

**INSURGENT POETICS:
LITERATURE AND ALTERNATIVE TEXTUALITIES
IN CONTEMPORARY ABYA YALA**

by

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The last two decades of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st centuries have been marked by a notable increase in indigenous political action as well as an outpouring of texts produced by native authors and poets. Amerindians from Alaska to Chile are increasingly raising their voices and reclaiming the right to represent themselves, in both a political and a discursive sense. This boom in indigenous literature and social movements is arguably one of the most significant occurrences at the turn of the twenty-first century, yet it remains largely understudied on a comparative level. This dissertation seeks to address that gap by expanding the possibilities for North-South dialogue and exploring the commonalities and particularities of different movements across both continents. By critically adopting native activists' use of the term Abya Yala—meaning “Continent of Plenitude and Maturity” in the Kuna language of Panama—I explore alternative conceptions of space and place that impart a powerful starting point for rethinking comparative, inter-American work through the lens of indigenous studies.

Central to this inquiry is the concept of insurgent poetics, which I introduce to convey a mode of writing that narrates and/or performs acts of resistance and partakes in the struggle for political and

intellectual sovereignty. Through an analysis of several novels, essays, and poetry collections from Guatemala, Mexico, Colombia/Venezuela, the Southwestern United States, and Bolivia, I demonstrate that literature constitutes a key weapon in indigenous social movements, as it provides a means of rendering subjugated knowledges visible (*visibilizar*) and of envisioning alternatives to modernity/coloniality (*visualizar*). Given that this process of revitalization represents a struggle for autonomy in what is ultimately a poetic (re)creation of the self, I contend that insurgency represents not only the negation of oppression, coloniality, neoliberalism, or the dominant classes (as the case may be), but also the affirmation of possible alternatives to the dominant power structures and systems of knowledge. Contemporary indigenous insurgency thus represents a form cultural resurgence, an emergence into the scene of global politics, and an in-surgence into the sphere of lettered culture and State power.

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INTRODUCTION

FROM POLITICAL PROTEST TO POETIC AWAKENING

*Naya saparukiw jwayapxitata, nayxarusti
waranqa, waranqanakaw kut'anixa...*

*¡A mí solo me mataréis, pero mañana volveré y
seré millones!*

—Aymara insurgent Túpac Katari
just prior to his assassination, 1781

*My people will sleep for 100 years. When they
awaken, it will be the artists who will give them
back their spirit.*

— Métis leader Louis Riel, 1885

From the Zapatista uprising in Mexico and the rise of the Pan-Maya Movement in Guatemala to the coup d'état in Ecuador and the Water and Gas Wars in Bolivia, the last two decades of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st centuries have been marked by a notable increase in indigenous political action as well as an outpouring of texts produced by native

authors and poets. Amerindians from across both continents are increasingly raising their voices and reclaiming the right to represent themselves, in both a political and a discursive sense. This dual phenomenon suggests the function of poetic writing as part of a process of cultural revitalization proper to indigenous social movements at large. Since the times of conquest, writing has functioned as an instrument for authorizing and advancing the project of Western modernization, repeatedly negating and undermining cultures sustained by oral traditions and forms of textuality not assimilable to Western conceptions of writing, such as ideographic and textile forms. Time and again, literary and anthropological texts documenting indigenous ways of life, produced almost entirely by white and mestizo authors, have primarily served the projects of modernization and national integration rather than addressing the needs and interests of Amerindian communities themselves. However, the recent boom in texts by indigenous authors suggests a significant shift in the composition and function of literature in this context. Whether produced in their native languages, in the dominant European language, or both, these texts form an integral part of the struggle for cultural and intellectual sovereignty that some have referred to as a Native American renaissance.¹ What once was, and continues to be, an instrument of domination thus becomes a potential tool for liberation, carrying with it both the baggage of colonialism and the rich repertoire of oral traditions characteristic of each ethnic community.

This phenomenon is arguably one of the most significant occurrences at the turn of the twenty-first century, yet the connection between indigenous literature and social movements remains largely understudied. Without a doubt, the recent upturn in political mobilization has

¹ This is a term coined by Kenneth Lincoln in his landmark 1983 study of the same name. Some have objected to the notion that indigenous cultures and aesthetic traditions have been dormant or underdeveloped and are only now “re-awakening” as they turn to Western literary genres like the novel. However, other scholars have emphasized that this literary “rebirth” is part of a larger process that comprises many other aspects of cultural practices and artistic production beyond the sphere of literature. See, for example, Stephen Cornell, *The Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence* (1988); Joane Nagel, *Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture* (1996); and Natalio Hernández, *El despertar de nuestras lenguas / Quemán tlachixque totlahtolhuan* (2002).

