

**LITERATURE AND CULTURAL STUDIES**

# From Indigenous Literatures to Native American and Indigenous Theorists: The Makings of a Grassroots Decoloniality

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From the coloniality of power to the decolonial swerve, US-centered decolonial academics concur with the foundational points introduced by Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano. Nevertheless, they seldom cite Latin American Indigenous or Native American intellectuals' decolonial perspectives, or examine specific bodies of critical thinking emerging in hemispheric Indigenous communities. In turn, a diversity of Indigenous paradigms and methods are appearing in the Americas, either as literary texts or critical works. Indigenous or Native American writers and theorists are often political actors, working within their respective grassroots movements, or writing to advance specific goals of their own communities. This article will emphasize Native American and Indigenous decolonial issues framed from a critique of contemporary Indigenous narratives. Their views both enrich and complicate Western decolonial theorists' assumptions. Examining their production provides continuity to the political and epistemological searches of both, while also contributing to breaking down those invisible walls separating them.

De la colonialidad del poder al giro decolonial, los académicos decoloniales que trabajan en los Estados Unidos coinciden con los aspectos fundacionales introducidos por el sociólogo Aníbal Quijano. Sin embargo, rara vez citan las perspectivas descolonizadoras de intelectuales indígenas. Tampoco examinan las corrientes específicas de pensamiento crítico que están surgiendo en las comunidades indígenas del hemisferio. Toda una gran diversidad de paradigmas y métodos indígenas han aparecido en las Américas, sea como textos literarios, o como pensamiento crítico. Los escritores o teóricos indígenas suelen ser actores políticos, trabajando dentro de sus respectivos movimientos de base, o bien escribiendo para avanzar metas concretas de estas organizaciones. Este artículo enfatiza las problemáticas descolonizadoras indígenas enmarcadas desde una perspectiva de la crítica de narrativas indígenas contemporáneas. Sus puntos de vista enriquecen y complican las presuposiciones de muchos teóricos decoloniales occidentales. Examinando su producción provee continuidad a las búsquedas políticas y epistemológicas de ambos, y contribuye a romper los muros invisibles que los separan.

Grotesque descriptions were employed by Spanish clerics to discredit the metaphysical concepts of Mayas, Mexicas (Aztecs), and other native peoples of the Americas. In 1525, the Dominican official Tomás Ortiz proclaimed that Indians ate human flesh, engaged in sodomy, went naked, and had no respect for love, virginity, or the truth. He reported that Indians “were incapable of learning. ...God has never created a race more full of vice and composed without the least mixture of kindness or culture. ...The Indians are more stupid than asses and refuse to improve in anything.”<sup>1</sup> He went on to become commissioner of the Inquisition a year later.<sup>2</sup>

Neta Crawford (2002, 148) also cites Franciscan Bishop Juan de Quevedo, who stated, “If any people ever deserved to be treated harshly, it is the Indians, who resemble ferocious beasts more than rational creatures.”

<sup>1</sup> See Crawford (2002, 148). The quote is her translation.

<sup>2</sup> The *Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 262.

Dominican missionary Domingo de Betanzos, who participated in the so-called Spiritual Conquest, evangelizing Indigenous subjects throughout New Spain, charged in 1533 that Indians were beasts destined for extinction. These outrageous fabrications led to a bonfire in the Yucatecan town of Máani', where the infamous Franciscan friar Diego de Landa (1524–1579) burned Maya codices and approximately twenty thousand cult images in his auto-da-fé of July 12, 1562, damaging Maya culture forever.<sup>3</sup> It should be no surprise, then, that Yucateco Maya writer Javier Gómez Navarrete inserts a passage like the following in his novel *Cecilio Chi*: "Peons begin the workday as phantoms in the morning fog. By noon the sun's anger is toasting them, but they do not interrupt the cutting of the *pencas* with their curved machete. ... Their rags are sweat and dust, they are bleeding on their feet, hands, and back; sometimes, they lift a calabash gourd to drink their bitterness" (2006, 318).<sup>4</sup>

Indigenous literatures in Mesoamerica (southern Mexico and Central America) have become counter-discourses to the Eurocentric racist clichés that have prevailed in the *longue durée* of coloniality. This corpus began to appear in print in the 1980s. Published in the authors' maternal languages and in Castilian,<sup>5</sup> these works express a deep yearning for social, ethical, cosmological, and political autochthonous values. They also rescue and vindicate their maternal languages in written form, standardize systems of writing, and stage an unlimited range of characters and situations that accommodate a means to envision alternative understandings of Indigenous knowledges and cultural sophistication. Displaying how communities balance native ontological categories that often close the divide between nature and culture, this literature renders pertinent imaginative activity on the pressures of Eurocentric modernization on Indigenous communities, while reclaiming identities at odds with standing Western models of modern citizenship. This article will emphasize Indigenous decolonial issues framed from a critique of contemporary Indigenous literatures and Indigenous intellectuals. Their views both enrich and complicate Western decolonial theorists' assumptions.

The reasons behind the emergence of Indigenous narratives are complex, varying from one country to the next. But all share the experience of Indigenous subjects entering universities in the second half of the twentieth century and resisting the celebration of the quincentenary of the Spanish invasion in 1992. The explanations are linked to the consequences of the 1980s revolutionary crisis in the case of Guatemala, to the radical Indigenous activism that developed in the Andean region in the wake of the García Meza dictatorship in Bolivia and the heritage of the Velasco Alvarado government in Peru, to resisting Pinochet's dictatorship combined with a growing sense of self-pride in the Chilean Mapuche case, and to the emergence of Zapatismo in Chiapas, Mexico, in 1994. In this last case, with the ensuing reaction of the Mexican state to combat the Zapatista insurgency with a wide array of developmentalist models and projects, a greater number of literary texts written by Indigenous authors in their own languages burst forth, as Nahua, Binnizá, Bene Xhon, Yucateco Maya, Yokot'anob, Rarámuri, or Wixáritari, took advantage of these policies to produce novels, short stories, plays, or poetry.

Emerging Indigenous textualities disrupt the myth of homogeneous nation-states. Operating in unprivileged peripheral spaces, most Indigenous writers reconfigure their displaced, subalternized, and racialized identities, regardless of whether this signifies a belated, and critical, embrace of the "lettered city." Often, these authors are the purveyors of self-generated cognizance, one that originates in nontraditional and unconventional sites, even when some of them express it in what appears to be a traditional, anachronistic, form: the novel. Indigenous writers disrupt the myth that information, social imaginaries, and learning are produced exclusively by cosmopolitan *letrados* or academic disciplines. In so doing, these narratives provincialize cosmopolitan critics, writers, and academic institutions, challenging the Western-centered knowledge-producing machine.

