EMBERS OF THE PAST

Essays in Times of Decolonization

JAVIER SANJINÉS C.

With a Foreword by Walter Mignolo

TRANSLATED BY DAVID FRYE

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IN MEMORY OF FERNANDO CORONIL (1943–2011)

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About the Series

Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations is a critical series. It aims to explore the emergence and consequences of concepts used to define "Latin America" while at the same time exploring the broad interplay of political, economic, and cultural practices that have shaped Latin American worlds. Latin America, at the crossroads of competing imperial designs and local responses, has been construed as a geocultural and geopolitical entity since the nineteenth century. This series provides a starting point to redefine Latin America as a configuration of political, linguistic, cultural, and economic intersections that demands a continuous reappraisal of the role of the Americas in history and of the ongoing process of globalization and the relocation of people and cultures that have characterized Latin America's experience. *Latin America Otherwise: Languages, Empires, Nations* is a forum that confronts established geocultural constructions, rethinks area studies and disciplinary boundaries, assesses convictions of the academy and of public policy, and correspondingly demands that the practices through which we produce knowledge and understanding about and from Latin America be subject to rigorous and critical scrutiny.

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Introduction

MODERNITY IN THE BALANCE, THE "TRANSGRESSIVE" ESSAY, AND DECOLONIZATION

Must we always fixate on progress and "building the future," never stopping to consider why we are going through a crisis in the historical project of modernity? Aren't we facing a historical impasse because we have no map to tell us which routes to the future might work? Aren't "peripheral" societies—the ones that the dominant systems of knowledge have forgotten or left in the dust—precisely the societies that now reject, sometimes violently, the moral and philosophical systems that modernity thought were universal? Doubt seems to have corroded and dissolved every certainty that once shored up our lives and conveniently blinded us so we could go on living in a world that had lost its aim, its sure direction.

What can we do in the face of such pervasive doubt? Dissociating ourselves from humanity would mean forgetting that we are never so human as when we regret it. What holds us in doubt now is not so much the death of the old era as the birth of a new one, an event we can no longer look forward to with the same confidence we had when we waited for modernity to finally arrive. For vast groups who have found their voice in the key of voicelessness itself, consciousness has arrived uninvited, mired in virtual reality, rejoicing in the empty plenitude of a self, an identity that must negotiate the thorny pathways that will lead it to delve into a "ruinous" past, into a "self" that predates the modern self. There, in that space—better yet, in that space-time—will be what E. M. Cioran called "the light of pure anteriority" (Cioran 1970: 48). Unable to take refuge in animal howling or mineral senselessness, we humans find ourselves forced to

come up with a new project inspired more by the past and by a continuing, constantly expanding present than by a perfectible future. Its "rhythm" demands a new state, a new disposition of the soul, not conditioned exclusively by the philosophical assumptions of Western temporality, particularly those that govern the modern philosophy of history. Today, social dynamics in our countries has destroyed the prestige of many of our formerly cherished concepts and has forced us to reconsider the space-time structure of our thinking. It isn't that we should be indifferent bystanders, just watching the problematic historical time that it has been our lot to live through. Quite the contrary: we must be observers free of all illusion, critics of the utopian goal of modernity. Since we can no longer refrain from questioning it, I think it useful to cover some controversial aspects of this goal that we now find dubious.

1. MODERNITY IN THE BALANCE

Seen from the European perspective, from the point of view of supposedly universal thought, modernity—the historical project that began in the Renaissance with the "discovery" of America—acquired its philosophical foundations with seventeenth-century Rationalism and the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.

If we stick to dictionary definitions and call anything referring to Greco-Roman antiquity "classical," it is clear that the seventeenth century, which is taken to be foundational for modern culture and modern civilization, was France's classical century, given that, while its great writers wanted to continue imitating the Greeks and Romans, its scientists, followers of Galileo, made progress the basis for Western culture and civilization. It was precisely the notion of change, of progress, that influenced science so profoundly. Thus, the modernity of Descartes was based on the imposition of a mathematical model founded on the principle that only logic, with its forms and categories, was capable of deciphering the world. Thanks to this model, long chains of reasoning arose that made it possible to have, on the one hand, deductive philosophy, and, on the other, observations of measurements on which an inductive science could be built. Thus, the application of the Cartesian method had a revolutionary impact on progress and on change.

But could the dominated, the subjugated, peacefully accept a rectilinear modernity that was imposed on them from the outside, that defined them without caring about the particularities of their own being? Compli-

cated by intellectuals from the former colonies of Spain, Portugal, and France, the victorious gaze of modernity could not be taken into account unless it was associated with "coloniality," that is, with its complementary concept, with the historical-structural violence that Walter Mignolo has called, after Frantz Fanon, the "colonial wound" (Mignolo 2005: 5–8), which even today constitutes modernity's dark side. Well, this "wound," which introduces doubt into the cocksure course of modernity, is nothing but the physical and psychological consequence of racism, of the hegemonic discourse that denied and still denies the humanity of the dispossessed, that assumes it alone can encompass everything and can classify everyone else's stage of evolution and of knowledge.

If modernity is the name of the historical process by which imperial Europe began to build its worldwide hegemony, its mantle of knowledge also covers "coloniality," a set of events that, as I have said, has oppressed vast human groups. Coloniality thus explains the logic that has imposed control, exploitation, and domination on the rest of humankind and that masks this subjugation with the language of salvation, of progress, of modernization. If "colonialism" refers to a specific period of imperial domination, "coloniality" is the logical structure of domination that colonialism has imposed since America was "discovered." Coloniality explains the logic of economic, political, and social domination of the whole world, above and beyond the concrete fact that in the past the colonizing country may have been Spain, Britain, or more recently the United States. Therefore, dressed up in "civilization" and "progress," the rhetoric of modernity created an imaginary, a conceptual coherence that derives from the abstract principles of equality and fraternity, as fashioned in the French Revolution. This imaginary generally corresponded to the political, economic, and social configuration from which the three great ideologies of the modern world emerged: conservatism, liberalism, and socialism.

From the viewpoint of the triumphal march of modernity, these three great ideologies seem to express the development of reality well. However, what all three leave out—willfully, it must be said—is any genuine expression of the injustices suffered by the dominated. We therefore think that the colonial experience can only be articulated from the "colonial wound," not from the sensitivities of the imperial victors. Triumphant modernity and its opposite, "modernity / coloniality," are perspectives organized from two different paradigms that intertwine in the colonial matrix of power[1] and that are articulated under structurally heterogeneous histories of language and knowledge; later in the book we call this,

after Ernst Bloch, "the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous" (Bloch 1991 [1935]: 106). In this way, the paradigm of the "dispossessed," those whom Fanon and Sartre termed "the wretched of the earth," came about due to the diversity of the noncoeval, structurally heterogeneous histories of those who had to live under the burden of imperial languages and the civilizing process imposed by the lineal and future-directed view of History. This colonial history is what obliges us to distinguish between the colonizer's discourse and the discourse of national resistance. So placing yourself within the rhetoric of the French *mission civilisatrice* isn't the same as doing so from the point of view of *négritude* or Indian identity. When we enunciate from the viewpoint of coloniality, we do so from a different consciousness, an alternative consciousness, made invisible by the dominant thought of the West, which Frantz Fanon relates to C. L. R. James, W. E. B. Du Bois, Walter Rodney, Aimé Césaire, and José Carlos Mariátegui. All of these writers, unquestionably metropolitan in their thinking, are "ex-centrics," because their writings purvey a different consciousness, distant from and profoundly critical of the prevailing consciousness in Europe and the United States.