garnered an immense amount of critical attention, particularly in the field of new social movement studies and in the modernity/coloniality collective.² In the case of the former, sociologists have emphasized the new forms and manifestations of activism within the context of globalization, as social actors move away from class-based conflict and protest against the State in order to develop new repertoires of contention³ within the transnational arena of human rights. In turn, the modernity/coloniality collective has focused on the epistemological dimensions of social movements in the Global South based on non-Western and/or non-modern political practices and forms of governance. Critical studies on indigenous literature are also on the rise, due in part to the influence of scholars like Carlos Montemayor, a writer himself who actively fomented publications in native languages, as well as indigenous critics teaching and working in the U.S. such as Emilio del Valle Escalante (Maya K'iche') and Luis Cárcamo Huechante (Mapuche Huilliche).

Surprisingly little work, however, has been done connecting social movements to indigenous literature on a comparative level.⁴ If literature played a key role in the construction of Latin American national identities and political formations during the 19th century, as Benedict Anderson and Doris Sommer have shown,⁵ then the looming question at the turn of the 21st

² This theoretical and political project has developed around Enrique Dussel's and Walter Mignolo's idea that coloniality is the "darker side" of modernity. While the two are constitutive of each other, the colonial dimension is often negated and obviated by Eurocentric discourse. The modernity/coloniality group has focused on 1) a critique of Eurocentrism that reveals the colonial dimensions of modernity, and 2) an exploration of epistemic, "decolonial" challenges to that framework from spaces never completely colonized by it. For a concise overview of the group's development and critical objectives, see Arturo Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise: The Latin American Modernity/Coloniality Research Program" (2007).

³ For a discussion on the concept of repertoires of contention, see Charles Tilly, *Regimes and repertoires* (2006).

⁴ The one text I know of that has treated this topic comparatively is a special issue of the *Latin American Indian Literatures Journal* edited by Emilio del Valle Escalante in 2008. However, del Valle's introduction to the volume is limited to a brief, five-page overview, and each subsequent article focuses on an individual region/context, such as the Maya Movement in Guatemala or Mapuche poetry in Chile. While there are a handful of monographs that address the intersection between poetics and politics within individual movements—including the work of del Valle Escalante and Cárcamo Huechante—, there are none that I know of that take up the topic in a comparative context.

⁵ See *Imagined Communities* (1983) and *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (1984).

century is what role emergent forms of poetic writing play in the context of globalization, where the State and its foundational fictions appear to be in decline. What kinds of transformations are taking place in the sphere of the lettered city,⁶ we might ask, and how do the age-old power relationships inherent to the form and function of literature play out in these new textual productions? In an essay titled “The ‘Lettered City’ and the Insurrection of Subjugated Knowledges in Latin America,” Juan Ricardo Aparicio and Mario Blaser argue that native forms of knowledge have significantly shaped political mobilizations, which not only place concrete demands on the State regarding land tenure and resource management but also attempt to transform the very structures of knowledge that underlie the coloniality of power and to produce a more equal exchange of ideas and worldviews. Yet their focus on the lettered city begs the question of what role literature plays in this context. So what do indigenous literature and social movements have to do with one another, and why do the two phenomena arise almost simultaneously in such disparate contexts, from rural reservations in the United States and isolated pockets of the Amazon to places like Bolivia and Guatemala where Indians comprise the majority of the population?

In the context of Mexico, Montemayor suggests that the simultaneous and initially haphazard appearance of literature in native languages across the country was a result of the labor of indigenous organizations themselves, particularly their beleaguered attempts to establish standardized alphabets for traditionally oral languages and to promote literacy as a tool for cultural preservation and renovation (*Literatura actual* 29). I would argue, however, that the converse is equally true: literature constitutes a key weapon in these political struggles, as it

⁶ This term, coined by Ángel Rama in his posthumous work *La ciudad letrada* (1984), denotes a particular configuration of power/knowledge in Latin America tied to the centrality of writing in conquest and nation building. For a recent critical revision of the concept in light of indigenous history, see also Joanne Rappaport and Tom Cummins, *Beyond the Lettered City: Indigenous Literacies in the Andes* (2012).

provides a means of rendering subjugated knowledges visible (*visibilizar*) and envisioning alternatives to modernity/coloniality (*visualizar*).⁷ In other words, indigenous literature and social movements are mutually constructive and inextricably entwined.

