, the anthropocene was invented at the beginning of the twenty-first century. There was no anthropocene before the year 2000, more or less.

The anthropocene is indeed a welcome addition to the fictional vocabulary naming the species of organisms to which he who names belong. It is also a welcome addition because Human (always since the European Renaissance) were depicted as good guys: they were the agents of conversion to Christianity and the fight against the Devil and Evil, the agents of the civilizing mission, the agents of development and modernization, and the agents of the march towards socialism. But the anthropocene singles out the agents of the era of the bad guys of the narrative; the guys that contributed to degenerate life on earth—all of us, so it seems. There is no escape from the damage the agents of the anthropocene era caused to the planet. *We* are all bad guys, not only those self-identified as Humans.

To be clear, the anthropocene has been proposed to delimit a special era in the history of planet earth. This particular era is added to Pleistocene, Pliocene, and Holocene and it singles out the time in which “human activities started to have a significant global impact on Earth.” Human beings had no distinguished roles in the previous era, for such creatures (our ancestors) did not even biologically (and not only semantically) exist. The specificity of the definition is “significant global impact on Earth System.”

The anthropocene was invented by Earth System’s scientists. The earth is—for them—conceived as a system of interlinking and interacting “spheres” of processes and phenomena. Earth system *science* embraces chemistry, physics, biology, mathematics, and applied sciences in transcending disciplinary boundaries to treat the Earth as an integrated system and seeks a deeper understanding of the physical, chemical, biological, and human interactions that determine the past, current, and future states of the Earth.<sup>7</sup> Interestingly enough, the earth’s conception in earth system science coincides with current version of millenarian cosmological and philosophical in many civilizations on the planet before the advent of the Human in the European Renaissance, the ancestors of today’s scientists.

And there is more. *Chakana* is the overarching scheme of Andean millenarian philosophy. Life requires a cyclical mutation of the seasons (summer, winter, fall, spring). Each season corresponds to one dimension of *Chakana*. When the seasons are in

consideration because of the harvest and the fundamental needs of survival, the center of the Chakana is occupied by “Life” (Kawsay). But the four dimensions of the Chakana could also be interpreted in relation to labor. Thus, in this regard, one dimension of the Chakana would be Munay (Spiritual dimension). Another dimension is Atiy-Yuyah (also Ushuay) (Political and organizational dimension of the communal); a third dimension would be Ruray (Building, doing, economy in narrow sense, working to leave) and the fourth Yachay (Wisdom, knowledge, epistemology). When the doing of Runa is considered the center of the Chakana “Wisdom” (Kawsay).<sup>8</sup>

The fact that the same word, Kawsay, means Life and Wisdom means that to live it is necessary to know and knowing is living. Thus the concept of “Sumak Kaway” meaning “Life in plenitude and harmony” (translated as Buen Vivir, Good Living), implies that just paying attention to one dimension (Ruray), and forgetting the rest leads to disharmony and an unbalanced world order. And that is what happened precisely with the advent, during the Renaissance, of a cosmology in which living organisms that defined themselves as Human and from there they invented Racism, Sexism, and Naturism, began a process of disequilibrium and disharmony that led to inequalities, violence, wars, and the deterioration of the niche of all living organisms of the anthropocene era.

If Earth System Science conceived the Earth as a system of interlinking and interacting “spheres,” so did all Pueblos Originarios of the Americas since we have knowledge about them. One case will be the just described Chakana, the master symbol of Andean epistemology, providing one specific example of the interlinking and interacting domains of spheres of life. Chakana is not buried in the forgotten past; it was never forgotten by Indigenous people; and it is well and alive today, co-existing with Earth System Science. The Chakana and Earth System Sciences are both creations of human beings based on different cosmologies. Earth System Sciences are ingrained in Western cosmological history, while the Chakana is ingrained in Andean cosmological history. The technicalities that distinguish one from the other are not relevant here. What counts are the vision that emanates from each of them. The difference is radical.

And if the anthropocene is the era in which human beings began to have a significant global impact on earth, then we have to assume that there was a time in which the living organisms that eventually would be identified as “human beings” and later framed in the “anthropocene era” were living organisms without one common and universal name but were not having a significant impact on earth. Following this reasoning, one may ask if the story of the emergence of “human beings” on the planet coincides or not with the anthropocene era.