History, a field created in the eighteenth century by the rise of the analytic method itself, remains a privilege of modernity, which subordinate peoples can also have if they adapt to the perspective imposed by European knowledge. This perspective governs life, economy, subjectivity, family, and religion in nations that have been subjugated and modeled on the organizing principles of the dominant nations.

From the viewpoint of the dominated, History is an institution that legitimates the silence of other histories; that obscures the testimony of the dispossessed. Thus, the Hegelian philosophy of History is the best example of how the West made any other possible view of the world unrealizable. The West held on to the categories of thought by which the rest of the world could be described, interpreted, and classified. Hegel's "Occidentalism" was located, geohistorically and geopolitically, in the heart of modernity.

Now, the so-called colonial matrix of power—of which the Hegelian philosophy of History is a fundamental element—could be observed critically only if a new paradigm were constructed that could understand the difference of the dispossessed, that is, the "colonial difference." As Mignolo has rightly observed (2000), this is a remarkably important geopolitical turn within knowledge itself. Thanks to it, we now realize that only when we abandon the natural belief that History is a chronological suc-

cession of events, ordered linearly (past, present, future) in pursuit of the progressive development of humanity, can we comprehend that History is actually interwoven with coloniality in a spatial distribution of nodules that fill a "structural" space, not merely a time line. It is even more important to become aware that every historical milestone, in addition to having a structure and not a linear location, is also profoundly heterogeneous. Therefore, if we bear in mind that we are facing not the "end of history," as Francis Fukuyama prematurely declared, but merely the demise of the Hegelian concept of History, we can also comprehend the spatial-temporal intricacies that make up our modernity, fraught with coloniality.

"Historical-structural complexity" removes us from Hegelian-style secular narratives. Instead of accepting history as a linear succession of events, I speak of "the contemporaneity of the non-contemporaneous" in our peoples because history, viewed from a local vantage point, far from Western macronarratives, obliges us to see that social space is full of multiple and contrasting perspectives and historical processes. Thus we can look at history as a set of historical-structural heterogeneities that must be interpreted using both the rhetoric of modernity (progress, happiness, wealth) and the logic that constitutes coloniality (backwardness, death, poverty). Instead of observing modernity from the historical process that brings happiness, historical-structural heterogeneity springs from the fact that the "utopian dreams" of modernity were achieved at an enormous human cost that our dependent societies have suffered, and that they will continue to suffer so long as the annoying rhetoric of modernity maintains its hegemony. Dating from the seventeenth century, this rhetoric is based on the idea that history is a linear process, with progress as the driving force propelling it into the future.

Given that the rectilinear time organized in the West according to abstract universals conflicts with the historical-structural reality of the former colonies, this conflict shows that the differences between our peoples and the Europeans are not merely spatial; they are also temporal. As I argue in this book, Euclides da Cunha, the peerless Brazilian writer of the early twentieth century, observed this historical-structural impasse with particular keenness. And observing it led the author of *Os sertões* (1902) to doubt the rectilinear meaning of history. It also caused him to suggest the need for our peoples, who lacked their own histories, to reactivate their memories (of slavery, oppression, racism, marginalization) and to project the embers of the past onto the present. Today we are

experiencing a situation already captured by da Cunha's essay: that the philosophy of history has been turned upside down by the growing organization of "societies on the move" (Zibechi 2006). Doubts have also been planted by the increasing self-analysis undertaken by the peoples of the Caribbean and South America—particularly those in the Andean and Amazonian regions—who have been making a troublesome and uncertain "leftward turn."

2. THE "LEFTWARD TURN" IN OUR SOCIETIES

A keen and level-headed critic of the changing faces of modernity and historical time, the Venezuelan anthropologist Fernando Coronil, argued in a recent essay (2011b) that, after a euphoric embrace of neoliberalism, more than 300 million Latin Americans are now ruled by governments that promote nationalist ideologies associated with socialist principles. What should we infer from this surprising leftward turn? How should we conceptualize it in social and cultural terms? What image of the future has guided it? Coronil is careful to point out that, before we ask whether or not the Left has a future, the work of theory is to clarify what notion of the future has led to such a turn. In other words, he is guided by the same interest that orients my work here: to illuminate the future that the Left is imagining right now, thus constructing what Coronil calls the "imaginary future of the present" (2011b: 232). Regardless of the different and contradictory forms to which this leftward turn is giving rise, then, the question is to investigate how the course of history has been reoriented over the past three or four decades.

As we know, the tremor that shook History (once again with a capital H) was less turbulent in some countries and regions of Latin America than in others. The leftward turn in the Southern Cone countries (Argentina, Uruguay, Chile) was basically pragmatic and reformist, eschewing the revolutionary radicalism that marked the processes that took place in Venezuela, Ecuador, and especially Bolivia. With actions on the ground, the Andean and Amazonian regions are shifting beyond the homogenizing idea of a single, universal modernity. We might speak of a shift to a "postliberal stage," if by "postliberal" we understand, to put it succinctly, the decentering of capitalism on the economic plane, of liberalism on the political plane, and of the nation-state as the matrix that defines social organization. This doesn't mean that capitalism, liberalism, and the nation-state have ceased to exist; it simply means that the discursive and social

centrality of these "universal" concepts has been significantly supplanted,[2] so that a wide range of social experiences are being considered as possible alternatives, thus constituting an unknown, and a problematic unknown at that, which nonetheless has thrown modernity into question.

There can be no doubt that Latin America has reached an uncertain historical crossroads. Here we see the growth and unfolding of critical theories at least as complex as those that dominated modernity, and richer in every aspect in both advantages and dangers, which point to different trajectories, from Marxist political economy and poststructuralism to what is now called "border thinking and decolonization thinking,"[3] of particular importance in Bolivia.

Looming on the horizon, which is no longer the exclusive property of a uniform modernity and its expectations, we can see new theoretical intertwinings, giving rise to multiple histories and futures, to diverse political and cultural projects, all converging on the same space or territory. So the present conjuncture can be defined based on two processes: the crisis of the neoliberal project of the past three decades, and the crisis of the project that has been unfolding since Conquest and colonization, which brought modernity to our America.