The project at hand emerges from a conviction that the current historical conjuncture raises a productive opportunity to rethink the notions of literature, indigeneity, and the modes and methods of subaltern resistance in the context of globalization. I contend that contemporary indigenous literature puts forth viable alternatives to hegemonic forms of knowledge tied to neoliberal, capitalistic, and Eurocentric values of progress and individualism. The goal is not simply to praise non-Western cosmovisions⁸ as a cure for the ills of society, a stance that would further contribute to the romantic commoditization of indigenous epistemologies as an easily contained and non-threatening niche in the global economy, or as a sort of blood transfusion to an ailing modernity. Rather, I suggest that an exploration of the dialogues, resonances, and dissonances among a handful of texts informed by indigenous epistemologies opens possibilities for thinking differently as a source for possible transformations within society.

Central to this inquiry is the concept of *insurgent poetics*, which I introduce to convey a mode of writing that narrates and/or performs acts of resistance and partakes in the struggle for political and intellectual sovereignty. Driven by a conviction in the performative power of poetic language, I argue that poesis—understood as a constructive act of creating new meanings in

⁷ The verb *visibilizar* exists in Spanish but not in English, yet I find that *visibilizar* and *visualizar* nicely convey the two main functions of literature within the context of indigenous social movements. When possible, then, I use the word in Spanish (in italics) in order to avoid the awkwardness of *visibilize* as academic jargon.

⁸ This term technically does not exist in English but is increasingly being used by scholars in that language due to its heavy purchase in Spanish in the context of contemporary indigenous movements. It should be noted that in Spanish the word *cosmovisión* often carries negative connotations, as it tends to elicit new age valuations of indigenous “wisdom” as a depoliticized and ahistorical form of knowledge. As such, I use the term sparingly, if somewhat ironically, and prefer to speak instead of indigenous knowledges, epistemologies, and/or worldviews. While I do not deny the potential usefulness of the term, this is a conscious choice that reflects my endeavor to avoid the kinds of romanticized perceptions of indigenous cultures that it invokes.

polysemic and plurivocal articulations of the world—provides a useful lens for considering processes of consciousness-raising and counterhegemony as a complex rearticulation of non-colonialist forms of knowledge and governance. Given that this process conveys a refusal by native authors to understand themselves only in the terms imposed by the colonizer and a reclamation of cultural autonomy through a poetic (re)creation of the self, I argue that indigenous insurgency entails not only the *negation* of colonial oppression, the State, neoliberalism, or the dominant classes (as the case may be), but also the *affirmation* of possible alternatives to hegemonic power structures and epistemes. In this context, insurgency would denote not only its traditional understanding as a form of political defiance of authority but also a kind of cultural resurgence, an in-surgence into spheres of society previously reserved to Western actors and modern values, and an emergence onto the scene of global politics. It suggests both continuation and rupture and allows us to contemplate the newness of the not new—that is, to examine the ways in which cultural roots reaching back hundreds or even thousands of years provide the seeds for a politics geared toward a radical transformation of modern society.

The concept of cultural revitalization was first introduced by Anthony Wallace in a 1956 essay titled “Revitalization Movements” and further developed in *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (1969). For Wallace, revitalization represents a complex amalgam of tradition and innovation, as social movements of various types and provenances struggle to reinvent cultures in crisis. As the focus of his monograph suggests, this concept is particularly relevant to indigenous movements, which often involve recreating ancestral traditions. In the case of the

Maya Movement in Guatemala, Nora England has demonstrated that activists, linguists, poets, and *aj q'ij*, or spiritual leaders,⁹ have assumed the task of reviving cultural practices under threat of extinction. Within this context, she argues, language plays a particularly central role, as it is understood to be the core matrix through which various forms of cultural expression are formulated and maintained (“Mayan Language Revival” 733). This process of language revival requires the invention of new forms of expression—including, but not limited to, a viable, standardized system of alphabetic writing. The concept of ethnic renewal, renaissance, or revitalization—whichever term we choose to employ—thus indicates a reactivation of lost or dormant cultural practices, not as a simple return to the past but as a critical reinvention of tradition in response to the demands of modern society.

The study of indigenous movements through the lens of revitalization both dialogues with and challenges contemporary theories of political action. In *Zapotec Renaissance: Ethnic Politics and Cultural Revivalism in Southern Mexico* (1994), for instance, Howard Campbell maintains that new social movement theory is insufficient to capture the spirit and objectives of contemporary indigenous movements, since their apparently new strategies and forms of expression are also informed by a long history of resistance and self-expression (XVIII-XIX). While they certainly reflect the general trend of “new social movements” by articulating their demands in ethnic rather than class-based terms, they also exhibit multiple continuities with past forms of insurgency. By engaging what Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui refers to as the “long memory” (*memoria larga*) of oppression, insurgents tap into a deep-seated tradition of rebellion—identifying a precedent for their own struggles, for instance, in the historical figures of Túpac

⁹ Known as *aj q'ij* in the K'iche' language, these spiritual leaders, often interpreted as a kind of shaman, hold the responsibility of cultivating spiritual practices linked to the Maya calendar, conducting ceremonies, interpreting dreams, and divining the future.