Furthermore, if the focus is on “era” and not on the actors (presumably “human beings”), there is not much concern about the agents that characterize the era. The concern is on the time frame: when did it begin and where? But if the focus is on the agency, the question cannot be avoided: was/is the anthropocene female or male; yellow, black, or white; straight, gay, or transsexual; Muslim or Christian, Buddhist, Confucianist, the non-Specified Indigenous beliefs, and so forth? Or perhaps an android? Racism and sexism, in its variegated forms should not be a concern if we focus on anthropocene as an era. But we cannot focus on the era without focusing on the agency. And that is the difference between the Anthropocene on the one hand and the Holocene, Pleistocene and Pliocene on the other. The anthropocene era is the work of the Anthropos while there is no Pleisto or Holo agents identified in these other two eras.

The circumstance that the anthropocene is an era is not universal: it is an era for the scientists of earth system sciences, their followers and believers.

It doesn't make any sense from the perspective of indigenous cosmologies! How can they be counted in the era of the anthropocene and responsible for damaging the earth system when indigenous people considered "Mother earth" what scientist leveled "earth system?"

What I am strongly arguing is that the anthropocene era *could not be but another fiction* of Western epistemology and Western civilization reflecting on its own selfish history and counting among the guilty party people who have been always respectful of Mother Earth now converted into a System. The anthropocene, in other words, is another North Atlantic universal fiction pretending to be universal truth. It belongs to the same underline logic that divided nature from culture and that erases the classification that, in the era of the anthropocene, divided Humans from lesser humans.

Now the question is whether the anthropocene(s) equals human beings or the actors of the anthropocene era are or are not human beings? It seems implied in the conceptualization of the era that the actors are human beings in one of their aspects: their/our doings to damage planet earth, so that there are three meta-narratives: one is the story of when human beings appeared on earth till today; the second is shorter in time, it is the appearance of the Human (European Renaissance) that built its own metanarrative distinguishing itself from human of color, from non-man (woman) and from non-heterosexual human beings of all color including white.

But let's look closer at the ambiguous relations now between human beings and the actors of the anthropocene era. The advent of human beings (that is, the history of human beings after the concept of the Human was created) seems to be the general assumption. For example, Roger Bradbury's assumption in his *New York Times* op-ed of July 13, 2012:

Coral reefs will be the first, but certainly not the last, major ecosystem to succumb to the Anthropocene.<sup>9</sup>

Here anthropocene seems to refer to both the era and the actor. In that case the anthropocene is the human with small h, our ancestors. Or is it perhaps the Human, the ancestors for the scientists that invented the anthropocene? Hard to believe that it would be the Human because the Human only did good things: to Christianize, to civilize, to develop, to promote democracy and peace on earth even if violence was necessary. The Human is also the inventor of racism, sexism and naturism, but, could it be the agent damaging the earth system?! Bradbury's article generated a heated discussion about whether coral reefs would succumb or not. No one, however, paid any attention to the anthropocene that would succumb to the Anthropocene (with capital A). In this case, the Anthropocene is not an era, but an agency, someone who destroys coral reef. Thus, the Anthropocene is a human being, or something like that. Let me repeat: if this is the case, then the anthropocene era begins with advent of the human species on earth, and the advent of the human species on earth marks the beginning of the anthropocene era. But all of these narratives are narratives of one and the same ontology: the world imagined through Western scholarship.

At this point, the anthropocene-agent can no longer remain an unspecified walking subject framed in a geological era. If as it is known *anthropos* is the Greek word for what



became then *humanus* in Latin and *cene* is “new,” the new geological era is the era where the *anthropos* began to leave its mark on planet earth. When exactly and where that era began is a matter of debate. And since the anthropocene is an invention, a fiction, so it would be the temporal location of its rapacious behavior.