In the Bolivian case, the neoliberal reformers who initiated the free-market turn in 1985 had privatized state industries, deregulated production, increased labor flexibility, and encouraged foreign investment in natural resource extraction and exportation. As Bret Gustafson and Nicole Fabricant have argued recently (2011), neoliberals also embraced the rhetoric of "interculturalism," a gesture that offered some recognition to indigenous peoples. Yet interculturalism, among other well-meaning reforms, did not ameliorate the dislocation of rural people into urban peripheries and informal economies. Indeed, the economic restructuring of the 1980s led to the relocation of both the ex-miners from highland communities and small-scale subsistence farmers moving from the Amazonian lowlands to the urban peripheral spaces. Migrants to cities like El Alto, one of the highest major cities in the world, above the city of La Paz, found jobs in the expanding informal economy as domestic servants and street vendors, and frequently moved in search of employment. The social and economic fragmentation and intensified poverty produced by the reterritorialization of miners and peasants had much to do with the rise of the powerful social movements that ended up debunking the neoliberal state.

The neoliberal disruption and its attendant reforms, most crucially

municipal decentralization or "Popular Participation" (1994), led to the emergence of multiple new types of groups that mobilized around renewed concerns about territory and space. These territorially based organizations, such as the Federation of Neighborhood Councils (FEJUVE) in El Alto; the coca-grower movement in Cochabamba, where Evo Morales acquired power as a trade union leader; and the Landless Peasant Movement (MST) in Santa Cruz all multiplied and coexisted with new municipal indigenous organizations like the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ), the new peasant Confederation from the Andean altiplano. In this sense, hybrid spaces and dispossessed peoples became forums in which distinct ethnic and cultural groups forged new political identities around territorializing logics and agendas. Urban satellite cities like El Alto now house informal workers, ex-miners, mestizos, and indigenous Aymara. Against liberal theorists of *mestizaje*, I have argued before (2004) and continue arguing that these social changes are not representative of some modernizing rupture with indigeneities rooted in the past, but, to the contrary, are the result of the crisis of both the neoliberal project and of the racial project of domination that has persisted since Conquest and colonization.

The Bolivian case is revealing with regard to this double crisis, between "productivist nationalism and indigenous decolonization," as Gustafson and Fabricant have described it (2011: 17). What is going on in Bolivia today is a dogged fight between differing political and cultural projects—a fight between two logics at loggerheads with one another, the results of which are manifested here in the tension between the projects put forward by indigenous movements and those developed by the state itself. I call this "tension" because the former are decidedly at a "postliberal" stage, while the state proposes an alternative modernization project that does not entail the wholesale transformation of liberal society (Escobar 2009). Let me elaborate on this tension.

With the demise of neoliberalism in 2005, the leftward turn was put forward by the vice president of the Plurinational State himself, Álvaro García Linera, who stated that the current MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo) administration of Evo Morales should achieve a high level of state control over the production of wealth and the distribution of the surplus. Moving beyond the "structural adjustments" of neoliberalism, and convinced that the country should enter a new stage of postcapitalist development, the vice president was arguing for a pluralist process that would articulate the modernization of three key economic sectors: industry,

small urban craft businesses, and the indigenous / peasant rural sector. By speaking of the need for building a "satisfactory modernity" (2007), García Linera advocates an alternative form of modernity characterized by hybrid practices that decenter modernity via decolonizing projects such as "pluriversality" and "interculturality." For this leftward turn, "postliberalism" signifies a space / time in which social life isn't completely dominated by either the economy or individualist instrumental rationality, a pair of aspects fundamental to liberal modernity as seen from the Western perspective.

Though still modernizing and developmentalist, this leftward turn conceives of "postcapitalism" as an economic process that melds the hybrid practices of capitalism, alternative capitalism, and indigenous communalism.[4] In this way, liberal capitalism has ceased to be the hegemonic form of modernization, because it no longer occupies the field of the economy entirely on its own but, rather, has to share it with alternative economic systems. In other words, the prefix "post-" means, for this alternative modernity, the decentering that I have already discussed above: the economy is not "essentially" or "naturally" capitalist, nor are societies "naturally" liberal, and the state is no longer the only way in which social power can be instituted. These facts amplify the function of movements that emerge from the heart of civil society.

In sum, "postliberalism," "postcapitalism," and "poststatism," taken all together, constitute alternative forms that clash with the projects of modernity as thought from Western liberalism. These new movements support the hybrid practices of alternative modernity that best express this leftward turn (Escobar 2010).

But the leftward turn of productivist nationalism that Bolivia is undergoing is being resisted and questioned by a more radical proposal: the decolonial communal forms of exercising politics. For this "communalism," alternative modernization still maintains a teleological view of reality that is preserved within the confines of Eurocentrism and that reactualizes, in its expectation of a promising future, developmentalist imaginaries. Therefore this alternative modernization is being questioned by certain communal ways of practicing politics, which, from their radical decolonial enunciation, suggest the possibility of building forms of political and social organization that reject capitalism and the state itself. This is a radical philosophy that, starting from a different place of enunciation and from a different epistemology, renews the dynamics of certain popular movements in the present. Let me lay them out here briefly.

Popular uprisings in Bolivia during the first five years of the twenty-first century were characterized by a heavy decolonizing indigenous presence. The "water war" in Cochabamba in 2000 and the nationwide "natural gas war" of 2003 are the two best-known moments in this wave of uprisings, which, by rejecting the liberal system founded on representative democracy, introduced embers of past indigenous worlds into the present. This way of thinking has been reinforced since 2003 by the growth, not only demographic but also theoretical, of the great working-class urban concentration of El Alto, a city of nearly a million people that took in huge numbers of indigenous people displaced from mining and agricultural enclaves by the neoliberal reforms of the late 1980s. It was precisely in this urban conglomeration that a new kind of politics made its appearance, with significant influences from indigenous communal practices. This popular-communal and national-popular world is based on an epistemological position that, instead of rebuilding the social order from the heights of the state, as is now occurring with the alternative modernizing project of MAS, opts for a popular-indigenous project that views reality beyond the limits of the state. From this perspective, states "do not seem to be the appropriate tools for creating emancipatory social relations" (Zibechi 2006: 25). Another result of this is that the popular projects generated by indigenous-style poststate postliberalism go well beyond the kind of modernization centered on the power of the state: they express the actions of common people mobilized as a "multitude," as "a communitarian social machine that breaks up the power of the state" (Zibechi 2006: 161; see also Rabasa 2010: 138–147).

The communal decolonial practices that took place in Bolivia from 2000 to 2005 included the struggle for municipal autonomy for the city of El Alto, indigenous uprisings in rural communities, and uprisings of coca farmers and indigenous groups in the eastern half of the country. In my opinion, all of this is also related to the epistemological changes and the evolving view of life that have caused the state, as a form, to shatter when confronted with everyday activities, with the "here" and the "now" of a society on the move. Likewise, it is not surprising that the state has begun to recede in the face of new and unprecedented forms of self-government, which now include constituent assemblies, horizontal organizations, and carrying out civic tasks and duties by rotation.