Amaru II (1742-1781) and Túpac Katari (1750-1781).¹⁰ José Rabasa has suggested that the study of social movements today may also help to lend insight into movements of the past, as certain parallels between riots in Mexico City and Tlaxcala during the 1690s and the Zapatista uprising of the 1990s suggest that “The Zapatistas today function as a return of the repressed that reminds us that other rationalities could have very well have informed other insurgencies in other times” (36). Contemporary indigenous literature, too, is new in many ways—particularly in the use of the Latin alphabet to transcribe native languages and the appeal to genres like the novel—yet it also partakes in a rich aesthetic tradition dating back hundreds or even thousands of years. For many authors, written literature and the oral tradition complement and enrich one another; rather than a clear-cut dichotomy or opposition, orality and textuality represent mutually constructive means of expressing indigenous realities, such that writing—often referred to as *oral literature*—represents an effective vehicle for recuperating ancient traditions in active engagement with contemporary society.

What is new about these movements and literatures, then, has more to do with the form and context of their articulations than with their ultimate objectives or inherent qualities. The most striking difference between contemporary mobilizations and their predecessors, perhaps, is their international and inter-tribal orientation. Reading the Zapatista uprising as a “move to the ancient future,” Gary Gossen suggests that its primary characteristics correspond to a series of epistemological principles encoded in the *Popol Wuj*, a set of texts transcribed in the 16th century that recount the mythical creation of the men of maize as well as centuries of Maya history.¹¹ He also contends, however, that the pan-Indian composition of the EZLN (Zapatista National

¹⁰ See *Oprimidos pero no vencidos: Luchas del campesinado aymara y q'hechwa de Bolivia, 1900-1980* (1986).

¹¹ In particular, Gossen interprets the uprising through the lens of the motif of breath on the mirror, as explored by Dennis Tedlock in his landmark 1993 book of the same name. I discuss the implications of this philosophical framework for Maya conceptions of insurgency in chapter one.

Liberation Army) represents something new, if not utterly revolutionary, in the modern era: “Only on rare occasions in colonial and modern Chiapas history—notably, the Tzeltal Rebellion of 1712 and the War of Santa Rosa in 1867-70—have Indian political and religious movements in Chiapas crossed ethnic and linguistic lines in terms of their constituencies and military mobilization” (536). A similar phenomenon marks the emergence of the American Indian Movement (AIM) and Red Power during the 1960s and 70s; Joane Nagel notes that, with the exception of the Ghost Dance Movement of the 1870s and 80s, Indian activism prior to AIM was “organized mainly at the tribal level and often directed against U.S. government public works projects that threatened Indian land holdings and sacred areas” (160). Although hundreds of uprisings have taken place throughout Abya Yala since the European invasion, most of those that have transpired since the colonial period have remained limited to local events (Brysk 8).

The rise of Indian movements since the 1960s and 70s reflects the increasing internationalization of human rights struggles as an upshot of globalization. Organizations such as the United Nations and the World Social Forum provide institutional channels for the affirmation of cultural, linguistic, and territorial rights that allow ethnic groups to circumvent the State and identify other spaces of intervention and legitimation. Though not legally binding, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (DRIP), signed into effect in 2007 and later revised in 2009, helps to put pressure on nation-States to uphold a series of principles agreed upon by 182 States worldwide.¹² In many ways, it would seem that globalization is a double-edged sword: as a homogenizing force, it has played a heavy hand in accelerating language death

¹² DRIP was signed into effect in 2007 with 144 States in favor, four against (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States) and eleven abstentions. It is worth noting that all four countries to vote against the declaration in 2007 are former British colonies with white majorities and minority indigenous populations that have been significantly reduced through genocidal practices during the settlement of these countries. All four have since endorsed the declaration following the Durban Review Conference in April of 2009. Unlike DRIP, the ILO Convention 169 is legally binding, yet only twenty countries have ratified it thus far (thirteen of which are in Latin America). See <<http://undesadspd.org/IndigenousPeoples.aspx>> and <<http://www.survivalinternational.org/law>>.

and cultural assimilation in countless communities worldwide, yet it also facilitates the emergence of inter-ethnic coalitions that strengthen individual movements through force of number. For this reason, many proponents of the global justice movement prefer the term “alter-globalization” (or *altermondialisme*) over “anti-globalization,” as they promote globalization in some ways—particularly the increased communication between disparate populations in similar conditions of impoverishment and subjugation—while they also contest the negative impact of transnational corporations and neoliberal economics on those same populations.

