

## Indigenous Knowledges and Sites of Indigenous Memory

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ARTURO ARIAS  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED

### Introduction

This special issue of *Transmodernity* emphasizes Indigenous knowledges that may be represented in literary texts, or else be manifestations present in “multi-dimensional sites of indigenous knowledges,” to use Michelle Wibbelsman’s phrase in her article on this same issue, as webs of signification in the symbolic production of heterodox cultural forms in the United States, Canada, and in Latin America. Literatures and other representational forms explain beliefs, relationships of kinship, relations with nature, and ways of living within contexts of flux, paradox, or tension, articulating their perspectives, while also reconciling opposing forces disaggregating their communities. Their claims are rooted in a sophisticated worldview anchored in complex ontological and epistemological articulations, oftentimes grounded in turn on a comprehensive elucidation of cosmologies. In short, Indigenous peoples’ worldviews deviate from those that have been hegemonic in the West. Noted Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro has stated that “the classic distinction between nature and culture cannot be used to describe domains internal to non-Western cosmologies” (45). In the last of the same series of lectures published in *Cosmological Perspectivism in Amazonia and Elsewhere* (2012), Viveiros de Castro defined what he labels Amerindian knowledge, primarily Amazonian, as “multinaturalism” (as opposed to Western *uni*-naturalism). He adds that this “is perspectivism as cosmic politics” (73). Perhaps the latter phrase could also be a metaphor of sorts to explain the rhetorical codes of many Latin American Indigenous intellectuals addressing local knowledges. Just as the cosmological outlooks of the West and Abya Yala—the name that Indigenous peoples give to the Latin American continent as will be explained later on in this same introduction—are mutually incompatible, oftentimes so is the rhetoric of their respective cultural productions. Yet this should not be interpreted as an assertion that Abya Yala’s Indigenous intellectuals lack the rigor of Western-centered academic knowledges. They are what Hale, Stephen, Rappaport, Perry, Hernández Castillo and others label *Otros saberes*, and Colombian scholar Arturo Escobar has named “knowledges otherwise.”

This topic is timely. It coincides with an increasing recognition and concern with the cultural importance of Indigenous knowledges. Presently, many leading academics are reassessing hemispheric connections to better understand overarching aesthetic systems and technologies that signal robust trans-indigenous features. These are not only common in many parts of this continent, but also foreground a rich and complex reorienting process of critical engagement with Indigenous epistemologies articulated in highly developed literary practices. This project aims to augment their interpretation. In the 1990s, pioneering Native American scholars Jace Weaver and Craig Womack argued that what was at stake was “nothing less than Native identity, definitional and actual sovereignty” (41). In Latin America, the consequences of the 1980s revolutionary crises, the emergence of Zapatismo in Mexico, and the ensuing reaction of the Mexican government, which created developmentalist projects to generate scholarships, literary awards, and publication venues for Indigenous Mexican writers, were factors in the surge of Mesoamerican Indigenous literatures. Currently, the number of studies attests to a growing interest in this production. This special issue aims at presenting new work by emerging scholars in the field of Native American and Indigenous Studies, and at providing a stimulating forum for discussion of these literatures presently produced from Canada to southern Chile. They all communicate realities critical to understanding knowledges that are not expressed in any other way. Sometimes, their literatures frame those experiences that anchor processes of cognitive transmission. Others, they may be expressed in compilations of local knowledges, in oral traditions, or in performances or symbolic productions of objects that in the West may not be associated to ontological or epistemological knowledges, but for many Indigenous cultures—where the word that defines writing usually also means signs, symbols, colors, weavings, or lines, as Maya Q’anjob’al novelist Gaspar Pedro González asserts in *Kotx’ib*, a text in which, while explaining critically the genealogy of Maya literature, implies that the term in question defines “our” literature in his language.