Indigenous political struggles from roughly the 1980s on yielded many forms of decolonizing and decolonial practices among grassroots intellectuals and artists.<sup>6</sup> Their textual representations now configure

<sup>3</sup> John F. Chuchiak argues, "With one single bonfire, centuries of Maya culture and religion perished forever" (2005, 615). For three months, Landa practiced "savage unselective torture" in Máani' and two adjacent provinces, where the treatment of Mayas was even worse (Clendinnen 1987, 75). More than 4,500 Mayas were tortured during this period and, according to the few records found, 158 died during their interrogations. Many committed suicide or disappeared. Hundreds were left crippled, "their shoulder muscles irreparably torn, their hands paralyzed" (Clendinnen 1987, 76).

<sup>4</sup> My translation from the Castilian version.

<sup>5</sup> I use "Castilian" to refer to the language spoken by the citizens of Castile, *castellano* in Spanish. Spain's autonomous communities speak and have legalized their own languages, such as Catalan in Catalonia, Euskera in the Basque Country, or Galego in Galicia.

<sup>6</sup> There is a subtle difference between the terms *decolonizing* and *decolonial*. The first one is generically associated with all kinds of struggles against colonialism. Decolonization engages with imperialism and colonialism at every level. In contrast, *decolonial* is understood as resulting from coloniality. If colonialism produced racial, political, and social hierarchical orders that disenfranchised and subalternized colonized peoples of the Americas during three centuries of colonization, resulting in a caste

the social imaginaries crafted by Indigenous literatures. By articulating political and cultural critiques of racism, violence, and overall abjection in which their communities had been submerged since the Spanish invasion, their signifiers ultimately undermine the legitimacy of existing colonial practices. In so doing, they point to larger ontological issues that inevitably fall within the purview of decolonial perspectives. Within the United States, we owe the emergence of decolonial thinking in academia to the efforts of Aníbal Quijano and Walter Dignolo, whose epistemic turn has marked all decolonial thinking in academia to date.<sup>7</sup> In his seminal text *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (1995), Dignolo argues that the epistemic effects of colonialism are among the most damaging, far-reaching, and least understood problems impacting Westernization and modernity.

There have been, however, matters of contention in the relationship between literary production and decoloniality in academic settings of the global North. For Latin Americanist cultural studies, decolonial studies seemed a no-miss approach. The Spanish invasion of the Americas is the emblematic moment when the centrality and superiority of European knowledge was first posited, when Western epistemologies easily became sources for ideologies of racial and cultural superiority. Decoloniality would liberate the global South by explaining the nature of its perpetual subalternization to Europe. It would account for a diversity of knowledges capable of challenging Eurocentric epistemic and political projects. Indigenous and Afro-descendant knowledges, cultures, social relations, and everyday behaviors—and their literary production—could be explored from within their own perspectives, not the hauteur of the colonial gaze of Eurocentric subjects pretending to speak in their name. This conviction, however, clashes with the influential body of literary scholarship that still gravitates within Eurocentric positionalities and often considers subalternized texts as unthinkable, untranslatable, unrepresentable, or unconceptualizable. Emphasizing the political urgency, ethical imperatives, and new insights of decoloniality, Argentinian critic Horacio Legrás (2016, 29) pointed out that literature can bring to the coloniality/decoloniality problematic “a theory of the subject of decolonization that is by and large lacking in decolonial authors,” even though decolonial theorists, including Dignolo, seldom engage with literature. Legrás (2016, 20) calls this omission “referential ingratitude,” one that reflects decolonialists’ reluctance to abandon Westernness to embrace those cultures the West colonized.

In the introduction to their volume, Juan G. Ramos and Tara Daly stated that to think decolonially is not to impose theoretical premises, but to amplify “the forms of decolonial thinking that emerge from subjective experiences and textualities,” especially nonacademic interventions and Indigenous subjects (2016, xv–xvi). This is crucial, as “it is precisely from what remains outside of codification and translatability that decolonial modes of resistance and resignification can emerge” (2016, xvi) and offer responses to their oppression, silencing, or invisibility.

Indigenous writers and theorists often are first political actors in grassroots movements, while operating outside of the academy. In some cases, their writings aim to help grassroots organizations or their communities to advance specific goals. Yet these organic intellectuals have also made important theoretical understandings of decoloniality in settings—Chiapas, Guatemala, and the Andes, in the case of Abiyala—where people are engaged in political struggles, yet carry out systematic analyses of the processes in which they are engaged.<sup>8</sup>

Unlike North America, where Native American scholars such as Mi’kmaw Marie Battiste, Chickasaw James (Sa’ke’j) Youngblood Henderson, Cherokee Eva Marie Garroutte, or Osage Robert Warrior, to name but a selected few, have led decolonizing efforts in US and Canadian academia, the Latin American Indigenous experience varies significantly. The lack of access to higher education, more acute among subalternized populations in Abiyala, has meant that grassroots Indigenous scholars often work outside the academy.

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system, decoloniality is how those effects lingered after Latin American nations declared their independence from Spain and Portugal. In Quijano’s understanding, this legacy continues to this day. That is what he has defined as *coloniality*. This category implies the continuity of social discrimination that outlived formal colonialism and became integrated in contemporary social orders due to cultural systems that revolve around a Eurocentric hierarchy that enforces Eurocentric economic, knowledge, and symbolic production systems.

<sup>7</sup> For cultural studies scholars, there is no longer a need to review Dignolo’s contribution in *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (1995), concurring with what Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (1991) named “coloniality.” I dwell at length on their work in the introduction to *Recovering Lost Footprints*, volume 1. Though Dignolo and Quijano are well known as scholars in the global North, some academics working in other fields may be less familiar with their work.

<sup>8</sup> The phrase *Abiyala*, from the Kuna language, represents the Latin American continent from an Indigenous perspective. Abya stands for “blood.” Yala stands for “mountain.” The pre-Hispanic expression is understood as “land in its full maturity” or “land of vital blood.” This affirmation is traced to Bolivian Aymara leader Takir Mamani (aka Constantino Lima Chávez), as explained later in this article. The correct spelling of “Abya Yala” according to the *Gayamar Sabga*, the dictionary of the Guna language (previously written as “Kuna”), is Abiyala. Gunas began to standardize their written language in 2006 and informed of this scriptural change in 2017.

Such was the case of Bolivian Qhiswa Fausto Reinaga (1906–1994), author of more than thirty landmark texts such as *La revolución india* (1969), *Tesis india* (1971), or *Indianidad* (1978). Reinaga, proving that Indigenous knowledge was more sophisticated and inclusive than Eurocentric philosophy, claimed that the solution for Bolivia was not the elimination of mestizos by Indians but rather their assimilation by Indians.