The contemporary affiliations between indigenous populations worldwide manifest a significant, incipient shift in the composition of communities often forcefully isolated and segregated from one another by colonial administrative policies, settlement patterns, and civil and religious organizations. Inés Hernández-Ávila and Stefano Varese note that

Historically, the colonially engendered fragmentation of indigenous peoples created a corollary fragmentation of indigenous knowledge systems and a rupturing of hemispheric information networks that were in place before contact. Over the course of time, Native peoples have focused, for survival's sake, mostly on their own communities, often resulting in parochial and local views of their situations, without the opportunity of drawing upon the strengths, knowledge, and creative strategies of the larger hemispheric Indian community. (85)

Moreover, the colonial politics of segregation are largely responsible for the proliferation of local dialects, such that speakers of the same language may be incapable of understanding each other from one town to the next, even within a relatively confined geographic area (85-86). Since the wars of independence, this configuration of ethnically and demographically isolated townships has been indirectly perpetuated by the State through the cacique system and is only now in the

throes of disintegration (Gossen 536). If indeed the term “Indian” is a misnomer that has historically lumped together a heterogeneous array of peoples—from the stateless societies of the Amazon to the vast empires and metropolitan centers of the Incas and Aztecs—it also serves as a shorthand for culturally diverse societies that have experienced similar processes of genocide, forced assimilation, territorial appropriation, and racist oppression. That the precise form and expression of coloniality often differs significantly from one region to the next does not preclude the articulation of a common struggle across linguistic, sociopolitical, and cultural divides. The inter-ethnic affiliations that have emerged within individual movements such as AIM, the EZLN, the pan-Maya Movement, and CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador), as well as in international movement coalitions, suggest that indigenous communities are beginning to articulate new and different forms of collaboration that challenge the geopolitical barriers established through colonization and the formation of modern nation-States.

Illustrative of this tendency is the widespread adoption of the term *Abya Yala* as an alternative name for the Americas. Meaning roughly “Continent of Plenitude and Maturity,” this toponym derived from the Kuna language of Panama denotes an alternative conception of a collectively inhabited geopolitical space and challenges the assumptions implied in the notion of the “New World.” Perhaps as a result of persistent cultural and linguistic barriers, it is most often used as a synonym for Latin or South America. Increasingly, however, activists and scholars are utilizing the term in a broader sense to refer to América as a whole, highlighting a sense of solidarity with American Indians in the U.S. and Canada. In fact, its transgressive potential seems to lie in its ability to transcend modern/colonial understandings of nationhood and to forge intercontinental connections between different Amerindian populations. Miguel Rocha Vivas

emphasizes the significance of the word's geographic origin: the isthmus that the Kuna call home provides a strategic link between North and South, Atlantic and Pacific (30).

As a result, the concept of Abya Yala has powerful implications for the burgeoning field of hemispheric indigenous studies.¹³ The interest in inter-American approaches to Native America is on the rise; a panel at the most recent meeting of the Latin American Studies Association (Washington D.C., May 2013), for instance, titled “Divergences/Traces/Convergences: Movements Across Indigenous Studies and Latino Studies,” posed a series of pressing questions for the future of these two disciplines—namely, how to bring together two separate, often isolated fields of study in light of increasing flows of people and knowledge across borders of all kinds. Scholars such as Inés Hernández-Ávila (Nez Perce/Chicana) and Gloria Chacón (Maya/Chicana) are expanding the possibilities for North-South dialogue by drawing attention to recent trends of northward migration, the international dimensions of indigenous diasporas, and the shared cultural heritage of the Mesoamerican region. Attention to this topic extends beyond academia as well; indigenous poets have also expressed a newfound commitment to reading and collaborating with one another across regional and linguistic boundaries.¹⁴ The International Poetry Festival held every year in Medellín, Colombia has seen an increase in participation by Native American authors such as Rita Mestokosho (Innu) of Canada and Joy Harjo (Muskogee), Allison Hedge Coke (Cherokee/Huron), Sherwin Bitsui

¹³ There seems to be some disagreement over whether the term “hemispheric” refers to the Americas as a whole (the Western hemisphere) or just North and Central America. Many scholars use the term in the latter sense (see, for example, Hernández-Ávila and Varese [1999] and Miralles Alberola [2006]), which focuses on the overlap between the Northern and Western hemispheres. However, true to the meaning of the term as a bipartite division of the globe, I opt for the broader interpretation. It should be noted, however, that a hemispheric approach, rather than a continental Abya Yalan approach, would also imply the inclusion of Hawaii, a region that is often considered in Native American studies but which I have omitted from my own study due to methodological concerns.