So how should a sociocultural process as complex as the one I have been describing be approached? Should this process be examined exclusively from the theoretical space opened up by the social sciences? Wouldn't it be

appropriate to involve other forms of knowledge as well, such as the aesthetic forms and concrete experiences of the "lifeworlds" (*Lebenswelten*) opened up by historical agents that are developing in daily life itself?[5] It seems to me that questions about aesthetic forms, about the place from which this complex reality should be considered, and about the temporal conditioning that guides our thought, are important elements that this investigation must incorporate into our analysis of reality.

3. THE CONFLICT OVER TIME AND THE "DECOLONIAL TURN"

Could a society as diverse and regionally complex as Bolivia—with its indigenous and nonindigenous populations, its individual and collective subjects, living their lives according to both liberal and communal logics—possibly respond to a single, unified historical time? It seems to me that research on time must be particularly sensitive to the fact that today we are living through a conflict that has erupted between liberal modernity on the one hand, and the communal systems and "alternative modernities" promoted by the state on the other. The conflict between such dissimilar spatial-temporal logics has given rise to a range of contrasts: between neoliberal developmentalist models that are firmly rooted in modernity, and anti-neoliberal political movements that have adopted a hybrid modernizing outlook; between the nation-state as conceived under the republic that has been built over the past two centuries, and our current Plurinational State; between the national *criollo-mestizo* culture and interculturality; between capitalist development and the socialism that is being constructed today and is still hard to define; between the leftward turn and the more radical decolonial turn.

These are sharp contrasts; the novelty of the two different turns is disconcerting. The background theme, however, is the crisis of modernity. This is a crisis of discourses, practices, structures, and institutions that are closely related to the growth of the social sciences and that have dominated the fields of knowledge over the past two hundred years, as modernity has clung to the cultural and ontological assumptions of the dominant European societies. In this way, modernity brought about a convergence between philosophy, biology, and the construction of the social sciences. This produced a modern ontology that established a separation between nature and culture; the racist supremacy of some human beings over others; the notion that the autonomous individual forges his own existence with no help from the community; the belief that for

knowledge to be valid it must be objective, rational, and scientific; and the certainty that the cultural construction of the economy is an independent social practice, self-regulated by the invisible hand of the market, unrelated to social relationships (Escobar 2009).

The fact that the dominant form of imperial modernity has not seduced all European thinkers has been crucially important to my research. A very important tradition of decentered, "ex-centric" thinking exists in Europe, devoted to revealing the downfall of the fictions that we have been living up to now. This is a tradition of heterodox thought, stripped of illusions, dissenting from the dominant systems, which harasses people of good conscience and confronts them with the necessity of accepting the fall of a civilization whose universal validity is being questioned. I see a possibility of engaging a dialogue between this thought, disenchanted with modernity and its idea of progress, and the decolonizing projects we find in Latin America, particularly those of indigenous intellectuals who are thinking from their own needs. I conceive of decolonization as a local effort that has emerged from the struggle against colonial domination but cannot and should not disregard the tremendous critical contribution from Europe that questions Eurocentrism and the historical time that constitutes it. I think of José Carlos Mariátegui, an important early twentieth-century Peruvian essayist, as a revelatory and mature example of how to think from Latin America, how to imagine it beyond Western contributions in the various fields of knowledge and life, incorporating it into an epistemological and political project that, like Mariátegui's, will affirm the difference of those peoples who have been subjected to colonial domination for so long.[6] When it creates its own genealogy and its own history, decolonization cannot abandon those critical ex-centric thinkers who wrote in Europe and whose works are cited throughout this book.

I am speaking, then, of the possible formulation of "a paradigm other,"[7] to be articulated while bearing in mind not only the diversity of colonial histories that are now establishing the "South-South dialogue" (Latin America, Africa, Asia), but also the outstanding "place of enunciation" that is Southern and Eastern Europe, which has been undervalued as much by the geopolitics of knowledge as by the philosophy of history derived from Hegel's thought, which promotes progress and development (Mignolo 2000: 164). This decentered Europe occupies an important place in my research, particularly the thinking of those Europeans who question historicism and who, as we will see, have reclaimed an old mission of the

essay: to doubt, to meditate, to attain the wise old aspiration of living with dignity, in accordance with nature.

For essayists as diverse, heterodox, and subversive as the Rumanian philosopher E. M. Cioran or the German Jewish intellectual Walter Benjamin (1968 [1940]), whose critical reading of the philosophy of history is fundamental to my work, history is nothing but "an imbalance, a swift, intense dislocation of time itself, a rush towards a future where nothing ever *becomes* again" (Cioran 1983: 33). In his ruthless attack on historical time, Cioran conceives of it as a time so taut that it is hard to see how it won't shatter when it comes into contact with concrete reality. If people make history, history, a veritable shredder of human beings, unmakes people. Modernity thought it had subjugated history, but we now know that it has escaped and bloomed, as Cioran puts it, "into the insoluble and the intolerable: a lunatic epic, whose conclusion implies no notion of finality" (1983: 37). With the "future" eliminated, what goal can now be assigned to historical time? Discredited, historical time has turned into a nightmare, dropping as many capital letters as the illusions we have known (who would be so naive today as to write "progress" with a capital *P*?).

Is this view too pessimistic? Perhaps, given that it runs a risk of being taken as an apology for irrationality. In the same way that we affirm our need to explore our identity by regressing to an earlier self than the one modernity has constructed for us, we also postulate the existence of "an other" time within historical time—what Bloch referred to as "persistence of 'then' within 'now' "—and we argue that, by introducing the past into the present, this "other time" is incapable of projecting itself "forward," unable to escape into the future, the hereafter.[8] Its disappearance is related to the fact that it is impossible to measure social life with the yardstick of the future; the criterion we should follow is that social life belongs to the present because it is always in construction, while the future plays a lesser role.

As I have just argued, the crisis of modernity and its historical time also imply that economy is not essentially or naturally capitalist, that societies do not have to be governed exclusively by liberalism, and that the state is not the only way to institute social power. In short, the crisis of teleological, linear, and progressive historical time is linked to the decentering of capitalism, of liberalism, and of the state, the last of which has traditionally been taken as the matrix of social organization. The discursive centrality of all these categories formed by modernity has been seriously contested.

In his observation on future utopias, Coronil correctly notes a theme that I will cover later as a fundamental element in my own interpretation of the contemporary essay: the crisis of historical time and uncertainty about the shape of the future clash with the contents of political activism in the present (2011b). Given that political activism has no given a priori form, being mutable in nature, the heterogeneity of Latin America and of the Andean region in particular oblige us to think about reality from different conceptions of history and from a variety of cosmogonies. We must face the fact that our nations contain many nations, that a new diversity of internal communities must give rise to multiple views of the world. Thus, the appearance of "societies on the move" (Zibechi 2006) has placed in the public arena a wide range of social actors and times that overlap each other and give rise to diverse concepts of life.