Another key figure is Bolivian Aymara political activist Constantino Lima Chávez (b. 1933), known as Takir Mamani,<sup>9</sup> one of the founders of the Movimiento Nacional Tupak Katari (MNT) in 1968 (Portugal Mollinedo 2013). At his suggestion, they adopted the *wiphala*—the Tawantinsuyu flag—as their symbol, the first time it reappeared in the Andes in the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup> He also suggested the name Abya Yala,<sup>11</sup> which was ratified at the Declaración de Kito (Kito Declaration) of the II Cumbre Continental de los Pueblos y Nacionalidades Indígenas de Abya Yala, held in Quito on July 21–25, 2004.

Other decolonial writer-activists articulate spiritual perspectives, Carlos Milla Villena's (Wayra Katari) *Génesis de la cultura andina* ([1979] 2011) is an in-depth study of the sacred Chakana (Andean Cross). Katari argues that four thousand years ago there was an Andean world with a geometric system of measurements, based on the concept of  $\pi$  (pi). Archaeological evidence from geoglyphs (the figures configured by the Nazca lines) and remains along the Peruvian coast, such as at the temple of Pramonga, confirm his hypothesis. More recently, Diego Pacheco's meticulously researched study *El indianismo y los indios contemporáneos en Bolivia* (1992) traces the evolution of the Indianista movement from 1970 throughout its many phases.

We see analogous circumstances in Mesoamerica. A good example is *La palabra y el sentir de las mujeres mayas de Kaqla* (Grupo de Mujeres Mayas Kaqla 2004), written collectively by Kaqla, a feminist Maya collective in Iximuleu (Guatemala). The book addresses a multiplicity of issues such as racism, discrimination, victimization, sexuality and sexual violence, native dress and Maya identity, family, and conflicts among women. Domingo Yojcom Rocché's *La epistemología de la matemática maya* (2013) systematizes the scientific nature of Maya "cosmovision with a socio-epistemological analysis of the social construction of mathematics among the Maya. In Chiapas, *K'anel: Funciones y representaciones sociales en Huixtán, Chiapas* (2010), by Maya Tsotsil scholar Manuel Bolom Pale, uses the Tsotsil term *k'anel* "to want" as an ethical category. *K'anel* is attached to the maturity of the *ch'ulel* of the community's subjects. In this way, Bolom Pale understands *ch'ulel* more as consciousness, something that one develops through knowledge. From these terms one can infer the principles of Tsotsil cosmovision.

It goes without saying that I could continue citing many other books which evidence widespread Indigenous cultural production, all of which represent differential knowledges, acuity of perceptions, and depth. Mignolo labeled this personal embodiment "the colonial matrix of power." It enabled Reinaga, Lima Chávez, and many others to link the legality/illegality dichotomy to race. This lived realization triggered in a visceral fashion their will to power and pushed them in the direction of becoming organic intellectuals in a Gramscian sense. They are emblematic of the situation of many others, as is Reinaga's statement, "para llegar al tramo actual de mi pensamiento, yo dejé al pensamiento socrático, dejé al cristianismo, dejé al marxismo y dejé al indianismo" (to reach the present state of my thinking, I left Socratic thought, I left Christianity, I left Marxism, and I left Indianism) (Reinaga 1981, 15).<sup>12</sup>

Having survived myriad confrontations with land or mine owners, and/or governmental authorities, some of these organic intellectual-activists afterwards engaged in higher studies. Some became writers. Some learned to critique or theorize their counterhegemonic movements. They gradually acquired the

<sup>9</sup> Lima Chávez adopted his nom de guerre when he founded the Tupaj Katari Movement in April 1975, with Luciano Tapia Quisbert. The movement claimed to be "the political vanguard of the Indian peoples of the Collasuyo" and articulated a political plan that would return to communal forms of production and reestablish Indigenous languages. The name Tupaj Katari derived from Aymara leader Julián Apasa Nina, who, taking the name of Tupaj Katari to honor two earlier rebel leaders, Tomás Katari and Tupaj Amaru, executed by the Spanish in 1572, led an uprising in Alto Perú (Upper Peru, now Bolivia) that lay siege to La Paz for six months in 1781. Now this name also refers to a Bolivian communications satellite launched from China in 2013. Its official name is Túpac Katari 1.

<sup>10</sup> This fact is also mentioned by Ramiro Reynaga Burgoa (2016, 346–347). Nowadays the use of the wiphala is common. In Bolivia it appears next to the national flag in all official buildings in the capital city. According to Portugal Mollinedo, in 1968 Lima Chávez saw a Peruvian document alluding to this flag used as a symbol of resistance from the moment of the fall of the Inca empire. Lima Chávez tried to find a visual image. He discovered drawings of the wiphala a few years later. He copied it and brought it to his political meeting, telling his fellow militants that this was the flag flown by Bartolina Sisa and Tupak Katari in their eighteenth-century insurrection. Lima Chávez made the first wiphala himself and flew it for the first time at a meeting in Pukara de Jach'a Apasa, Pacajes Province, La Paz Department, during Holy Week 1970. It immediately became the movement's emblem.

<sup>11</sup> In doing so, Mamani stated the now often quoted phrase, "To name our cities, villages, and continents using a foreign name is the equivalent of subjugating our identity to the will of our invaders and that of their descendants," and proposed the name of Abiyala for what European invaders had labeled Indias Occidentales, and then French emperor Napoleon III called "Latin America" in the second half of the nineteenth century in *Lettres sur l'Amérique du Nord*.

<sup>12</sup> This same quote is cited by Esteban Ticona Alejo (2015, 134).

status of “knowledges otherwise” as Colombian sociologist Arturo Escobar named them.<sup>13</sup> Anthropologist Charles R. Hale and the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) referred to these as *otros saberes* when in 2005 they promoted deep and sustained collaborations between intellectuals inside and outside the academy (Hale and Stephen 2013). Indigenous collaborators worked on their own practices from within their singular histories, subjectivities, and cosmovisions. Keisha-Khan Y. Perry and Joanne Rappaport stated in chapter 2 of *Otros saberes* (Hale and Stephen 2013) that North American academics have for the most part overlooked the significant body of critical thought produced by social movements or Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in Latin America. Perry and Rappaport (2013, 31) understood these communities as knowledge producers and political actors, generating “a kind of theory-in-action that merges political militancy and cultural renewal.” As American scholar Catherine Walsh—working at the Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar in Quito—noted as well, the research produced by Indigenous scholars radically challenged and transformed “the historic processes of epistemic and existential subalternization ... opening up new analytic, critical, post/trans-continental, and decolonial possibilities of knowledge and existence” (Walsh 2012, 16). The analytic foundations of these modes of thinking produced a place-based epistemology that inevitably articulated new theoretical and political logics. This approach also confirmed Peruvian anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena’s notion of “cosmopolitics,” which closes the divide between nature and culture in her analysis of *runakuna* world-making practices, where “Earth Beings” are more-than-natural entities that challenge modernity ontologically. As de la Cadena (2015, 206) states, “‘religion’ is also not religion, but interactions with other-than-human entities that are neither natural nor supernatural, but beings that *are with* runakuna in socio-natural collectives that do not abide by the divisions between God, nature, and humanity.” De la Cadena (2015, 266) thus opens a dialogue between epistemic “worlding” and a state authority representing modern politics. Her research also confirmed that heightening social conflict, new citizens’ protagonism, and abandonment of traditional political party practices could lead to the ontological-political decentering of modern politics.