#### IV

Let me remind you that I am exploring racism and coloniality. Racism as the consequence of hierarchical classifications; and arguing that hierarchical classification is not ontological (that is, that the classification I am talking about came with human beings on earth, whether anthropocene era or not) but epistemological. And further claiming that the origination of the classification (not of the classified) was the European Renaissance and the invention of the concept of Human (Man1 in Wynter’s argument).<sup>10</sup> Now, this is important. We do not have the point of origination of the anthropocene era but the origin of the system of classification that made possible, 500 years later, the invention of the anthropocene era.

As far as Human (Man1) and Humanity are Western inventions (and I mean, the genealogy from Greek to Latin to modern European vernacular and Imperial languages), they are manifestations of the self-consciousness that (at least) all languaging living organisms have of them; and can express it in sign systems, visual and/or audible.<sup>11</sup> What is common to all known communities of this kind living on planet earth, past and present, is precisely the self-consciousness of themselves as a group, as a community and as an individual within the group that share (through conversations and physical and visible signs) the memories of the group. When a community at a certain stage of its organization reaches the point of collective self-consciousness, the community builds narratives of their common heritage.

What is “universal,” then (and this is very crucial for all other domains of lived experience, their conceptualization, naming, unfolding, and preservation) is not the ideas of Human and Humanity but the self-consciousness of living organisms engaging in conversations about themselves as being “x” and member of a larger community of “xs.”

While I was in Hong Kong (the first semester of 2012), I entertained conversations with Chinese friends and colleagues asking how they expressed their self-consciousness of being on the one hand the species of “x” and on the other of being Chinese, a national specification of the global “x”. I was informed several times that in Mandarin, there is a concept Ren (just in passing, in Quechua there is the concept of Runa equivalent to Ren and humanity in Latin and European languages), visibly expressed as in Figure 32.1.

Ren was the self-consciousness of people who inhabited the center of the nested rectangles, according to territorial imagination in Ancient China (Incas modeled the territory as diagonal of an open square). There is more to say about the five nested rectangles and who inhabited them. But I will not go there.<sup>12</sup> The point to note is that the



Figure 32.1 Ren

figure of the nested rectangles was invented by people who inhabited the center. This is indeed a “universal” or global feature of communities building narratives of the creation of the world and of their heritage and spatial organization of their territoriality.<sup>13</sup>

- “Dongyi,” referred to people outside the center, inhabiting the lands where the sun rises (dong);
- “Nanman,” referred to people outside the center who inhabited the land to the left from where the sun rises (nan);
- “Xirong,” referred to people outside the center who inhabited the land where the sun sets (xi means);
- Beidi,” referred to people inhabiting the lands to the right from where the sun sets: barbarians in the north (bei).

We could go around and make similar observations based on ancient Arabic, Persian, Nahuatl and Kechwa/Aymara, Hindi and Bengali, Wolof and Bambara, and so forth. I won’t pursue these analogies here. I wanted to name them to remind you that *humanity* is one among many regional concepts that communities built to express the consciousness of themselves as people and their genealogy). The problem emerged at the moment in which humanity became the concept that brought together coloniality and racism and it became the only concept that is at once local and became global (or universal) and in so doing demoted the “centrality” that other civilizations have of themselves.

The point is that once “humanity,” became the self-referential concept of the newest civilization on the planet (Western civilization is only 500 years old) came into the picture, it managed to project its own regional self-consciousness into a planetary one. The “success” in universalizing the concept of humanity was devastating; for it is upon it that modern/colonial racial classification (including the racialization of life reducing it to nature) was founded. As we know it, racial classification is tantamount to racism.

Why I am saying that the concept of humanity was the foundation of racism? Because racism is not a question of skin color or the purity of your blood, but a classificatory system that takes a definition of the “human” and humanity to rank “lesser” beings in need of be lifted up: Christianized, civilized, developed, organized themselves in multiparty system and built a civil society that votes, and so forth. Western humanity became the exemplar of the species while at the same time set up to classify and rank people of the world taking the idea and the ideal of humanity as points of reference. Thus, the global age and the concept of humanity are two sides of the same coin: the historical foundation of global coloniality.

Let’s explore other naming of the walking entities that the Greek named *anthropos* and the Romans *humanus*. These two names, remember, are very local like any other at their time. Their promotion to universality has to do with the consolidation and expansion of Western civilization, which was a specific time and place of the anthropocene era in which the walking entities who could engage in conversations named themselves *anthropos* and then *humans*.