It was in the logic of the growth of Indigenous movements in Latin America that the name Abya Yala came about. Abya stands for “blood.” Blood, we must remember in this definition, signified life among Mesoamerican peoples. Yala stands for “mountain.” The pre-Hispanic expression is understood as meaning “land in its full maturity” or “land of vital blood.” The name is traced in more recent times to Bolivian Aymara leader Takir Mamani (real name, Constantino Lima Chávez), one of the founders of the Tupaj Katari Movement in Bolivia in 1978. In a jointly published article, my colleague Luis Cárcamo-Huechante makes précis of Mamani’s statement: “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”<sup>1</sup> The name was ratified at the “Declaración de Kito” (Kito Declaration) of the II Cumbre Continental de los Pueblos y Nacionalidades Indígenas de Abya Yala (Second Continental Summit of the Indigenous Peoples and Nationalities of Abya Yala) held in Ecuador’s capital on July 21-25, 2004.

So, we have a name agreed upon by most Indigenous movements of Latin America, and certainly the most representative ones. Yet even in Abya Yala, there is no agreement on the definition of knowledges. Different communities, in different locations, privilege different understandings of what they conceive as knowledge for epistemological and political reasons. In this logic, we had a fascinating debate during the Mellon-Sawyer Seminar at the University of Texas at Austin in the fall of 2014. Mapuche scholar Luis Cárcamo-Huechante manifested his strong opposition to the usage of the term “indigeneity” as a concept or category.<sup>2</sup> For him, this implicated a return to a fixation with taxonomies of Indigenous peoples and processes. The trope of indigeneity, he argued, was not part of the conversation in Latin American Indigenous communities. The difference between the adjective “Indigenous” and the noun “indigeneity” made a great difference to him. He felt that rather than seeking a unifying term that would categorize the whole, there was a need for a set of terms, for plurality. Cherokee scholar Circe Sturm felt some of the same discomfort.<sup>3</sup> She saw a greater trace of essentialism in the term “indigeneity.” For her, it became monolithic at heart. It tended to be rooted in a specific place, and she sensed a pathologization and a primitivizing accompanying the term that made her uncomfortable. It was devoid of authenticating traits. In Sturm’s understanding, the question of the Indigenous had been used for a long time to differentiate a particular form of beingness from that of the settler, as an intellectual and a political necessity. These were questions that were worked out relationally. In this logic, indigeneity was defined as a non-self-determined position. The very terms of debate presupposed the non-possibilities of political autonomy. It defined itself in opposition to self-determination.

In this argumentation, Kanaka Maoli historian David Chang, who was a visiting speaker at the Mellon-Sawyer Seminar on that afternoon, stated that establishing typologies was a classical nineteenth-century form of categorization.<sup>4</sup> He made the observation as well that terms that were used to be expansive in a given historical moment become restricted later. There was also a need to acknowledge historicity. For example, said Chang, it was hard to use the same terms before settler colonialism started and afterwards. Discomfort with the term “indigeneity” often resulted from the fact that it was defined by dispossession and disempowerment. Cárcamo-Huechante added that, in

terms of discursive practices or rhetorical regimes in our field, the term “indigeneity” was a specific lexicon in a professional academic setting.

Most hemispheric scholars recognize how Eurocentric colonialism and coloniality damaged Indigenous knowledges.<sup>5</sup> Whatever unifying traits may have existed prior to the Spanish invasion became fractured, and often disintegrated into heterogeneous modes of expression during the colonial period. For example, the Mesoamerican region—a relatively cohesive cultural zone whose pre-Columbian societies flourished before the Spanish invasion of the Americas in the sixteenth century, and one that shared a cosmology whose ideational aspects and worldview manifested themselves in calendrics and cosmology for well over 2,000 years—not only disintegrated as a political unit during the colonial period, despite the allegation that it all was a part of the Vice-royalty of New Spain, but also separated even further after independence, while undergoing modern waves of genocide against Indigenous peoples, such as the so-called Caste War of Yucatan in the nineteenth century, the Guatemalan Maya genocide in the 1980s, and the Zapatista insurrection in Chiapas in the 1990s.

Nevertheless, despite analogous experiences throughout the Americas, this process has ultimately led to what Maya Jakalteq scholar Víctor Montejo labeled an “Indigenous renaissance” (*Maya Intellectual Renaissance: Identity Representation and Leadership*, 2005). That is, a sudden, massive, and broad cultural production appearing in print, and in other media, during the last forty or so years, where a new generation of emerging Indigenous intellectuals have reconfigured their own knowledges. In the midst of this divergent world of heterogeneities, Mesoamerican Indigenous peoples continue to use the term “cosmovision” to refer to a type of knowledge that includes a cyclical interpretation of time, the expression of *k’atunic* prophecies—a *k’atun* being a period of twenty years in the Maya calendar, as will be explained further—and the presence of the myth of the return of Kukulcán in Maya languages, or Quetzalcóatl in Nahuatl, as a liberator figure. For the most part, this is not happening in the southern end of Abya Yala. Mesoamerican communities are now recycling these knowledges locally in a decolonial process that rejects Western epistemologies. Respecting Mesoamerican Indigenous agency, we cannot impose normative pan-Indigenous categories because this phenomenon may be of a regional nature.