Coronil also observes that the crisis of capitalism, of liberalism, and of the state form will not necessarily lead to a redemptive future that lies "beyond" the concepts pointed out here. For this reason, Coronil argues, "utopian dreams" are adopting new forms, related to the crossing of two trends of thought: one is the transformational politics of the "here and now"; the other is our lack of certainty about the future (2011b: 234). Both tendencies are staking out the tense social panorama in which we act, and are creating the situation that Coronil defines as a "crisis 'of' the present and 'about' the future" (2011b: 235). This crisis leads us to wonder whether the future is the positive "horizon of expectation" envisioned by the German historian Reinhart Koselleck (1985), or whether it is instead an uncertain, dubious construct, not expanding but shrinking. Is the future the visionary and perfectible event imagined by liberalism? Or won't this event be, rather, a stage of deterioration, social anomie, and depression?

The seed of doubt planted here about the future is not only the result of the crisis of liberalism and its free-trade practices; it is also linked to the deterioration and disparagement of socialism and its collapse at the end of the twentieth century, a fact that gave rise to the widely trumpeted victory of capitalism and to the so-called "end of history."

The effects of the crises of capitalism and socialism are quite revealing: today we are witnessing a growing polarization in our societies as well as growing global inequality, the ecological destruction of the planet, the mass exclusion of vast social sectors and human groups that have never had access to development, the predominance of financial speculation over production, and exacerbated consumerism and individualism. How can we be optimistic about the future when the outlook is so unsettling?

Though the pernicious effects of the crisis of modernity occurred first in the nations of the South, unleashing protests against the "structural adjustments" imposed by neoliberal regimes, the limitations of the capitalist system became visible worldwide only when they affected the heart of Empire, in 2008. Today it is clear that we are not witnessing the failure of financial institutions in poor nations that have proved incapable of reaping the benefits of a globalized marketplace, but the deep crisis of a whole financial system that has put its failures and limitations on display.

So, then, the political changes produced by the crisis in the capitalist system, and in particular the controversial leftward turn that Coronil mentions in his essay, have a clear result: history has not ended; on the contrary, it has returned with unprecedented strength. But how should we think of it now? What kind of history governs us? What future inspires it? Is it possible to imagine aesthetic forms that can interpret this new reality?

4. THE ESSAY AS A TRANSGRESSIVE PROPOSITION

My aim in this section is to probe the category and even the status of the "foundational essays" that oriented the construction of the nation-state in the century after independence, comparing them and questioning them with my version of what the essay could be as a transgressive genre confronting the current rationalizing state of modernization. My version of the essay—a very subjective one, undoubtedly, and one I find useful for introducing the four essays that make up this book—is tied to the critical processes of the historical time that gives the essay its subversive, transgressive function, very much as recent ex-centric thinkers conceptualized it in the past, including the Palestinian critic Edward Said and the German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno, whose critical theory of society abandons the historical, rectilinear time of modernity.

I think it is necessary to clarify the place of the essay in relation to other literary genres, especially the novel. There can be no doubt that the transgressive role I have given to the essay is also characteristic of essay-novels such as *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* (translated as *The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below*) by the Peruvian writer José María Arguedas, which I briefly analyze in chapter 1. In this novel, as in others by Arguedas, we are clearly observing a writer of dialogistic orality, who, by interweaving Spanish with Quechua, has created one of the most accomplished examples of transculturation in literature.

Without scorning or underestimating the ability of any genre to subvert reality, I emphasize the role of the essay because I find in it a particularly keen capacity to think in fragments and against the grain of the historical time set up by the totalizing linearity of modernity.[9] The essay, a literary practice known for brevity, interests me because it is a genre that introduces doubt into its aesthetic form, refusing to situate itself as the beginning or end of the reality it describes and studies. For Adorno, whose critical thinking has helped me conceive of the essay as subversive, it was neither science nor art but an all-out effort on the part of youthful will to set fire to any totalizing scientific possibility. Luck and play are thus the essential characteristics of the essay, which, unlike the epic, has no utopian origin. The essay begins and ends with what it means to discuss or analyze; it says just enough, then stops when it is done with what it meant to say, unconcerned with whether it has exhausted or resolved its topic. In the process, the essay leaves questions unanswered.

The essay, then, is provisional in character, and doubt is its fundamental characteristic. In Latin America, however, there is a close relationship between the essay and the rationalist nature of the nation-building project, with its Enlightenment roots. This close relationship between "literary Americanism" and the European Enlightenment would complicate any possible connection between the essay and the aesthetic representation of decolonization. Aware of this situation, I still think it is worth looking into the relationship between the loss of the unity, the homogeneity, the perfectibility of the historical project of modernity, and my approach to the nature of the essay as an appropriate transgression for uncertain times such as these, with the crisis now developing about the theme of decolonization.

The close relationship between the essay and nation building in Latin America is beyond question. "Literary Americanism," the trend behind the most important essays of "our América," as José Martí called it (I will take a more detailed look at this "Americanism" in chapter 2), followed the historicist tradition that intellectuals such as Andrés Bello and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento began in the mid-nineteenth century. A project that gave expression to free-trade economics and political liberalism, this "Americanism" tightly linked local culture with Western culture. In attempting to construct their vision of a new American cosmos, the "men of letters" of that historical moment integrated local nature and human groups into the social program fashioned by the nascent liberal bourgeoisie, and subjugated them to it. By connecting the essay with another

specific narrative genre, the epic of the conquest of the national hinterlands, "literary Americanism" functioned as an ideological practice of the booming commercial bourgeoisie, turning their practice into a national enterprise. In this sense, essays from the nineteenth century, and from the early decades of the twentieth had little or nothing to do with any sort of decolonizing emancipation; instead, they reinforced the new nations' "colonizing postcolonial" nature, fashioned from the perspective of European historicism, which, under its view of social perfectibility and of confidence in the future, was incapable of harboring the doubts and uncertainties that arose from the unrestricted application of foreign theories to profoundly different and contrasting local realities. Disseminated by the lettered culture of the era, these essays were the result of efforts by intellectuals who, in Edward Said's happy observation about the intellectual face of all colonizing enterprises, were "in symbolic relationship with their time" (1994: 43).

This project, "foreshadowed" by European historicism, came to include the very theories of *indigenismo* and mestizaje that Latin American essayists elaborated, beginning with Martí in the late nineteenth century, through José Vasconcelos in Mexico and, among others, the Bolivians Alcides Arguedas and Franz Tamayo in the early twentieth century, all the way to the more modern and liberating proposals of intellectuals such as Agustín Cueva of Ecuador. Reflections on the same, such as the theory of mestizaje, which seems to be a genuinely autochthonous development, still did not question the European historicist trajectory that would link America to ancient Greece, an inheritance which, even if it didn't pass probate, continued unrestrictedly reproducing rationalistic historiographical categories from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that had the ultimate effect of silencing and utterly displacing local cultures.