Chilean historian Claudia Zapata Silva (2013, 12) noted the critical importance of the emergence of Latin American Indigenous intellectuals since the 1970s: “There exists a segment of professionals formed at the university that each day exercises more weight; this sector is relatively new among Indigenous societies [no more than forty years], a product of the expansion of educational systems during the twentieth century in the continent; despite it being a new segment, it has become more and more diversified and specialized.”<sup>14</sup>

Zapata Silva adds that such writers begin from a decolonial perspective, one that places decoloniality “at the forefront of their predicament” (2013, 349). Nonetheless, these intellectual actors’ contributions remain invisibilized to this day, largely because they publish outside of the traditional venues for university academics, who generally do not read and critically include their work (Zapata Silva 2013, 11).<sup>15</sup> As we can gather from Zapata Silva’s evidence, for these actors decoloniality is not just a theory. It is primarily a visceral reaction against coloniality, leading to concrete, organized political actions where the ancestral principles and historic struggles of Afro-descendants and Indigenous peoples begin to disrupt, transgress, and traverse Western thinking. This rupture continuously advances new notions of interculturality and decoloniality. For Indigenous activists, one cannot talk of decolonialization nor articulate a theory about it without first implementing its practice in the field, and with the active consent—if not participation—of Indigenous communities. It is not something learned rhetorically to achieve a finite theoretical goal.

Despite the political protagonism of Indigenous movements since the 1980s and the conceptual articulation of their discursivities, more often than not based on their respective cosmovisions and epistemologies, their published output—whether literatures or knowledges—remains mostly invisible in the academic venues of the global North. This may be more a statement about academic power relations than about scholars’ respect for Indigenous agency and about their willingness to collaborate on equal terms with nontraditional knowledge producers. The work of these organic intellectuals emerges often outside of the boundaries of the academy, and usually in small, marginal presses.

<sup>13</sup> Escobar (2007) labeled this process the “modernity/coloniality research program.” He located its origins in Latin America: “I would argue that this body of work, still relatively unknown in the English speaking world for reasons that go beyond language and that speak to the heart of the program, constitutes a novel perspective from Latin America but not only for Latin America but for the world of the social and human sciences as a whole” (2007, 179). The English version of his original article (Escobar 2003) was published in *Cultural Studies* in 2007, with some variations from the original.

<sup>14</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from Spanish to English are my own.

<sup>15</sup> In addition to Zapata Silva’s *Intelectuales indígenas en Ecuador, Bolivia y Chile*, a book titled *Indigenous Intellectuals* edited by Gabriela Ramos and Yanna Yannakakis was published by Duke in 2014, but it limits its scope to colonial culture in Mexico and the Andes.

Because of these situations, Indigenous theorists such as those previously cited remain largely unknown in the United States, along with writers like Maya Q'anjob'al novelist Gaspar Pedro González; Maya Tsotsil poet Ruperta Bautista; Maya Jakaltek novelist, short-story writer, and poet Victor Montejo; Binnizá poet Irma Pineda; or Bene Xhon novelist Javier Castellanos, who besides their creative work have also published on issues such as linguistics, literary history, anthropology, or politics, while also keeping their distance from many US decolonial scholars. These writers and others like them—Maya Yukateko novelist Sol Ceh Moo, Runa Simi novelist Pablo Landeo, Nahua poet Natalio Hernández, Nahua novelist Crispín Amador Ramírez—at times perceive US-centered scholars as mired within cosmopolitan theoretical debates exclusively despite their decolonial embrace, rather than engaging with grassroots knowledge-producers like themselves. In their understanding, elucidations by US-centered scholars may fit within US academic debates, but colonized subjects remain invisible in them.

Indigenous activists cannot talk of decolonialization nor articulate a theory about it without first implementing its practice in the field with the consent of their communities. Most have pre-Hispanic local concepts that address these needs. For Native American scholar Kelly McDonough (2014, 6), the Nahuatl concept addressing this is *ixtlamatini*:

Intellectual, Knowledge, (*ix*)*tlamatini*, (*ix*)*tlamatiliztli*

My use of the terms “intellectual” and “knowledge producer” requires some elaboration. Both stand for individuals who are producers and interpreters of wisdom (broadly defined as cultural, historical, and political knowledges), acquired by experience and/or study and shared in and/or beyond his/her own community. This may not be precisely what is understood by a Western definition of the term, for several reasons, namely the nature and the source of knowledge.<sup>16</sup>

The concept implies that no individual can be a teacher or guide by being simply bookish. To be recognized as a teacher/guide, an individual needs experience in the community's affairs. The same would hold true of the Andean concept of the *amawt'a*. Aymara scholar Esteban Ticona Alejo, another Bolivian organic intellectual who after years as a grassroots activist proceeded to study at Quito's Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar under Catherine Walsh, defines *amawt'a* as the conclusion of moving up the ladder of a *thakhi* (ñan in Qhiswa), the path toward leadership within an *ayllu*, a traditional Andean community (2015, 25). Only those who have completed this process get to be *amawt'a* (26). *Amawt'as* are, in this logic, the wise old men with expertise on Amautic knowledge within the leadership of the *ayllu*. In this sense, they are analogous to the Nahua *ixtlamatini* theorized by McDonough. Not being an *amawt'a* or an *ixtlamatini*—to stay with these two examples—would presuppose an implicit lack of knowledge on how to grasp the basic but paramount issues vital to Indigenous communities. Trust must be earned *in situ*. An interview, for instance, is not just a means to obtain data from a “native informant.” It is a visit in which the interviewer is a guest in someone else's memories and in someone else's mind. A most respectful and ritualized dialogic relationship needs to be forged before such an exchange may even take place. If we were to engage decoloniality strictly on careerist grounds, it would lack a moral center.