Prior to furthering the explanation of “cosmovision,” allow me to dwell more on the *k’atun*, and on the figure of Kukulcán or Quetzalcóatl. As stated, *k’atuns* are periods of twenty years in the Maya calendar, a unit of time equal to twenty *tuns* or 7,200 days. There were thirteen *k’atuns* in the calendar, a period of 260 years, and then they repeated themselves in cyclical fashion. A prophecy was attached to each of them. For example, *K’atun Eight Ajaw* was supposed to be one where great tragedies

would befall Mesoamerican civilizations. As it was, both great post-classic Yucatecan cities of Chichen Itza and Mayapan were destroyed during this *k'atun*. As for Kukulcán, it represents the feathered serpent deity. This image has been worshiped by many different ethno-political groups in Mesoamerican history. The existence of such worship can be seen through studies of the iconography of most Mesoamerican cultures, From the Olmec Stela nineteen at La Venta, in the Mexican state of Tabasco. On the basis of the different symbolic systems used in depictions of the feathered serpent deity in the many cultures that extended themselves throughout Mesoamerica until the Spanish invasion, scholars have interpreted the religious and symbolic meaning of the feathered serpent deity in Mesoamerican cultures.

Let us now explore the category of “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. This Mesoamerican Indigenous worldview has been recorded since at least 2,500 years ago in surviving Mesoamerican written documents, and reconfigured in others collected since the Spanish invasion.<sup>6</sup> Thus, “cosmovision” became the foundation and legitimization of Mesoamerican rulers. Nancy M. Farriss says, “The key . . . to the Mesoamericans’ conception of time and to their entire cosmology is their preoccupation with . . . cosmic order.... For the Maya and the rest of Mesoamerica, time is cosmic order, its cyclical patterning the counterforce to the randomness of evil” (574). These ideational aspects of Mesoamerican culture and worldview are what contemporary Mesoamerican indigenous peoples understand to this day as “cosmovision.” It is used by contemporary Mesoamerican indigenous thinkers, and even tweaked by some, such as Leopoldo Méndez, a Maya Kaqchikel *ajq'ij* or spiritual guide (shaman), and a leading intellectual of the Uk'ux B'e Maya Association, who plays with the term, labeling it *cosmocimiento*; that is, cosmo-knowledge, in Spanish. He has argued how observing celestial phenomena culminated in a complex set of calendrical principles and associated mytho-ritual practices, producing an interrelation among time, calendrics, and the cosmos. Those same factors enable anthropologist Prudence M. Rice to propose that the *Popol Wuj* myth of cosmogenesis and human origins is an allegory of the history of calendrical developments. She adds,

These principles were based in an ideology of time—calendars, calendrical cycles of the *k'atun* and *may* . . . and they were born in the Early Formative period and greatly elaborated in the Middle Formative. Creation of the Mesoamerican calendars

demanded focused intellectual effort in at least six areas: observing seasonal and celestial phenomena; developing a counting and tallying system; invention of the 260-day calendar; refining the solar calendar to 365 days; coordinating the two calendars (the Calendar Round); and innovating a system of signs. (191)