¹⁴ Two strong examples of this tendency, which I will examine at length in chapter three, are Miguel Ángel López Hernández, whose poetry collection *Encounters on the Paths of Abya Yala* is explicitly pan-Indian and inter-American, and Leslie Marmon Silko, whose novel *Almanac of the Dead* envisions an indigenous uprising of epic proportions spreading across both American continents.

(Navajo), and Karenne Wood (Monacan) of the United States. As such, it represents just one of many venues through which indigenous poets from around the world share their work and exchange notes on the experiences of colonialism and resistance in their home communities.

As the participants of the panel at LASA agreed,¹⁵ the field of hemispheric indigenous studies faces significant methodological challenges, as the former colonies of Britain, Spain, and Portugal each wrestle with their own distinct legacies of colonialism.¹⁶ In what is now the U.S. and Canada, settlers tended to arrive as family units with the objective of permanent settlement and the corollary tendency to displace the current inhabitants, often annihilating them completely.¹⁷ This procedure contrasts with that of the Spanish and Portuguese, whose focus lay less on occupying and cultivating the land for agricultural purposes than on extracting and exporting raw materials, exploiting human labor to that end, and converting local inhabitants to Christianity. Instead of whole families, the initial wave of Spanish colonialists brought male conquistadores, explorers, and proprietors, who rapidly procreated with the native women, creating the first generation of mestizos. Although indigenous populations in the Iberian colonies also suffered the devastating effects of disease and warfare like those in the North—and in some cases, like the Taino, were wiped out almost entirely—the general difference in settlement patterns laid the foundation for a sharply different demographic, as countries in the former Iberian colonies were to become primarily mestizo, while racial populations in the United States and Canada remained more clearly segregated.

¹⁵ The presenters on this panel were Gloria Chacón (UC San Diego), Kirstie Dorr (UC San Diego), Alicia Ivonne Estrada (Cal State Northridge), and Maylei Blackwell (UCLA), with José Antonio Lucero (University of Washington) as discussant.

¹⁶ Brazil introduces its own set of historical and sociopolitical issues that I do not have the space to explore here. A truly inter-American approach to indigenous studies must necessarily take Brazil into account, yet due to limitations of time and space in this dissertation, I have opted to leave that avenue of inquiry open to future research.

¹⁷ For Patrick Wolfe, this is one of the defining characteristics of settler-colonial societies, in which elimination constitutes an organizing principle, rather than a “one-off (and superseded) occurrence” (388). See “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” (2006).

These historical differences exert a direct impact on the shape of indigenous societies today and the way in which they articulate their struggle for sovereignty in relation to the modern nation-State. In particular, the reservation system in the U.S. and Canada, which has emerged out of a complex history of treaty negotiations and forced migration, marks a different terrain of political action than in Latin America. This administrative structure grants hundreds of ethnicities throughout the country—understood as nations within a nation-State—with a limited amount of autonomy within the boundaries of their relegated territories, while also fortifying their dependence upon the federal government and maintaining separate tribes in isolation. As a result of this system, which is unparalleled in Latin America,¹⁸ contemporary indigenous movements in the North face the unique challenge of negotiating federal stipulations for tribal enrollment, such as blood quantum laws and tribal registers, and maintaining the observance of treaties as legal agreements between sovereign entities.

There also are significant differences between the two regions in regards to literature. To begin with, the indigenous literary renaissance has been much more pronounced in the U.S.; in 1983, Kenneth Lincoln counted more than one hundred published Native American authors born since WWII (7), and this number has only increased since. By contrast, Indian authorship has been scarcer in much of Latin America, where many poets and novelists remain largely unknown even in their home countries. Dolores Miralles Alberola emphasizes that U.S. writers have the advantage of residing within the most powerful nation on the planet (or, at least, one that once

¹⁸ In some ways, this system resembles the model of the plurinational State currently in place in Ecuador and Bolivia. However, the origins of the reservation in North America render it starkly different from the form and function of the plurinational State. Namely, as a product of settler colonialism, the reservation system is primarily territorial in nature and emerged out of a violent process of displacement and expropriation, often through illegitimate and misleading treaties. American Indian nations are, almost by definition, marginal to the functioning of the federal government and the constitution of U.S. national identity. The plurinational State, however, is a much more recent invention by social movements themselves and proposes the equal participation of the country's various ethnicities in the democratic functioning of the government on a local and national level.