Given the profoundly rationalist and historicist nature of the Latin American essay, one has to ask whether it wouldn't be unfruitful to rethink it at a decolonizing moment that is struggling against the current of the Europeanizing project that gave birth to the foundational Latin American essay, as I have briefly argued here. I think there are powerful reasons to reclaim this genre for the needed liberatory ends; to rethink it against the current of the instrumental rationality introduced by modern culture; and to connect it with the conflicts raised by that "other America" about which Said has spoken (2003). Looking at it from the renovating viewpoint of contemporary thinkers such as the Martinique-born French psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon, I believe the fragmentary character of the essay—I

am thinking of Pascal, Adorno, Benjamin—can also be made to carry out the task of dismantling the identity image that local elites have constructed, making way for the "silent" subjectivities that are thought from different epistemological suppositions. Beyond the fundamentalisms of the Right and the Left, it seems to me that Latin American pluralism cannot be reduced to the proposition of a homogenizing ethnic identity, which, like the ocular centrism introduced by the metaphor of mestizaje (Sanjinés 2004), forgets that diversity cannot be reduced to a Hegelian-style synthesis, but rather should open up, widen itself into a diversity that cannot be thought of as identical with one's self. There is, in this insistence that attention must be paid to the lists of diversity, a way of thinking that departs from the history on the move toward a synthetic unity, toward a resurrection of a lost wholeness. Seen from Europe, which has also had its thinkers in exile, ex-centric essayists, critics of instrumental reason, this complete rejection of the Hegelian concept of history as progress, as the identity of subject and object, appears in the construction of history in fragments that was advanced by Adorno, whose conception of the essay "rubs history against the grain," struggles against the spirit of the era, and, by introducing the "embers of the past" into the present, focuses history backward rather than forward (Adorno 2000 [1958]). Let me be clear: rather than following Adorno's arguments as if they were prescriptions for today's Latin America, I want to put them to use in organizing the argument of transgression. We must construct a "border epistemology" that will let us talk from various systems of knowledge, one of which is European ex-centric critical thought about modernity and its historical time.

To think the local from the past, I must reclaim the essay as the form that makes it possible to question the four "narratemes" (to use Vladimir Propp's 1968 [1927] neologism for the narrative equivalent of a morpheme, that is, a minimal narrative unit) that constitute the set of narrative structures that package and control modernity and that dress up reality in an appearance of variety and diversity.

The first of these narratemes is the preconception that the nation is a collective "we" (this common "we" deriving from the imaginary of European history) that can overcome differences by using an all-encompassing rhetoric that pays only lip service to the rightful claims of diversity.

The second narrateme relates to the difficulty that the rhetoric of modernity has in accepting the controversial nature of historicism, supporting its homogenizing view with the concept that history obeys "objective" laws. The critique of this view brings us to the basic argument of Adorno,

who, as Susan Buck-Morss has observed, rejected any "ontological, positive definition of history's philosophical meaning" (1977: 49). There can thus be no "objective" law of history that is independent of human actions and that can guarantee the progress of society.

Without stopping to consider the origin of its enunciation (who speaks, and for whom), the historicist project sets up a third stumbling block: its radical intolerance for anyone who dissents from power, conceiving any kind of dissent as a complaint coming from the irrational "anti-nation."

Finally, the dominant narrative declares unacceptable any sort of knowledge that does not come from what has been formulated "from above" by the authorities who hold power. Since the essay is thought of as a counter-memory linked to subaltern groups, to critical collectivities that operate "outside" Europeanizing historicism and from the "outskirts" of modernity, its transgressive role must cling to a principle of "non-identity" (Adorno 2000 [1958]: 98), which, moving beyond the rationalizations of an elitist discourse that ties the nation to power, would be able to place the essay as a privileged form of resistance, of the nation's struggle with itself (Courville 2010). This "nonidentity principle" on which Adorno's "negative dialectic" is based is a theoretical tool that can be used to demythify the ideological web of discourse that is woven from power. In this sense, it seems to me that Adorno's process of nonidentity dialectics can help us conceptualize transgression, because it will allow us to read against the grain the discourse that has been referring to the nation over the past two centuries in order to turn it into the exclusive, hegemonic form of collective identity of modernity (hence the felt need to use "we" in its narrative), and the principal if not the only source of legitimacy for political power. Therefore, when a transgressive essay takes up this nation-building narrative, its point is to show that the narrative is nothing but a myth concealing the monadic, isolated, elitist nature of national construction. This transgressive process, which denies an identity-based synthesis, thus sets forth the existence of multiple subjectivities that complicate the seemingly collective nature of the "we" that was delivered "from up above." By emphasizing the fragmentary nature of social reality, the transgressive essay also demonstrates the double character of the concepts "modernity / coloniality" and "archaism / modernity." The constant use of antithetical pairs doesn't transform them into a synthesis; rather, it demythifies both concepts and the realities that they try to define.

By thinking, after Adorno and Said, more about "beginnings" (in which the past manages things so that it can return to the present, to question it and trouble it) than about "origins" (taken as utopian, as

arcadian), the essay distances itself from poiesis, the construction of literary images; recall that in *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975), Said established, in the best Platonic style, the difference between the essay and literature. The essay is tied to the world of values, while literature is tied to the world of images and the senses—to reinforce a secular mysticism similar to what Said himself developed in the 1990s, and what the Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui before him developed in the early twentieth century (I will analyze this in chapter 2). I am thinking, then, of a transgressive essay that, as an aesthetic proposition tied to the world of values, and as an advocate of the self-determination of nations, of peoples, will seek a nonidentity dialectic to mark the struggle of the nation against itself (in reality, its struggle to free itself) in order to gain recognition and respect for its "first nature" as diverse and pluriversal. Therefore, I refer to the essay, in the best Adornian sense of the term, as the most appropriate form of resistance and transgression: a renewed restart for the struggle in the interior of society itself that gave rise to the essay as the foundational form par excellence. This form, tied to the construction of the nation-state, depicts the mental horizon of modern humankind as an inescapable reality, one that shapes and determines all aspects of collective life, from people's characters to their forms of artistic expression. Treating this idea of the nation as ontological necessity "against the grain," it would appear that, were our way and manner of being in the world completely determined, transgressive thought should insist on the fact that only the nation can fight to liberate itself, to overcome the "hard boundaries" (Duara 1996: 169) that it has constructed from the vantage point of power. So my vision of the essay, which naturally does not implicate the views of other critics on the subject, revolves around Adorno's declaration, in *Minima Moralia* (2005 [1951]: 39), that "it is part of morality not to be at home in one's home."

But reflecting on the theme of transgression as seen by two thinkers in exile, Adorno and Said, I ask myself whether the essay can recover what was sacrificed and lost by homogenizing unity. I do not have the answer, but I think life itself, filled with twists and turns, creates decentered and fragmentary aesthetic forms, without any historicist a priori principles at all. So I opt for the essay as a transgression that can express "the turbulent richness of life." In tension between the lyrical expression of the poetic and the narrative demands of the mundane, the essay is the genre that conveys the lost, strayed, arcane flow of life. It organizes a new conceptual ordering of life, an arrangement of ideas that might cast doubt on the

congealed and definitive solutions contained in the abstract values of philosophy. Perhaps because we now need art more than science itself, I again call my reader's attention to the proposition that the essay gives meaning to ex-centric, transgressive human events, a signification that they cannot attain by themselves, examining them and connecting them with the ultimate problems of life and fate.