We know that since the emblematic year of 1492, and especially since the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, scholarship in the Americas is produced within the frameworks of Eurocentric domination. In the case of “cosmovision,” in the West it derives from the German *Weltanschauung*. I do not want to devote much time to the German concept because I do not believe that Indigenous ontologies gain their legitimacy by being measured against the standards of Eurocentric philosophy. Still, *Weltanschauung* was adopted primarily by early twentieth-century European and American archaeologists and ethnographers (who also trained Latin American ones as of the 1930s) to evaluate “seasonally timed, circumnavigated or spatially dispersed ritual behavior in a broader geographic context,” as archeologist Anne S. Dowd has explained it (211). Clifford Geertz stated, in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, that anthropologists took this category from Wilhelm Dilthey. Western anthropologists transposed the category to mean a certain outlook within the context of values, mythology, religious beliefs and art, including geomantic architecture for time–space ritualized performance. Dilthey’s understanding of cosmovision remained an ontology; that is, a descriptive model of the world. Yet its Western anthropological use did impose a racialized gaze upon Indigenous peoples whereby they were perceived as mere objects of variable categories of Eurocentric philosophy, believed superior in conception to what they scornfully thought were a-systematic knowledges based on superstition and belief. It certainly makes sense that some contemporary Indigenous intellectuals would find the term “cosmovision” distasteful.

However, another way of looking at it would be that the latter attitude fatally presumes that the term is Western-centric. After all, many pre-Hispanic civilizations in both Mesoamerica and the Andean region (and possibly in others as well) were using its equivalent at least a thousand years before Dilthey was born in 1833. Why not then acknowledge its pre-Hispanic origin? In *A Study of Liberation Discourse: The Semantics of Opposition in Freire and Gutiérrez* (2004), Guatemalan philosopher Roberto Rivera brought into question the ethical performance of Latin America’s intellectuals who continually have had to come to terms with the implications of political action. Rivera was concerned with the predicament of post-colonial intellectuals, a concept he introduced as an original variant of Gayatri Spivak’s casual remarks on this matter. We might recall that when Spivak criticizes Cuban scholar Roberto Fernández Retamar’s substitution of Caliban for Rodó’s model of Ariel as the emblematic

Latin American trope, she visualizes the two binary opposites as cast in function of Europe. Spivak then confronts the “ethnocentric and reverse-ethnocentric benevolent double bind” (118) that effectively denies natives their own “worldling.” Rivera argues that meanings embedded in certain injunctions are always contested and that the “realm of the symbolic” is always the arena where conflicting signifieds reenact linguistic struggles that originated in alternative social realms. This accounts for the possibility of challenging dominant discourses from within, and thus being able to deconstruct their own logical premises. Rivera will resolve this apparent contradiction by re-theorizing Fernando Ortiz’s notion of “transculturation,” and establishing a difference between “transculturation from above” and “transculturation from below,” a distinction not elaborated originally by Ortiz himself. “Transculturation from below” is what enables meaningful political action. For Rivera, it is also evidence of how theories can be transformed in ways not intended by their original authors, so as to ground processes of liberation that lead to emancipatory practices. This process is what enables collective political actions challenging colonial and neocolonial social relationships. Rivera’s work offers a means to reframe the primary concerns of subalternized and racialized organic intellectuals, namely, how to articulate ideas created elsewhere, and with opposite intentions than their own, to mobilize plural subjectivities and reconceptualize political action in a new light. This would explain, among other things, how Liberation Theology—based on a Western text and religion—was reconfigured by Maya organic intellectuals to launch insurgencies in Guatemala in the 1970s and 1980s, and in Chiapas in the 1980s and 1990s, to use but those two well-known examples. To boot, both movements did so while reaffirming Maya cosmovisions in their respective processes, and gradually rejecting all forms of Catholic practices.

In this debate on whether “cosmovision” is or not a pre-Hispanic concept, or else, derivative of a Eurocentric philosophical category, the real issue when it comes to Indigenous knowledges, 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 (499), but contain linguistic categories, rules, and relationships unique to each knowledge system (501). The apparent disagreement around cosmovision has been more a consequence of the different lived experiences of heterogeneous inhabitants of Abya Yala, located in dissimilar expansions and contractions of multifaceted ecospace, while coexisting with variable topographic features generating dissimilar relationships to their biotic environment. These impacted their modes of life. However, the contemporary debate is more the consequence of trying to explain categories of knowledge in Western imperial languages, such as English or Spanish, than in their own. This is why Temagami First Nations

scholar Dale Turner states: “This tension arises because ... an indigenous intellectual culture needs to address what it means to claim that indigenous peoples have unique ways of understanding the world, and that those differences matter” (95). Turner uses Kwame Anthony Appiah’s model of African philosophy to develop his argumentation, while recognizing the lack of clarity in naming Indigenous knowledges (98), due to the multiplicity of languages framing ontological and epistemological understandings of the world. Concomitantly, he says that epistemological problems inherent in publishing Indigenous ontologies derive from their being rooted mostly in oral traditions and expressed in Indigenous languages that have only just recently been written down (100).