All known storytelling on the creation of the world (including sacred books like the Bible and the Qur’an) and of the living species to which the narrators of the origin of the world and of their selves belong, aim and claim the totality. The narrators of the Popol Vuh, of the Legend of the Fifth Sun, the many cosmological narratives in Ancient China or Ancient India or any other you would like to consider, wouldn’t aim

the totality, that is, what Christian philosophers of the Middle Age formulated in terms of “universals.” Universals, then, is a philosophical formulation within one specific cosmology (Christian) of the totality to which this cosmology, as any other cosmology, aims.<sup>14</sup> The problem with “the problem of the universals” is not from aiming at the totality, but that it became totalitarian. What this means is that it erased or disavowed similar claims in other cosmologies. *From being a local totality it became a universal totality* (as redundant as it may sound).

To sustain my argument I provide here conceptualizations of languaging living organisms, one from Persian and the other from Kechua. Notice that by “languaging living organisms” I describe a species of the animal kingdom that in the West was conceptualized as Human but not in other civilization contemporary or previous to the European Renaissance.

Ali Shari’ati’s discussions of the *Holy Qur’an* makes a distinction between *Bashar* and *Insan*. By using *Bashar*, the Qur’an is talking about the two-footed creature that emerged at the end of the evolutionary chain . . . *Bashar* is that particular being that contains physiological, biological and psychological characteristics which are shared by all *men* . . . On the other hand *Insan* is that unique and enigmatic being that has a special definition that does not apply to any other phenomenon in nature . . . *Bashar* is “being” while *Insan* is becoming (Italics mine).<sup>15</sup>

I double-checked Shari’ati’s definition of both terms (since I speak neither Arabic nor Persian), with Hamid Dabashi, Persian scholar and intellectual, who confirmed through an email conversation:

BASHAR and INSAN—both mean “human” in slightly different senses—they are both Arabic/Qur’anic that have entered Persian too.

BASHAR is the generic name for the corporeal body of the organism that becomes a person;

INSAN is the generic name for the disposition of the organism or person, to become a member of the community of organism in which is born.

Members of the species are all equals as BASHAR, but they/us become different as INSAN. If I had to translate this idea to Western vocabulary I would say that humans are not being but “becoming.” Organisms that “become” cannot become in isolation, by themselves. Not only the organism needs the assistance of its “parents” (and mainly the mother) until it can be on its own, but it needs the niche (air, water, food, light, etc.), that is, needs to be inter-relational with life beyond itself and the “parents.” Thus BASHAR/INSAN could not be translated as “human being.” Being underscores the entity while becoming underscores inter-relationality.

If we move from Persian to Quechua we would encounter that the noun Runa is often translated to modern European vernacular languages, like “human” or “human being.” But Runa is quite different from Man/Human. Man/Human as we have seen self-fashioned himself (perhaps I should say itself), by cutting the links with “nature” and by the eighteenth century with God, an act of degoding (in Sylvia Wynter’s vocabulary) and by setting up the rule of divisions between two things that are or are represented as being opposed or entirely different: Man and Woman, Human and Nature; Life and Death; Day and Night, Matter and Spirit; Mind and Body, and so forth.

Runa cannot be flatly translated to Man/Human and vice-versa for the two reasons that have to do with power differential than with the problems of the incommensurability of translation. People who conceived their own awareness of living organisms as Runa (similarly and parallel to other people who conceived themselves as Man/Human or still other Bashar/Ensan, and still others conceive themselves as Ren [人的]), aimed at universality from their local universe of meaning. Let's take Runa, to make a long story short, since we have already said something about Persian Bashar/Ensan.