Since empirical daily life thus needs the essay, this genre is an unimpeachably mundane historical experience because it implies an intellectual opening devoted to connecting the formal with the complex folds of life. The historical experience of the essay thus provides for a particularly interesting exploration of topics connected with ex-centric problems such as the everyday experiences of migration and exile. In this way, the essay opens up to the invigorating presence of topics too often made invisible by historicism. This new historical experience presented by the essay would not be exclusively concerned with the "imagined communities" of the dominant cultures; rather, it should also reclaim alternative communal experiences, that is, the formerly marginalized and little-explored experiences of ethnic groups.

But this new aesthetic experience presented by the essay is not exclusively political. Indeed, it would be wrong to think of it as one long political message. The essay, as an experience linked to the vicissitudes of life, should revive our senses. At the end of his introduction to *Reflections on Exile* (2002), Said argues that exile should sharpen our view of things, not keep us bound up in mourning or, even less, in hatred, which corrodes everything. What is forgotten, what is made invisible, should provide new motives to understand that although there is no return to the past that can be brought fully home in the present, the present must necessarily pay attention to the past if it wants to break with what Cioran called "the quietude of Unity" promoted by European historicism and by its most intimate nationalist aspiration: to construct the modern self. Opposed to this historicist perspective, the essay as I envision it must necessarily reinsert the discontinuity of the invisible past into the *longue durée* of history. As a turbulent experience of the empirical world, the essay is better prepared today to tackle the problems of active communities, of communities "on the move," than the pretentious gesture of the national epics, which, by forgetting the asynchronic experiences of the other, tended to homogenize and equalize everything.

Given that the question of the essay was, and remains, one of the subjects that most interests me intellectually, Xavier Albó is absolutely

correct, in his prologue to the Spanish version of this book (2009: xi), to identify my research here with the proposition of the essay. Indeed, in this book, our doubts concerning the meaning of history run remarkably parallel to the uncertainties that the essay raises for us as an aesthetic experience of transgression.

Confined neither to science nor to philosophy, both of which cling to "abstract universals" as their goals, the essay is, as I put it at the beginning of this section, the literary expression best suited to posing doubts and conjectures about the concrete lives of human beings. To keep from turning into an abstract framework for universals disconnected from the life at hand, the essay delves into experience, into perceptible and concrete life. For the investigation I propose, it is very important to bear in mind one key limitation of the essay: it raises problems connected to the future of humanity, but it gives no definitive answers. In other words, the responses in an essay do not provide solutions like those that science or, in the higher regions, religion and philosophy aspire to offer. The irony of the essay rests on the fact that the essayist claims familiarity with the ultimate problems of life in a way that leads us to believe that these are merely passing incidents in life (Lukács 1974 [1910]: 15–39).

There is, then, a clear difference between the philosopher of history and the essayist. The former acts on the level of ideas; the latter seeks connections with complex, concrete reality. Whereas the philosopher of history always has answers, the essayist projects only doubts and conjectures. For the essayist, what is exceptional is not that History may have ended or definitively left, but that it is returning today at full strength, in so particular and sui generis a way that it has ceased to be progressive, because it has dispensed with the route dictated by the rectilinear character of national histories. The essay thus captures the uncertain course of that history. So, as Coronil noted, today neither the Right nor the Left can project a clear, sure, epic fate that might express how human beings might adapt to the community and to the universe. With all totalizing possibilities shattered, with any ability to explain the world in which we are living vanished, aesthetics can no longer double for ethics, an ability that, in the Hegelian sense of the term, could have been conferred in better times upon the national epics. I therefore hazard to pose the necessity of the essay as a transgression, because it is the literary genre that best expresses, along with paradox and fragmentary writing, the current rupture between humans and their social universe. The attempt to return once more

to the Eurocentered modernity that covers up this dysfunction is, then, one of the most controversial utopias of our time.

Ever since European conquest and colonization, the elites of Latin America have followed the Western guidelines in having an ordering sense of the future. The problem now is that the horizons of expectation have grown murky and unpredictable. Indeed, the arbitration of those who were traditionally prepared to partake of the banquet of modernity, which consigned large groups of people to an uncertain "not yet," postponed the desires of the "noncontemporary" identities that are bursting into history with such force today. These are the huge sectors of postcolonial Latin American society that were forced for centuries to sit in the "waiting room of history" (Chakrabarty 2000: 8–10).

It seems to me that it isn't for the philosophy of history, which is fundamentally teleological and progress-oriented, but rather for what I call the "transgressive" essay, to capture the revolt of these sectors of Latin American society, which up to now have had a past of great economic and political instability, a chronic uncertainty that has deepened the inequality between the modern and the nonmodern, between the modern and the anachronistic, and that has given rise to "the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous." And this has a lot to do with the examples of Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia. These countries are now displaying a much more confrontational "decolonizing turn" (socialist, *indigenista*, and revolutionary) than the societies where the Left has tended to establish political alliances and compacts based on formally democratic procedures. These cases demonstrate a historical modality for which the future appears ethereal and ghostly, like a space inhabited by the specters of the past. We are living through a turbulent present that is stretching on and on in time, occupying the space and time usually taken up by the future, yet it is not the future, which has turned into a kind of waiting period that should not be confused with modernity's much more solid horizon of expectations.

Pushed beyond the horizon of expectations promoted by modernity, the future takes on a spectral form, a ghostly appearance that stalks the paths of our lives. What are these specters from the past? They are specters formed by colonialism—events that, despite independence and nearly two hundred years of republican life, continue to influence (and to disturb) our present. Recognizing and overcoming them is the most important task for our decolonizing enterprise. I therefore put forward this new

transgressive model of the essay as an aesthetic contribution to decolonization, as an aesthetic practice located at the margins of historical temporality, a practice that embodies the displacement, even the rupture of the time-form, which ought to be dealing with the empirical experience of the modern / colonial world. Decolonizing means reinscribing the suppressed, the ruinous, in the present. So reclaiming the essence of the essay means showing how the time-form—historical time; the national epic; the narratemes linked to modernity—shatters on contact with real life. In other words, I wonder whether it wasn't a peculiarly mestizo-criollo gesture to adopt a modernity that had no notion of the infinite precariousness of the local. Doesn't the imaginary of the dominant intelligentsia clash with the empirical experience of the modern / colonial world, with the place where the subaltern localization of Latin America is inscribed?