Indeed, if Indigenous systems of knowledge from Abya Yala represent a point of enunciation from which indigenous subjects utter their beliefs, we should always remember that they are naming their knowledges and beliefs in hundreds of different languages, with innumerable linguistic and conceptual implications and, in some cases, secret terminology. Thus, Battiste reminds us that Algonkian languages preserve those relationships, and underscores the central role of language in preserving each people’s concepts of epistemology. Paradoxically, these become more culturally distinct the more these native languages and belief systems remain dynamic and functional. At the same time, the ability to grasp systems of knowledge not written, spoken or practiced ritualistically and performatively in Western languages by subjects who are trying to decolonialize their own societies and systems of thought from Western colonial intrusion remains highly complex, if not altogether impossible. The risk of re-normalizing non-Western languages and interlocutors through Western parameters and common usage of Eurocentric conceptual thinking, as in the case of *Weltanschauung* vs. Cosmovision, remains high.

As scholars, we always equate a foreign language with interpretation. That is, with assigning meanings to knowledges framed in a different linguistic code. But how valid can this practice be when the original language, and the conceptual categories and notions framed in it, remain inaccessible? Especially, when even the original language requires a series of rituals and rites of passage as a selected few gain access to the often secrete knowledges linked often to performativity. These rituals are often involved in the processes of integrating natural and built features corresponding to, reproducing, or representing an actual view of the cosmos, either whole or in part. At the same time we should consider that, unlike Eurocentric thinking, where philosophy and theology are separate categories, most Indigenous societies do not separate the sacred and mundane worlds. The spiritual dimension of Indigenous knowledge is key, while differing from what Westerners may understand as Christian spirituality. Thus, rather than attempting to normalize conceptual terms, we should accept the plurality

of their existence in analogous terms to Viveiros de Castro's understanding of "multinaturalism," and listen to how the many variable Indigenous communities conceive of and envisage their respective knowledges as "coherent logics for ordering and knowing the world" (170), in the words of Cherokee sociologist Eva Garroutte, and recognize them as legitimate sources of knowledge, despite what some scholars may consider "contradictions" from a strictly Western perspective. In this last sense, it is not gratuitous that Mesoamerican Indigenous cultures use the term *cosmovision* when speaking in Spanish, irrespective of the terms crafted in their languages, which vary from one Maya language to another, not to speak of all the other Mesoamerican languages.

There are six major linguistic families in the Mesoamerican region, as well as a few smaller families and isolates, totaling a minimum of close to one hundred languages, without including dialectical variants that could easily triple that number. As Anthony Aveni, the greatest expert in studying Mesoamerican skywatchers, whom he has described as "conversing with the planets," has stated, *cosmovision* relates to cultural astronomy, which is located at the core of Mesoamerican knowledges. Since ancient times and into the present, Mesoamerican peoples have reflected on social, political, and religious issues at play in a relationship with nature and the cosmos (2014). Anne S. Dowd adds that the core of the *cosmovision* is the idea of reproducing, or representing an actual view of the cosmos on Earth. According to Eleanor Wake, this is why in 1699, when the indigenous leaders of San Antonio Zoyatzingo defined the boundaries of their land, they said that it began "toward the east, where the sun rises..." (203), ending where the sun met with Mercury upon setting. Wake goes on to explain after this same citation that at least eight Nahuatl *títulos* from central Mexico have celestially defined territory, using not just the sun and moon to measure, but also the North Star, Alpha Crucis on the south, Sirius or Antares on the southeast, Spica on the southwest, and of course Mercury, which doubles for the evening star for thirty-eight days of the year in this area.