Runa was and still is conceived in relation and “convivencia” (a literal translation would be “living-with-other-living-entities”, but is generally translated as coexistence or conviviality) with *huacas* (deities, entities of the sacred sphere) and *sallqa* (every living organisms), and the Apu (the tutelary spirit that inhabit the snowed peaks of the mountains). All of that is also weaved (for the metaphor of “tejido” is common to express “convivencia” and *vincularidad*. “Convivencia” furthermore is convivencia in the “Convivencia” (conviviality) furthermore is convivencia in the *ayllu* (equivalent to *oikos* in ancient Greece), a fluid structure of convivencia (conviviality). The *ayllu* is a fluid structure of kinship, but kinship not only among Runas, but also among *huacas*, *sallqa*, and *Apu*.<sup>16</sup>

In consequence, by translating Runa into Man/Human you erase convivencia of the living and the spiritual world and you “endow” Runa with the same violence that Man/Human have enacted to define themselves and, when projected towards Tawantinsuyu during the conquest and colonization, you continue the erasure that Man/Human started during the Renaissance in Europe and in the process of epistemic conquest and colonization of the world. In such translation you would imply that Runa is separated from Nature, which is an aberration. Now, convivencia is not necessarily pacific, but it is a struggle in search of balance and harmony. Andean philosophy had the concept of *tinku* and *ayny*. *Tinku* and *ayny* bring opposite but complementary elements in relation, as we see more below.<sup>17</sup> Struggling in search of balance and harmony is not the same than violence and war to secure development and democracy. Racist logic (and therefore coloniality) is embedded in politics.

Now, taking a cursory look at Daoism, one learns that *Qi* cannot be translated as *nature* but rather as *energy*. The energy of the living, of life in the universe and the energy that made possible living organisms that were able to self-define themselves in relation to all other organisms in *convivencia* (living and co-existing with other organisms that live and co-exist with us who are describing ourselves in relation to other organisms.) In some case, the relation is convivial, on other antagonistic.

*Qi* is the energy and principle of harmony expressed in the complementarity of *yin-yang*: there is no *yin* without *yang*, there is no masculine without feminine, there is no day without night, there is no life without death (I already said that), and so forth. Like indigenous cosmologies in the great civilizations of the Americas, *yin-yang* (like *Tinku* in Andean indigenous philosophy) is the constant search for harmony and equilibrium and the goal of living organisms endowed with the capacity to define themselves/ourselves as a particular entity in convivial or agonistic relations with other living organisms.

The diversity of the living that Western epistemology racialized and reduced to *nature* has a different conceptualization in Taoist or Daoist philosophy. In these philosophies the diversity of the living doesn't exclude the spiritual and the social and therefore it makes no sense reducing it to *nature*. It is very similar to Andean

philosophy: *sallqa* doesn't exclude *Runa* and *huacas* as in fact, *apu* is at once *sallqa* and *huaca*. So that the struggles of *yin* and *yang* in search of plenitude and harmony, not of development.

In Quechua language and Andean philosophy, *yanintin* and *masintin* are parallel to *yin* and *yang*.<sup>18</sup> What they have in common is to acknowledge that there cannot be A without its opposite B: there is no day without night, no masculine without feminine, no good without bad, and so forth. The search for balance and harmony is a search, is a struggle. It is not a given, a pacific conviviality without efforts. However, once you acknowledge that there cannot be one without the other, you have two options at least: either you try to eliminate what you declare to be opposite and did not let it be; or you recognize that you cannot eliminate or dominate forever your opposite: you could eliminate some of its manifestations but not its energy and living force. If you are trying to eliminate and control the opposite you enter the realm of *war*; if you search for harmony and balance, you enter the realm of *struggle* in search of harmony rather than *war* in search of elimination or total control.

## V

We can go on an on surveying cosmologies shattered by the cosmology of one God, binary oppositions and isolated rational individuals looking for their own interest and supporting democratic governments elected by vote. That is at the same time the cosmology founded on racism, sexism, and naturism.

What matters is the need to reset the goals and visions of life on the planet. The search for balance and harmony shall displace development and growth conceived only economically without attention to the growing of unbalance and disequilibrium of communal life and life on the planet. This statement and the argument that proceeds are the result of decolonial thinking and, in this case, oriented toward decolonizing knowledge and being.

Thus, decoloniality of knowledge and of being presupposes that the analytic that I went through in this chapter aims to delink and liberate us from the ontology of beings (and one of the consequences, the isolated self-interested individual of modernity) and to relink it to "vincularidad of the living and of life." Changing the terms of the conversation requires engaging in living story telling that delink from the belief in development, economic growth, manifest destinies and divine privileges to enact violence to keep the world in peace.