Again, I propose that the essay be considered an aesthetic transgression linked to decolonization. Having observed modernity "from the outside," I can vouch for the fact that Western historical time shatters when it meets the life of our peoples. After two long centuries of homogenizing projects, guided by cultural and political elites identified with the Western notion of progress, today's movements appear to be changing the rules of the game, making "the noncontemporaneous" possible in multiple nations whose respective cosmogonies can disrupt the spatial-temporal form of the nation-state. Thus, the "ruins of the past"—I prefer to call them "embers," a means of reinscribing the past (refusing to turn back the clock) in the debate over the new plurinational states—can set the imaginaries of the present afire. The need to reclaim icons of the past is a symptom that reveals our anxiety over learning that the future is uncertain and that we need to make the present more stable. This is why I prefer to talk about "embers" that illuminate our present-day struggles; this is a new image that reveals the presence now of flames that seemed to be extinguished but can be brought back to life to feed our utopian dreams.

5. THE EMBERS OF THE PAST

The four essays I have collected in this book as an exercise in the critique of historicism and modernity were thought through from the vantage point of an illusion-free need to study the conflict between the cultures and movements of indigenous peoples, on the one hand, and the modern nation-state in its contemporary Latin American manifestation, on the other.

As the reader can see from this introduction, I find the Bolivian case to be a particularly important example of this conflict, one that might even be taken as a contemporary model for other nations whose construction of modernity remains incomplete and problematic. But this book is also, above and beyond any argument it presents, a set of four essays on socio-cultural temporality: the persistence in the present of the "embers of the past," which, buried and smoldering, are still capable of lighting new conflagrations.

These essays were inspired by the idea that questions of time have been relatively forgotten in cultural studies—roughly speaking, ever since Michel Foucault declared that "certain ideological conflicts animating present-day polemics take place between the pious descendants of time and the fierce inhabitants of space" (Foucault 2008 [1967]: 14). Following Foucault, the category of time was relegated to nineteenth-century philosophies of history, while space was understood as the category from which cultural otherness was to be approached.

Rejecting this dichotomous conception of the categories of time and space, in this book I argue that the current process of incorporating indigenous peoples and cultures obliges us to rethink our temporal categories. In "The Changing Faces of Historical Time," the first essay in the book, I contrast the cases of the Peruvian novelist José María Arguedas and the Bolivian essayist Carlos Montenegro. Following Arguedas, I argue that the inclusion of indigenous peoples and cultures in the modern nation has been accompanied by a renewal of temporal categories. Indigenous cultures experience time in a very different way from how it has been employed in the construction of the modern nation and from how it has maintained a continuity between tradition and progress, as painstakingly examined by the German historian Koselleck (2002). Indigenous migrations, dramatically represented in Arguedas's posthumous novel *The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below* (2000 [1973]), demand their place in modernity, but as I argue in this essay, they bear a completely different temporal relationship than the one that governs the axis between conservatism and progressivism, between tradition and revolution, which characterizes modernity. These migrations (and the cultural texts associated with them) force us to bear in mind that the state is somewhat more than a modern institution: that is, the state includes multiple forms of relating to time and history; it contains multiple twists and turns that cannot be simplified by a linear narrative like the one Carlos Montenegro constructed in his essay *Nacionalismo y coloniaje* (1994 [1943]), in which the

noetic experiences of tragedy and comedy are revitalized by the novel and the catastrophic conflicts of the historical past lead to an epic beginning of the new social order introduced by the modern nation-state.

In the second essay, "Is the Nation an Imagined Community?" I express my doubts about how appropriate Benedict Anderson's well-known image of the nation as an "imagined community" is for the study of postcolonial societies. The newly independent nineteenth-century nations of Latin America are especially important in Anderson's study, but though he mentions the difficulty of building these national communities due to the marked economic inequalities the new nations faced, he doesn't take into account the irreducible specificity of the indigenous communities; instead he concentrates exclusively on the lettered culture of the criollo elites who organized the imagined construction of the nation-state. Isn't Anderson's own study a homogenizing view of the reality that was only consolidated in part in the hinterlands of our countries? My essay also illustrates this conjecture with two examples: the first is the rebellion of the *jagunços* in Canudos, in northeastern Brazil, which the incomparable Euclides da Cunha narrated so dramatically and passionately (2010 [1902]). The second example is how José Carlos Mariátegui, the great Peruvian thinker and essayist of the early twentieth century and the founder of Marxism in the Andes, discovered the indispensable role that Peruvian indigenismo played in the construction of Peru (1971 [1928]). At the end of the essay, I ask, but refrain from answering, some key questions raised by my reading of these two authors: How should "archaic" but contemporaneous ethnic groups be integrated into the modern nation? How should popular (folk, working-class) culture and society be addressed? As "the people," following Ernesto Laclau's analysis (2005)? Or perhaps as a "multitude," to appropriate the reflections of the recent theorists and critics of empire, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004), on this topic?

While my second essay dismantles the concept "nation," I devote the third and more complex essay, "'Now Time': Subaltern Pasts and Contested Historicism," to dissecting the concept "time." In this essay I ask how elements of the anachronistic and premodern past—in particular, the presence of supernatural beings and situations—can be translated and integrated into modern societies that have seen these archaicisms break through because of the direct action of indigenous people "on the move." In this essay, I offer, among other themes, a rereading of Marxist anthropologist Michael Taussig's work on the presence of the Devil in the tin mines of Bolivia (1980).

Won't the pursuit of integration in times of struggle and conflict be precarious and isolating? My fourth and final essay, titled "The Dimensions of the Nation and the Displacements of Social Metaphor in Bolivia," shows that the lack of connection between the "civic" and the "ethnic" continues to raise tension between time and space.

By discussing how social metaphors represent the evolution of the Bolivian nation-state throughout the twentieth century, this final essay revolves methodologically around the urgent need to reclaim, as part of the theme of ethnic nationalities, the subjectivities that are still being labeled "premodern" or "preexisting," which are prevented from participating in the production, distribution, and organization of knowledge, thus reinforcing the hierarchical structures of power. We can see how present-day indigenous movements are still hindered even by bureaucrats and administrators who critique the nation-state and aim to remake it, yet who still adopt positions that are problematic as concerns the spatial-temporal conflict. Are there alternatives that can overcome the temporal order of modernity? As opposed to modernizing efforts to marginalize national ethnicities, it seems to me that the most recent territorial conflicts in the Bolivian lowlands, particularly the claims to safeguard the TIPNIS (Territorios Indígenas del Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécure), would entail, among other things, the progressive decentering and displacement of capitalist economy, with a concomitant expansion of human and nature's rights tied to "postliberalism."

In short, the four essays in this book argue that ethnic movements—lately characterized as "societies on the move"—have introduced doubt into the rectilinear course of modernity. They have reopened the gap—the hiatus, Jacques Lacan would call it—between the symbolic and the real. The aim of *Embers of the Past* is to raise, but not to resolve, the conflict caused by this painful rupture. To that end, the decolonizing proposals in my essays insist that social demands that have never been fulfilled over the centuries should be brought back in the present (the past being a resource for our hardened present); that indigenous values should be accepted and integrated into society; and that a transformation of the self should take place, beginning by overcoming the egocentrism of modernity.