It is in this logic that leading contemporary Maya intellectuals, such as Leopoldo Méndez, return, when using Spanish, to the notion of *cosmovision/cosmo-knowledge*. Speaking among his peers, Méndez uses *Ruxe'el Maya' Nojib'äl*, a Kaqchikel phrase literally meaning "the root of Maya thought," though most Kaqchikels may say *Qab'anob'al* or *qab'antajik*, meaning "our customs." Méndez's use of "root" is emblematic of the tree of life. Mesoamericans believe those roots extend from our planet to the center of the galaxy. In K'iche', the formal knowledge would be *Uxe'eel Mayaab' No'jib'al*, connoting the same meaning, even if the common street naming of it would be *qanojib'al*, or *qana'oj*, meaning "our thinking," though some may simply say *qeta'mab'al*, "our knowledge" to invoke the logic of their community. Thus, when a Kaqchikel scholar, Ajpub' García Ixmata', was asked by

the Rafael Landívar University—Guatemala’s Catholic university—to put together a team and write a book explaining Maya epistemology, they titled it *Ruxe’el Mayab’ K’aslemal*, literally “the root of life in the Mayab’,” with the term *ruxe’el* again connoting a cosmic link. “Cosmovision” is understood as articulating the roots of the tree of life bounding our planet with the galaxy. Mayas believe that it is the presence of this “tree of life” what enables the continuity of spirituality. In consequence, the Maya cross, in which all four sides are of equal size, represents the four pillars of the universe, and the four stations of the sun during the day and the year. They indicate that humans live at the center of a fourfold universe. The median of the cross represents the *axis mundi* or Tree of Life, emblematic of the central cosmic axis of a galaxy symbolized by thirteen layers of the overworld—what Westerners would call the atmosphere, the stratosphere, and so forth—with the feathered serpent at the highest layer, enveloping the Tree of Life. Mesoamericans saw the circling Dippers as the pole of this tree, pointing to the celestial center, the axis of the four directions and their four trees, bringing the cosmos into a coherent vertical hierarchy.

We have to continue the task of rediscovering lost knowledges and learning the languages in which they are named. As Battiste reminds us, no uniform or universal Indigenous perspective on Indigenous knowledge exists (501). What connects them is diversity. Even if there are unifying strands, as Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete has argued, diversity prevails given the specific ecology of every single group.

It is in this spirit that we have prepared this special issue. We include eight articles that cover a varied spectrum of locales, from the Southwest of the US to Central Mexico, Chiapas, the Caribbean coast of Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, and urban Brazil. They also differ in significant ways in their understanding and configuration of what they conceive as Native American or Indigenous knowledges. The essays that follow all connect their analyses to larger questions of politics and coloniality in contrastive ways that point to different understandings of how conceptual schemes manifest themselves in heterogeneous Indigenous cultural productions, and how, or to what degree, these are related to particular cosmologies.

In “Down the Rabbit Hole and into the Moon: Nahua Perspectives in Mardonio Carballo’s *Tlajpijketl* (2014),” Adam Coon analyzes Carballo’s *Tlajpijketl* (2014) to explore how this work breaks with a limited Western notion of what may constitute a text. This bilingual Nahuatl-Spanish book/website/CD collection questions traditional notions of what “Indigenous literature” may be, that is, one rooted in a rural community with archaic traditions, simplistic in its technique, and very much a book in the traditional understanding of what this may mean, by incorporating figures such as

Alice from Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Carballo's *Tlajpijketl* tells the story of a young *tlajpijketl* (guardian of the maize field) and his quest to compose the "maize song." The journey takes this boy from a wooden platform overlooking his field down a rabbit hole into a world replete with plays on perspective, language, and time. Coon claims that this work points to new horizons in Nahua cultural production that fight visual and acoustic colonialism through a diverse array of media and Nahua perspectives. In his understanding, Carballo seeks to inundate media with Indigenous voices, as reflected in the multimedia format of *Tlajpijketl* and the Noachian flood symbolic of the resurgence of these worldviews depicted in the book. Coon concludes that Carballo's *Tlajpijketl* points to innovations in Nahua cultural production that fight acoustic and visual colonialism through a diverse array of media and unique worldviews. A key objective has been to view Nahuas as knowledge producers, with valuable perspectives for the present and future.