Vulnerability is common to most Indigenous communities. This is because, for five hundred years and counting, they have been reduced to social death. They have also lived through an ongoing invasion of European and US scholars at least since the end of the nineteenth century. Global North scholars often colonized their communities anew, wrested knowledge from them, and returned home to gain fame as scholars without looking back at those “native informants” who provided the knowledges that empowered them. There are, of course, significant exceptions of both US and European scholars loved by the communities in which they worked for their sensitivity, care, and solidarity. Jakalteko Maya Víctor Montejo's novel *The Adventures of Mister Puttison among the Maya* (1998, translated in 2002), an acerbic satire of the presence of American anthropologist Oliver La Farge among the Jakalteko community during the 1930s, problematizes the ugly model. It seems an understandable attitude, considering that Indigenous subjects' level of suspicion of foreigners has been historically high, bordering perhaps on the paranoid, yet with just and understandable cause.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> McDonough (2014, 8) adds that “the great sixteenth-century Franciscan grammarian and lexicographer Alonso de Molina glossed the Nahuatl term *tlamatini* (sing.) as ‘sabio’ (wise person) and *tlamatiliztli* as ‘sabiduría, o embuacamiento’ (knowledge or trickery). Both have as their root the verb *mati* or ‘saber algo’ (to know [something]). For example *tlamatini/meh* can be broken down in the following manner: *tla* (nonspecific nonhuman object prefix [thing/s]) + *mati* (to know [something]) + *ni/nimeh* (singular/plural present agentive suffix). *Tlmatiliztli* is an ‘action noun’: roughly ‘the act or action of knowing.’”

<sup>17</sup> By way of comparison, even in Aotearoa (New Zealand), Māoris still complained to me, during my stay, of suffering subalternized treatment by Pākehās (New Zealanders of British or European descent), and related it to the colonized experience of Latin

It is also important to appreciate the affect and emotions behind Abiyala's Indigenous positionalities in cases like Montejo's novel, which, in guarded fashion, reveals an ethical trespass. Indigenous communities are told what to do, yet again, without prior consultation, without a meaningful and lasting dialogue, without respect for difference (even if theoretically, respect is enunciated). Many Indigenous subjects remain highly sensitive to this behavior because it signifies a lack of respect for cultural integrity, effectively precluding possible collaboration. Indigenous peoples conflate speech with conduct. Paternalistic behavioral patterns tinted with heteronormativity and perceived as "white entitlement" when attempting to dialogize with Indigenous subjects—and most especially with female Indigenous subjects—are not separated from epistemic notions that de facto continue telling them how to run their lives. As US scholar Lisa Marie Cacho (2012, 31) states, "contemporary progressive politics must rely ... also on the 'value practices' that will make social statuses recognizable." Scholars working in the United States are often perceived by subalternized and racialized subjects living elsewhere as "Western-centric"—and thus, white by inference, even if they are Latin American or Latina/o scholars. They need, as a result, to be especially sensitive to, and patient with, the subjects they are working with.

As Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver reminds us, work concerned with Indigenous subjects is often about community (1997, xiv). His vision is reflected by his coining the concept of "communitism", a fusion of community and activism (xiii). Rightly or wrongly, Abiyala's Indigenous intellectuals, as Weaver would state it, are put "constantly in the position ... of answering Whites and thus allowing them to continue to set the agenda of discourse" (xii).

When we explore how Indigenous writers and intellectuals define their work, Western referents disappear altogether. Nahuatl poet Natalio Hernández names his writing *in xochitl in cuicatl* (41), the flower and the song, a subtle evocation of Netzahualcoyotl (1402–1472), the Acolhua *tlatoani* ("speaker" in Nahuatl, but meaning ruler) of the city-state of Texcoco, in *El despertar de nuestras lenguas/Queman tlaqchixque totlahtolhuan* (2002). McDonough (2014, 7) informs us that "Nahua (Guerrero/Morelos) poet and activist Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño has called himself a 'tlacuilo' (writer/painter), a 'xochitlacuilo' (flower-writer/poet), and a 'cuicajpike' ('hacedor de cantos' or a song/chant/poem-creator)." Maya Q'anjob'al novelist Gaspar Pedro González (1997, 7) speaks of *Kotz'ib'*, implying "our" literature in his language:

*Kotz'ib'* abarca las distintas maneras de expresar el pensamiento mediante signos, símbolos, colores, tejidos y líneas. La literatura maya como producto cultural de una sociedad, que tiene un particular punto de vista filosófico sobre el mundo y la vida, no siempre debe ser sometida al análisis bajo los cánones de la cultura occidental. Pues los ojos y los sentimientos de sus autores, se enmarcan dentro de esa cosmovisión que les permite la cultura.

(*Kotz'ib'* covers the diverse ways of expressing knowledge through signs, symbols, colors, weavings, and lines. Maya literature, as a cultural product of a society and with a specific philosophical point of view about the world and about life, should not always be subjected to analysis according to the norms of Western culture. This is because the eyes and the feelings of their authors are framed within the worldview of their own culture).

González's appeal immediately invokes a conceptual problem. Is it possible not to apply Western-centered "norms" in a globalized world hegemonized by the West? Let me recognize the virtue of enacting the critic's situatedness—his/her authorial positionality—and take stock of his privileged relation with his object of study. González restates goals that may also be viewed as a claim and a demand to interpret Maya literature *qua* Maya literature. His vantage point stands in relation to Maya languages and their linguistic traditions, to Mayas' cosmovision and other ontological positionings, aiming to articulate a new cultural genealogy going against the grain of the West that serves the interests of Maya subjectivity.

In North America, we hear echoes in González of what Creek scholar Craig S. Womack claims in *Red on Red* (1999, 16–17, emphasis original): "Native artistry is not pure aesthetics, or art for art's sake: as often as not Indian writers are trying to *invoke* as much as *evoke*. The idea behind ceremonial chant is that language, spoken in the appropriate ritual contexts, will actually cause a change in the physical universe. This element exists in contemporary Native writing and must be continuously explored in building up a national body of

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America's Indigenous peoples. This even though they were not defeated militarily, did not suffer the brutality of a prolonged occupation, and signed the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 with representatives of the British Crown, which recognized Māori ownership of their lands, forests, and other properties. They now have institutions of which Latin American Indigenous populations could only dream, such as Māori TV, bilingual education, land trusts, and private and publicly listed companies.

literature and criticism—language as invocation that will upset the balance of power, even to the point, as Zebolsky argues, where stories will be preeminent factors in land redress.”<sup>18</sup>