## Notes

- 1 See Sylvia Wynter's compelling argument excavating the historical foundations of Hu/Man1 (the European Renaissance) and Hu/Man2 (the European Enlightenment): "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.
- 2 See my "Commentaries" to the English translation of José de Acosta's *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, trans. Frances Lopez-Morillas, ed. Jane E. Mangan (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 451–518.
- 3 Kishore Mahbubani and Lawrence H. Summers, "The Fusion of Civilizations: The Case for Global Optimism," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 3 (2016): 126; Klaus Schwab, *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*. Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2016.

- 4 The reader shall keep in mind that by “linguaging living organisms,” I am referring to the set of living organisms that were once conceived of as “human” and lately as “post-human,” and singling out an era, the anthropocene era, in which such living organisms called “human” began to impact the balance of life in which the species of linguaging living organisms emerged on planet earth.
- 5 *The Barnhart dictionary of etymology*, Robert K. Barnhart, editor, New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1988.
- 6 *The Barnhart dictionary of etymology*, Robert K. Barnhart, editor, New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1988.
- 7 Martin Ruzek, “Earth Science in a Nutshell,” *Starting Point: Teaching Entry Level Geo-Science*, National Digital Science Library, n.d.
- 8 The popularized “Buen Vivir-Sumak Kawsay” is most of the time a version of non-Indigenous intellectuals alien to the senses, knowing and reasoning from Chakana’s philosophy. From Indigenous philosophy, Chakana is not an entity but the shape of the energy of thinking, sensing, and living; “Sistema de Vida Andino.”
- 9 Roger Bradbury, “A World Without Coral Reefs,” *New York Times*, July 13, 2012.
- 10 Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality.”
- 11 Linguaging Maturana
- 12 Joseph Needan and Wang Ling, *Science and Civilization in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).
- 13 Marshall G. S. Hodgson, “In the Center of the Map: Nations See Themselves as the Hub of History,” in *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam, and World History*, ed. Edmund Burke III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 29–34.
- 14 For the continuity of the topic in contemporary philosophy, see *The Problem of Universals in Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Gabriele Galluzzo and Michael J. Loux (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- 15 Najibullah Lafrai, *Revolutionary Ideology and Islamic Militancy: The Iranian Revolution and the Interpretation of the Quran* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 128.
- 16 Grimaldo Rengifo Vázquez, “The Ayllu,” in *The Spirit of Regeneration: Andean Culture Confronting Western Notions of Development*, ed. Frédérique Appfel-Marglin with PRATEC (London: Zed Books, 1998), 89–123.
- 17 A similar conceptualization was at work in Aztec philosophy. See James Maffie, “‘We Eat of the Earth Then the Earth Eats Us’: The Concept of Nature in Pre-Hispanic Nahua Thought,” *Ludis Vitalis* 10, no. 17 (2002): 5–19.
- 18 Tristan Platt, “Mirrors and Maize: The Concept of Yanantin Among the Macha of Bolivia,” in *Anthropological History of Andean Politics*, ed. John Murra, Nathan Wachtel, and Jacques Revel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 228–259. See also Deisy Nuñez del Prado Béjar, “Yanintin y masintin. La cosmovisión Andina,” in *Yachay: Revista Científica de la Universidad Andina del Cusco*, 1 (2008): 130–136.

This is similar in Aztec philosophy (see note 17), where the goal was to strive for balance and harmony. And they sacrifice human beings, you could object. The belief was to sustain the life of the sun rather than to advance democracy, for example, or to sustain development. The *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* provides this helpful insight and bibliography information:

Because of this I suggest Nahua philosophy is better understood as a “way-seeking” rather than as a “truth-seeking” philosophy. “Way-seeking” philosophies such as classical Taoism, classical Confucianism, and contemporary North American pragmatism adopt as their defining question, “What is the way?” or “What is the path?” In contrast, “truth-seeking” philosophies such as most European philosophies adopt as their defining question, “What is the truth?” (James Maffie, “Aztec Philosophy,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d.)

Similar arguments can be found in David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking from the Han: Self, Truth and Transcendence in Chinese and Western Culture* (Buffalo: SUNY Press, 1998).

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