Michelle Wibbelsman argues that material cultural production and performance traditions are key sites of Andean and Amazonian indigenous knowledges and memory. "Andean and Amazonian Material Culture and Performance Traditions as Sites of Indigenous Knowledges and Memory" explores these forms of expression as alternative literacies, while engaging *with* the epistemological frameworks, theoretical perspectives, and methodological approaches these sites of indigenous knowledge, memory, and practice, represent. They thus affirm representations of information located beyond conventional written texts that present Western-centered criticism with the challenge of developing "reading" practices beyond written documents and critical assessments of Western delimitations of alphabetic writing. Wibbelsman concludes that scholars need to address the unique methodological and theoretical contributions that Indigenous epistemologies bring forward. She argues that scholars need to engage *with* these alternative literacies and think *from* the epistemological frameworks and theoretical perspectives offered by Indigenous knowledges and practice systems.

Matthew Pincus claims, in "Bewitched Policies of Resistance: America's Legacy of Unknown Soldiers in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller*," that in this collection of short stories, Laguna Pueblo writer Leslie Marmon Silko revises and reforms the dominant *white* narrative through her representation of vulnerable Native American citizens that work for American governmental institutions, and yet expresses their identity and their solidarity with their peoples by behaving within Laguna Pueblo ethical codes and values. These stress, among other things, the importance of the New Mexico landscape, as well as respect and reverence for the creatures of their homeland. There is a dynamic sense of compassion that endures among inter- and intra-tribal members, displayed by way of a reenactment of their oral narratives in the stories in question, evoking a Native language that has

been passed down through generations and that ensures the continuing existence of their communities. Pincus states in his conclusion that Silko adheres to the notion that Laguna languages and oral storytelling are not only central to the preservation and existence of Laguna citizens and their community, but are a specific means of conveying and preserving epistemologies derived from their immediate ecology and their interaction with the spiritual world, presently threatened by Western-centric settler colonization.

Focusing on Maya Tsotsil fiction writer Mikel Ruiz's short story "*En medio del desierto*" (In the middle of the desert) and his novel *Los hijos errantes* (The errant sons), Sean Sell examines, in "Balance and Respect vs. Commodification and Control: Conflicting Values in the Work of Maya-Tsotsil Author Mikel Ruiz," two of Ruiz's works of fiction and one of criticism through the lens of Karl Polanyi's ideas from *The Great Transformation* (1944) and Maya Jakalteq Victor Montejo's *Maya Intellectual Renaissance* (2005). In applying Polanyi and Montejo to Ruiz's work, Sell corroborates how commodification has gone beyond Polanyi's categories. Although Maya cosmovision may be limited in the face of the global market's onslaught, Sell believes that their cosmovision still holds the best hope for the survival of humankind. He concludes that by applying the ideas of Polanyi and Montejo to the works of Ruiz, he shows how Maya voices are increasingly expressing a degree of wisdom that the rest of the world should value in its present condition. Elements of Maya cosmovision enable subjects to withstand the assaults of commodification and enable them to find meaning by establishing ethical and affective connections with others.

"Mr. Downing, the Translocal Narrator: History and Travel Writing in Todd Downing's *The Mexican Earth*" by Paulina Gonzales posits that Native American Todd Downing's history and travelogue *The Mexican Earth* (1940) represents a translocal narrator who moves between Western textual traditions, while writing about Indigenous Mexico. In this way, Downing offers an interesting literary example to think about the connections between American Indian and Latin American Indigenous cultures. Gonzales concludes that Downing's text dismantles notions of race, *mestizaje*, official memory, and nation-building. In her understanding, he enacts and establishes Indigenous cross-border connections. This compels her to search for nuanced ways to understand how cultural and political relationships between and across tribal-nations, Indigenous and Mestizo communities, and settler colonial nation-states are lived and translated.

Afrodescendant subjects make a presence in the article by Jennifer Gómez Menjívar titled "Straight Outta Livingston: Black Indigeneity, Wordsmithing and Code-Switching in Wingston Gonzalez's Poetry." Gómez claims that González's poetry stands alone as a contemporary expression

of Guatemalan black indigeneity, and adds that Garifuna knowledge is present in three elements that infuse González's work with meaning: language and identity, spirituality and kinship, and memories of coastal homelands. Gómez locates these factors in a larger narrative of origins, departures and arrivals in Garifuna epistemologies. She affirms that González's poetic works capture a homeland in flux. This is the result of many ebbs and flows in the recent transmutations of Garifuna subjectivities as a consequence of emerging discourses of black indigeneity in the context of Guatemala's post-war cultural conceptual schemes and identity reconfigurations.