*Red on Red* is a call for Native American writers’ self-determination. Womack (1999, 14) sees literary and critical production as part of “sovereignty: Indian people exercising the right to present images of themselves and to discuss those images.” This forges a step toward nationhood because it constitutes “a people’s idea of themselves, their imaginings of who they are,” contributing to “keeping sovereignty alive” and giving it meaning “that is defined within the tribe rather than by external sources” (14). He adds that “even postcolonial approaches . . . miss an incredibly important point: how do Indians view Indians? Literature departments have done little to answer this question, and this area of history we must dig up ourselves” (13). Finally, Womack claims for Creek culture what I also see in Mesoamerican cultures, namely, that his nation’s ceremonies form the kind of communal ritual knowledge that in Mesoamerica is named “cosmovision.” This concept names the articulation of ontological knowledge in relation to stellar patterns and celestial phenomena, by way of numeracy, the recording of time, and the keeping of calendrical records, resulting from early cosmic observations and emerging predictive capabilities, which succeeded in establishing a subsequent social and cosmic order.<sup>19</sup>

Critic Luz María Lepe Lira (2010) explains in a Mexican context that many Indigenous writers disagree on how to label their literary production. Some, like Yukateko Maya playwright Feliciano Sánchez Chan, think that genres and critical categories should be named in their language and within categories created from within Indigenous knowledge (Lepe Lira 2010, 76). Lepe Lira advances Binnizá poet Víctor de la Cruz’s adjustments to Zapotecan literature that would submit such genres as *libana* (a sort of sermon given by elders), *diidxagola* (a proverb or refrain meaning the “ancient word”), *riuunda’* or *liuunda’* (a mixture of poetry and song accompanied by instruments), and *diidxaguca’–diidxaxhiihui’* (in literal terms, a “composition with exaggerated words” that references short stories with a strong communal content) (79–80). Lepe Lira underlines the difficulty involved in elaborating a taxonomy encompassing Indigenous literatures written in hundreds of languages located in more than a dozen modern nation-states.

Pacific Indigenous scholars offer refreshing advances on some of these issues. The work of Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith may be the greatest contribution to clarifying Native perspectives. Her seminal *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* ([1999] 2012) is not just a foundational marker on how to work from an Indigenous perspective. It is also a blueprint of the research she implemented as provost of Waikato University in 2006, an institution with a majority of Māori students.<sup>20</sup> In a Derridean move, she stresses the need for researchers to choose “the margins” (2012, 202). Smith is fully aware of the implications, including the need to preserve research ethics (207), while acknowledging that researchers who opt to work in the margins “are at risk of becoming marginalized themselves in their careers” (213). Smith problematizes the “relationship between activism and research” (217) and calls for the need to bring together “the Agenda for Indigenous Research and Indigenous Activism” (218). She reminds us that “research exists within a system of power” (226), insisting that researchers need to get the story “right” to tell the story well.

Indigenous literatures are, for the most part, a rediscovery of learning as spirituality and nurture. If these knowledges are discursively unavailable, it is because Western genocidal practices erased them in the first place. Contemporary Indigenous writers are reconfiguring them, rediscovering those lost footprints that nevertheless remain and haunt them in dreams. Here we could use the notion of “hauntology,” Derrida’s neologistic pun on *ontology*, referring to the present as it exists only with respect to the past (Derrida 1994). Derrida’s framework suggests that after the collapse of Eurocentric thinking, these societies will begin to orient themselves toward ethical principles that Eurocentric modernity appraised as archaic, primitive, or discarded. Put another way, it is the direction of those “ghosts” of the past that Indigenous cosmovisions perennially rearticulate, for Indigenous peoples are reinscribed within modernity.

The ghosts of the past explains why in many Indigenous texts, such as Maya Q’anjob’al Gaspar Pedro González’s *Sb’eyb’al jun naq maya’ q’anjob’al/La otra cara* (1992; *A Mayan Life*, 1995) the lives of contemporary characters, such as Lwin and his family, are framed within the mythic time of the Maya calendar. The repetitive mention of classical Maya motifs gives rise to a textual interplay between the classical past and the present; it is a desire to underscore the uninterrupted continuity of Maya culture

<sup>18</sup> Kirk Zebolsky was a Native literature student of Womack at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

<sup>19</sup> The real issue, to use an old cliché, is semantic. As Mi’kmaq scholar Marie Battiste claims, most Indigenous epistemologies derived from their immediate ecology and their interaction with the spiritual world (2008, 499), but contain linguistic categories, rules, and relationships unique to each knowledge system (2008, 501).

<sup>20</sup> The 2012 revised edition of Smith’s monograph has added two significant chapters.



and community for more than 2,500 years. Gloria Chacón (2018) has labeled this double gaze as *k'abawil*. Represented by K'iche' communities as a double-headed eagle called *k'ot*, meaning "one head looking at the sky and the other looking at the earth," it is presumed to symbolize the classical deity K'abawil, meaning "double-sighted deity." This implies two faces, two forms, two opposing energies. The motif originated as the ancient Maya sky saurian representing the ecliptic (the path of the sun and planets through the sky) and the midday sun at the "Heart of Sky" portal. K'abawil stands for Chacón as the capacity to see reality on a permanent double dimensionality.

The double gaze in question could be explained by hauntology as well as by the effects of the "ghostly," a notion that names phenomena excluded from conscious recollection and the historical record yet impacting them precisely because of their absence, as sociologist Avery Gordon reminds us in *Ghostly Matters* (1997). Gordon stresses the ways in which "questions of narrative structuring, constructedness, analytic standpoint, and historical provisionality of claims to knowledge" problematize sociological truth-claims and reveal "stories" to be "fictions of the real" (1997, 11). From literary perspectives, the ghostly works much like de la Cadena's interaction of human beings with Earth Beings as a conceptual practice for the Quechua, for whom Earth Beings are a seething presence, the epistemic translations of their "ghosts." To write stories concerning exclusions and invisibilities, according to Gordon, would be to write Indigenous narratives, because for her, "the ghost is ... a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life" (1997, 8).

Needless to say, Derrida's and Gordon's terminologies have to be used with caution when critiquing Indigenous narratives. After all, epistemological naming has to do with language itself, how it is configured, what it achieves, and how it names things. When it comes to the Indigenous world, Western categories always risk inhabiting other ways of framing references. Indigenous languages may very well oppose, challenge, or elaborate upon Western premises, in a process that reinvigorates the role of otherness in ethics, as is the case of *k'abawil*. Ontological frames of reference usually differ in most Indigenous cultures. For example, Maya Kaqchikels do not have a word for "art" or "artist." They say *patán samaj*, which can be translated as an ensemble of feelings, emotions, intuitions, thoughts, purposes, and responsibilities immersed in any kind of a job.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Monasterios (2016) informs us that in Aymara there is no such concept as "poem" or "poetry." Thus, a poem is defined more as "beautifying thought."<sup>22</sup>

Add to these preoccupations a shift to the plural when we are talking about languages. This is another problematic factor for scholars like myself. We are dealing with hundreds of languages that we—cultural critics trained by Western notions of epistemological knowledge in Western-centered institutions where we also work, and whose positionings become inevitably our lookout into the world—are, to a significant degree, incapable of understanding. At most, some anthropological linguists speak a handful of them, perhaps a dozen in a best-case scenario. This lack inevitably signals an ethical danger of which critics need to be aware.