was and likes to think it still is), as it is easier to carry out a project of cultural efflorescence in a context of economic prosperity (2). Indeed, authors in the U.S. have had relatively greater access to education and other material resources than their southern counterparts, and they benefit from a well-established publishing enterprise effective at marketing and selling books both nationally and abroad. At the same time however, it is important to note that indigenous populations often do not see the benefits of national economic success; reservations constitute some of the poorest pockets in the country, such that even in the “First World,” the living conditions of many communities more closely resemble those of the so-called “Third World.” The economic differences between Latin America and the United States and Canada, while certainly a determining factor, may not be as acute as they initially seem, and internal disparities within each region are often just as great as those between North and South America as a whole.

Significant differences in publishing formats have, however, elicited debates among authors of both regions regarding the definition of indigenous literature.¹⁹ For one reason or another—perhaps due in part to a greater degree of language loss in the North—authors in the U.S. generally write in English, whereas in Latin America they tend to publish bilingually, in Spanish and their mother tongues. Hernández-Ávila and Varese note that “The sole use of colonial languages for literary purposes is seen, in the south, as an act that subverts indigenous autonomy” (87). The general point of contention, then, is as follows: should this term refer only to texts produced in native languages, or should it include any text produced by an indigenous author? If we opt for the latter definition, which is clearly more inclusive, how are we to determine who “qualifies” as a Native American and who doesn’t? Once again, this question points to sociohistorical differences between the two regions, given the lack of official tribal

¹⁹ See Hernández-Ávila and Varese, “Indigenous Intellectual Sovereignities: A Hemispheric Convocation” (1999) for a discussion of one such debate.

enrollment in the South and the greater degree of assimilation in the North at the hands of settler colonialism. Placing these two contexts in dialogue thus forces us to think carefully about the who, how, and why involved in the definition of indigeneity and the historical processes that have shaped different conceptions of the term. Where, for instance, do non-federally recognized tribes in the U.S. fit into this equation, or urban Indians who do not live on reservations and never have? What about people in Central and South America who identify as indigenous but either do not speak a native language or choose to write only in Spanish? Furthermore, are authors who write in “Western” genres such as the novel somehow less authentic or genuine than those who appeal to a more folkloric mode of expression that satisfies expectations of cultural otherness?

The point of contact between North and South American literatures appears to pose more questions than answers, yet it may be productive for that very reason. My own approach as a non-native scholar is to opt for a broader conception of indigenous literature in order to explore the tensions between these different models and avoid imposing a definition from outside or above.²⁰ I argue that this context commands a relative, fluid understanding of both indigeneity and subalternity capable of accounting for the various degrees of privilege, access to resources, and power differentials within and among different indigenous groups. The clear-cut dichotomy of “the West vs. the rest” is useful in some ways, yet it also impedes a more nuanced, comparative perspective attuned to multiple forms of subalternity beyond that single horizon of difference. In the context of Ecuador, for example, Barbara Butler observes that

²⁰ Creek-Cherokee scholar Craig Womack admits the relevance and usefulness of terms such as ‘authenticity’ and even essentialist articulations of identity when used critically, yet his insistence on the importance of indigenous self-determination points to the ways in which a reproduction of insurgent binarism in non-Native discourse might lead to the reinforcement of subalternity by reinscribing the very categories that it seeks to contest. See “The Integrity of American Indian Claims. Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love My Hybridity” in *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (2006).

Otavaleños still see themselves in a powerful opposition to the outside world of *mishu jinticuna*, literally ‘mestizo people’ or nonindian Ecuadorians. This may be a cultural myth, but it has considerable social reality. Their social origins and their contemporary reality must take into account this polarized world, even as it shifts its shape and content. Recent indigenist political movements on the regional, national, and international scenes have only reinforced this dichotomy between indigenous and nonindigenous peoples, while economic and social changes have simultaneously reduced it. (4)

Butler effectively signals the tension between the imposition of difference as a tool for colonial subjugation and the affirmation of difference as a mode of anticolonial resistance. At the same time, however, it is worth noting that Otavaleños represent one of the wealthiest indigenous populations in all of Abya Yala, as a result of the thriving tourist industry and their participation in the global market economy.²¹ The articulation of difference in indigenous political discourse thus reflects a complex terrain of action in which native populations negotiate their own identity in relation to other sectors of society. In this case, the clear-cut dichotomy between Otavaleños and *mishu jinticuna* effectively highlights a long history of racial discrimination and colonial oppression, yet it also obscures certain class dynamics that differentiate Otavalan merchants from less privileged Indians, blacks, and mestizos in Ecuador and abroad.²²

Far from suggesting that Otavaleños are less “authentic” because they do not fit the stereotype of the poor, rural, oppressed Indian, my point is that this group is illustrative of the relative nature of subalternity, particularly in the intersections between race, ethnicity, and class. Much more useful than an understanding of “the subaltern” as a fixed essence or deconstructive

²¹ See Lynn A. Meisch, *Andean Entrepreneurs: Otavalo Merchants and Musicians in the Global Arena* (2002).