With Silvia Soto we return to Chiapas, Mexico. Soto examines the works of Maya poets that have gained prominence in Chiapas in the last three decades, in "Rebuilding a Mayan World: Awakening, Presence, and Possibilities." Central to their work is their role as organic intellectuals and carriers of knowledge that re-centers their presence in their region and sets forward new possibilities for rights claiming and identity formation in the future. Through their work, claims Soto, these writers re-explore their millennial traditions to reconfigure them as instruments that evidences the continuing importance of cultural politics in contemporary Chiapanecan social movements. She concludes that the acts of writing, telling and re-claiming that shape their literature constitutes an important part of reciprocal relations that, re-center these poets within their communities.

Finally, we shift to another unexpected locale—and languages—with Wesley Costa de Moraes. His article "El lenguaje como arma: la escritura del guerrero en *Todas as vezes que dissemos adeus* de Kaka Werá Jecupé" takes us to urban São Paulo. Jecupé is an Indigenous subject born and raised in Brazil's largest city. He writes an autobiographical text about the contemporary reconfiguration of Indigenous consciousness addressed to both white Brazilians and Indigenous subjects. In Costa de Moraes's analysis of *All the times we say good-bye*, the author exhibits a broad and deep understanding of the elites' lettered protocols. This enables him to mock and discredit their views, while reconfiguring their logic in favor of oppressed, racialized subjects. In an ingenious demonstration of mimicry, Jecupé reinvents himself as an imaginary subject through a masterful usage of discursive practices that enables him to show his mastery of native knowledges. Costa de Moraes concludes that despite his urban origins, Jecupé not only articulates his cosmovision as if he had never left his community, but also deploys it effectively to recommend solutions for Western perspectives on what is wrong with society. In so doing, the author displays an uncanny use of agency. For Costa de Moraes, this is the result of an unparalleled positionality that has allowed Jecupé to recover his Indigenous beingness while simultaneously gaining presence in his urban belongingness.

It is to be hoped that this discussion will continue beyond the confines of this special issue. Given the importance of Indigenous knowledges at a time when our planet heads into an ecological catastrophe, this would not be surprising. At least, among believers of the warming planetary trends that indicate a catastrophe to come. Besides, a good portion of the struggle to validate Indigenous knowledges is aimed at legitimizing and dignifying communal functions, while also seeking recognition for the ontological nature of their knowledges, respect for those oral traditions within which much of their wisdom is encoded, as well as validation of parental and communal networks.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Llamar con un nombre extranjero nuestras ciudades, pueblos y continentes equivale a someter nuestra identidad a la voluntad de nuestros invasores y a la de sus herederos.” See Cárcamo-Huechante, del Valle Escalante, and Arias, “Literaturas de Abya Yala, note 1.”

<sup>2</sup> Mellon-Sawyer Seminar Session. Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies. University of Texas at Austin. October 3, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> This discussion was also a part of the Mellon-Sawyer Seminar indicated previously.

<sup>4</sup> The format of Mellon-Sawyer seminars normally consists of a group of scholars who meet on a regular basis during the academic year, and visiting scholars who offer a public lecture, and then participate in a closed-door session where their lecture is discussed. This was the nature of Chang’s participation on October 3, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> It goes without saying that this remark alludes to scholars whose research involves at least minimal aspects having to do with the Indigenous world. While it excludes areas of knowledge that may be far removed from these issues, it needlessly excludes right-wing scholars who may still hold racial or other kinds of prejudice against Indigenous or Native American peoples.

<sup>6</sup> The best known of these, but by no means the only ones, are the *Books of Chilam Balam*. The *Books of Chilam Balam* were first written early in the seventeenth century, though most appeared in the eighteenth. The title uses the plural *Books* because nine of them are known, all different, though all claim to be the mouthpiece of, or to have been written by, a legendary author called, or labeled with the name of, Chilam Balam. *Chilam* means a diviner, a religious figure specializing in prophecies. *Balam* denominates a jaguar, a common surname in the Mayab’, given that jaguars were the most sacred animals in the Mesoamerican region, along with the snake. Described as “the great priest,” Chilam Balam lived in Maní during the sixteenth century’s first decades. He is said to have predicted fairly accurately the Spaniards’ date of arrival.