It may be due to the different historical conditions of the Pacific's colonization that today we see more advances made by Indigenous scholars from this region than in the Americas. Tonga scholar Timote Vaoleti, for example, has developed what he dubs *Talanoa* as a methodology in this part of the world. More pointedly, Vaoleti is concerned with how Western scholars will perceive "issues pertaining to knowledge and ways of being that originated from the *nga wairua* (spirits) and *whenua* of Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Tuvalu or the other Pacific nations. Research methodologies that were designed to identify issues in a dominant culture and provide solutions are not necessarily suitable in searching for solutions for Pacific peoples, whose knowledge and ways of being have unique epistemologies" (Vaoleti 2006, 22).

*Talanoa* comes from "*Tala*, to inform, tell, relate and command, as well as to ask and apply. *Noa* means of any kind, ordinary, nothing in particular, purely imaginary, or void" (Vaoleti 2006, 23). Its meaning can range from talking about heterogeneous aspects of tradition and culture to interacting without any rigid network. It is an "ancient practice of multi-level and multi-layered critical discussions and free conversations" and a traditional way of collecting information from villages, leaders, and various agencies, governmental or not, to formulate policy proposals. *Talanoa* "requires researchers to partake deeply in the research experience rather than stand back and analyse ... and is resistant to rigid, institutional, hegemonic control" (Vaoleti 2006, 24).

One of the advantages of Pacific peoples is linguistic approximation and similarities. Despite the vastness of the ocean, they must contend with only three cultural zones (Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia). Strong linguistic similarities enable general comprehension from Hawai'i to Aotearoa. These deep linguistic

<sup>21</sup> See Carolina Escobar Sarti's article "Ruk'u'x" (2014).

<sup>22</sup> See the end of chapter 3 in *La vanguardia plebeya del Titikaka: Gamaliel Churata y otras beligerancias estéticas en los Andes*, where Monasterios analyzes a poem in Aymara by Manuel Kamacho Allqa.

and cultural contacts are attributable to the region's ethnic migrations over a long period of time. Latin America's nearly five hundred Indigenous languages are largely incomprehensible from one to another.

Nevertheless, circumstances are changing in Mesoamerica. If close to the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century we already have an abundance of Indigenous novelists, short story writers, and poets, there is still a dearth of criticism. This panorama has begun to change. An emblematic example is Maya Tsotsil writer and scholar Mikel Ruiz. Born in Chicumtantic, Chiapas, Mexico, in 1985, he obtained a BA at the Chiapas National Autonomous University. Ruiz formed part of the 2007 literary workshop and analysis and literary composition seminar organized by the Centro Estatal de Lengua, Arte y Literaturas Indígenas (CELALI), an institution founded by members of the Unidad de Escritores Mayas-Zoques (UNEMAZ), created in September 1991. On January 1, 1994, most members of UNEMAZ, despite working in state institutions, declared themselves sympathizers of the Zapatista uprising.<sup>23</sup> Members of UNEMAZ were later invited to participate in the dialogue between the Zapatistas and the federal government that took place in San Andrés Larráinzar. CELALI emerged from the February 16, 1996 peace accords.

Mikel Ruiz was still a child when CELALI was founded, but when he entered the institution, he studied with trained, established writers, such as Nicolás Huet Bautista, also a Maya Tsotsil. Huet Bautista is from Huixtán, and has been one of CELALI's coordinators for over a decade. While at the Center, Ruiz wrote a narrative, *Ch'ayemal nich'nabiletik/Los hijos errantes* (2014), which can be read either as a collection of five short stories or as a novel. Ruiz belongs to the first generation of writers who benefitted from studying at these institutions, often with scholarships that the Mexican federal government and the state of Chiapas poured on Indigenous writers and intellectuals as a developmentalist strategy to neutralize the radical impact of Zapatismo.

Ruiz won a scholarship from the Programa de Becas de Posgrado para Indígenas (PROBEPI) to study for an MA at the Universidad Austral de Chile, a Mapuche-centered institution. He finished his degree in 2015 with a master's thesis titled "El *Lekil kuxlejal* (buen vivir) y la heterogeneidad literaria: Dos categorías para leer el cuento maya tsotsil 'La última muerte' de Nicolás Huet Bautista" (The *Lekil kuxlejal* [Good Living] and Literary Heterogeneity: Two Categories for Reading the Short Story 'The Last Death' by Tsotsil Maya Nicolás Huet Bautista). This is the first theoretical reflection elaborated by a Mexican Indigenous subject to critique a piece of literature written in a non-Western language. Ruiz enunciates a new way of displaying critical knowledges that articulates an Indigenous decolonial perspective by both the critical subject's agency and by his deployment of Maya categories of analysis.

Ruiz positions the originary violence of colonialism as a conceptual usurpation of Maya knowledges and proceeds to disarticulate this positionality. His writing invites the realization that this knowledge never disappeared. It still haunts Chiapanecan Mayas and Zoques as its primary and most intimate possibility. Ruiz launches a reversal of power that opens the critical field by elaborating his analysis from within the system of Maya values. He articulates the categories of *Lekil kuxlejal* (good living) posited by Maya Tsotsil anthropologist Miguel Sánchez Álvarez in *Territorio y culturas en Huixtán, Chiapas* (2012). These include *cosmosensación* and *cosmovivencia*. Ruiz engages them as explanatory tools in his analysis of Huet Bautista's short story. He proceeds to construct Tsotsil subjectivity as constituted of *ch'ulel* (being), *k'anel* (to want), and *k'uxubinel* (feeling/loving, feeling/thinking), applying them to an analysis of Huet Bautista's short story "Ti slajebal lajele/La última muerte/The last death" (2001).

Ruiz (2015, 86) argues that "The last death" evidences a conflict between opposing linguistic codes: *bats'il k'op* (Maya Tsotsil, meaning "true word") confronting *kaxlan k'op* (Castilian, literally meaning "foreign word"). For him, they are not just different sounds and/or structures, but diverse ways of thinking and feeling culture. Huet's short story brings both codes together but does not let them interact because their linguistic protocols do not configure the same thing in different signs and sounds. Rather, they structure different referential signifiers. In Tsotsil the narrative voice invokes the phantasmatic trace of the *totil me'iletik*, literally "a voice that comes from before, from a long time ago." It is the sacred rhythm of prayer within the Tsotsil oral tradition. This voice invokes an aura of mysticism, as it is usually associated with sacred rituals. This would not be recognizable in Castilian, where signifiers as *ideologems* point in other directions. Witness *ch'ulel* itself. It has been translated as either "soul," invoking Christian imagery and connotations, or as "being," implying phenomenological categories of Western philosophy. Maya scholar Gabriel Herrera Salazar defines *ch'ulel* as subjectivity, a category analogous to consciousness (2015, 168). Yet he adds that it cannot be separated from the *nawalito*, often defined as "animal companion." Herrera Salazar, quoting Maya-Tsotsil healer Antonio Vázquez Jiménez, understands *nawalito* as constituting otherness within the subjective self.

<sup>23</sup> Enrique Pérez López, personal communication, Tuesday, April 2, 2013.

This conception of complementarity forms part of most Indigenous cultures, though the name changes due to linguistic variance (2015, 171). This phenomenon will inevitably impact language itself. In this last sense, Ruiz (2015, 87) claims about the invocation opening Huet's story, that it:

Fulfills the Maya formality of preparing the space where the narration will take place, as a way of requesting permission from the reader to use his time and his word. The author thus appropriates for himself the act of writing—a hegemonic means of expression in the West—by deploying within it a narrative oral voice with its own cultural and ritual elements as his territory of enunciation.

[cumple con la formalidad maya en preparar el espacio donde comienza a narrar, a manera de pedir permiso, al lector, por usar su tiempo y su palabra. El autor se apropia del canal hegemónico de la escritura asumiendo la voz narrativa como un territorio propio de enunciación con sus elementos culturales y rituales].

Ruiz adds that the oral discourse represented is the language of a healer, a shaman. He contends that its use is not one aiming at a dialogical relation between orality and writing. Rather, it is one of translating the sacred world that manifests itself within orality to a written form. That is, we have a phenomenon that performs translations and comparisons not just between different contexts, realms, and scales of being-as-other, but also within them, even if this leads to a disfiguration in Castilian because of its different linguistic and cultural roots, as evidenced in the previous example cited of *ch'ulel* (2015, 88). For Ruiz, the rhythm articulated in Tsotsil is summoned to connote that words, too, have a *ch'ulel*, an ontologically inflected conceptualization oriented toward the production of difference within Western/Tsotsil understanding of linguistics. Ruiz's affirmation connects with a statement from Maya Tseltal sociologist Xuno López (2013), quoted by Herrera Salazar (2015, 174):

Thus, for us, everything has a heart and a *ch'ulelal*-soul-*ch'ulel*-spiritconscience or *pixan*. Human beings, plants, animals, minerals, mountains, rivers, and everything that exists in the universe, has *ch'ulel-ch'ulelal*. Therefore, everything has its own language, everything speaks, cries, their heart thinks. Everything is part of the living and the sacred.

[Así, para nosotros todo tiene corazón y *ch'ulelal*-alma-*ch'ulel*-espírituconciencia o *pixan*. El ser humano, las plantas, animales, minerales, cerros, ríos y todo lo que existe en el universo, tiene *ch'ulel-ch'ulelal*. Por lo tanto, todo tiene su propio lenguaje, hablan, sienten, lloran, su corazón piensa. Todo es parte de lo viviente y de lo sagrado].

*Ch'ulel* and *pixan* are similar to the Andean concept of *camay*. In his introduction to the Huarochiri manuscript, Frank Salomon states that "*camay* connotes the energizing of extant matter" and "it is a continuous act that works upon a being as long as it lasts" (1991, 16). Thomas Cummins adds, "the Andean cosmological concept of *camay* ... can be considered the supernatural vitalization of all material things" (2015, 182). According to Tamara Bray (2009, 358), it is an essence or a power. Jeffrey Quilter (2014, 48) understands it as a distribution of life force across reality that does not make a sharp distinction between animate and inanimate. Though much more work needs to be done in this respect, the conceptual similarity is evident. Connections between Andean and Maya cosmovisions grow in similarity the more they are explored.

Readers unfamiliar with Tsotsil cosmovision and language would find it impossible to grasp those aspects of Huet Bautista's story depicted by Ruiz if they only had access to this text in Castilian and apprehended it from within a Western perspective. Thus, Ruiz claims that the opening lines display the ritualized tone of a spiritual ceremony that only Tsotsil readers will recognize. In the original version of Huet's story, the text, while written, invokes the trace of the voices of oral memory by structuring written words that connote a dream-like sacred chant (Ruiz 2015, 89). Ruiz proceeds to signal a series of many other examples where the meaning in Tsotsil is completely lost in Castilian, an issue implicating the chains of signifiers. Examples are too many to enumerate; I will cite but a few. "La expresión 'ch'ul ik'e' está traducida como viento, pero en tsotsil el adjetivo *ch'ul* denota pureza, sacralidad, por lo que debería decir sagrado viento. En castellano se omite ese carácter sagrado de un elemento cósmico en el pensamiento tsotsil" (92). (The expression "ch'ul ik'e" is translated as wind, but in Tsotsil the adjective *ch'ul* denotes purity, sacredness, so it should say, sacred wind. In Spanish that sacred nature of a cosmic element in the Tsotsil thought process is omitted.) He adds, in another example, that "ti slajebal lajela**l slajebal chopolale**" is translated as "the last infirmities," which includes only what is shown in bold, when the previous phrase that has been omitted ("ti slajebal lajela")

is the key element of the story, corresponding to its title, "The last death." Ruiz concludes that the poetic images in *Tsotsil* are either broken or altered in Spanish, a linguistic issue implicating the overall interplay of meanings within the text.

Non-Eurocentric epistemologies, together with a questioning of hierarchical academic structures, form part of strategies for decolonizing knowledges. New cognitive maps emerge continuously from within globalized Indigenous communities, or in sites of localized spaces of political struggle, generating new challenges for reconfiguring decolonial knowledges. These fluid processes taking place in the Pacific, Africa, or the global North, as much as in Abiyala, continuously challenge ongoing reflections on decolonial issues. To explore their scope and meaning, scholars need to offer alternative discursive interpretations. Decolonial thinking is not an abstraction. It is emblematic of the never-ending growth of subalternized knowledges continuously rethinking and reshaping their modes of resistance to global Westernization in communities scattered throughout the hemisphere, which include migrants lacking papers in the North. The most valuable aspect of decolonial thinking may be these multilevel processes that it sets in motion.

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