²² In the U.S. and Canada, this list could also include poor whites.

remainder—i.e. something that remains always outside hegemony, the State, or official history—is a flexible interpretative model capable of capturing a polarized world constantly shifting in shape and content. In “Listening to the Subaltern: The Poetics of Neocolonial States,” for instance, Fernando Coronil juxtaposes Venezuelan discourse towards its own citizens through a form of internal colonialism with its subordinate relationship to more powerful nations in the Global North. This example allows him to demonstrate that individuals and institutions are often dominant and subaltern at the same time (or, alternatively, dominant one minute and subaltern the next). At any given time or place, he argues, “an actor may be subaltern in relation to another, yet dominant in relation to a third” (649). Moreover, he adds, “there are contexts in which these categories may simply not be relevant. Dominance and subalternity are not inherent, but relational characterizations. Subalternity defines not the being of a subject, but a subjected state of being” (649).

Coronil’s methodology thus poses a direct challenge to the conception of subalternity implied in Gayatri Spivak’s essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988). Namely, he contends that defining subalternity as that which cannot be heard precludes the possibility for dialogue and political change, as it continues to reinscribe a perceived subjugation and silence onto the subaltern. I would argue, additionally, that treating subalternity as “just a function of difference within a Western system of signs” (Sanjinés 117) essentially serves to reinforce the very same binaries that legitimate domination in the first place. Spivak correctly identifies in colonial discourse an attempt to erase any possible agency on the part of the subaltern, constructing him/her as a historically mute subject, yet in proclaiming the definitive and intractable nature of that condition—by framing the issue as a yes/no question—she essentially reinforces that endeavor by affirming its truth. She demonstrates a keen understanding of the way in which

colonial discourse works (e.g. its attempted erasure of the subjecthood of the colonized) yet her argument hinges on the problematic assumption that those efforts were entirely effective. To posit that the subaltern has no agency or subjecthood is to understand the epistemological and ontological violence of colonialism, but it is also to take colonial discourse at its word and to base a postcolonial critique on a model incapable of seeing anything outside of coloniality or the existing hegemony. In short, Spivak constructs a narrative of a totalizing and absolute colonial discourse from which there is no possible escape.

A more relative framework, by contrast, opens a space for the critical intervention of subaltern political actors who “speak” by appealing to the language of dominant Western modernity while also thinking from their own cultural grammars and epistemologies. The implication is that while nothing remains untouched by the coloniality of power, there exist spaces like indigenous cosmologies that were never completely colonized and thus carry the seeds of change. As Aparicio and Blaser put it,

[...] the cosmologies expressed through the patterns of mobilization, while submerged and constrained, have always been operative (not to be confused with unchanging), wherever they found space. Therefore the main discontinuity evident today is not the emergence of something entirely new but the “thinning” of the modern blinders/stoppers that kept other worlds and other politics invisible and confined. (70)

The task for postcolonial studies today, I would argue, is not only to identify structures of coloniality in both obvious and unexpected places—which has largely been its focus thus far—but also to identify areas where colonization is incomplete, highlighting not only the ways in which coloniality works but also its instances of failure.

This line of reasoning generally reflects the orientation of the modernity/coloniality collective, whose emphasis on decolonial thinking—an epistemology of resistance born out of the experience of colonization—highlights the ongoing interventions of “worlds and knowledges otherwise.” Yet my own approach is also post-subalternist in many ways: “‘post’ in the sense that it displaces the subalternist paradigm but is also a *consequence* of the paradigm in that it involves rethinking the nature of the state and of the ‘national-popular’ from the perspectives opened up by subaltern studies” (Beverley 111).²³ Despite certain limitations to its theoretical apparatus and interpretative methodologies, subaltern studies continues to pose important questions regarding the relationship between “subaltern populations”—in this case, indigenous authors and insurgents—and dominant institutions such as academia and the State. Moreover, placing subaltern studies in dialogue with the principles of the modernity/coloniality group—and, more importantly, with indigenous theories of/in resistance—helps to highlight some of the key limitations of a theoretical framework predicated on absolute exteriority and opposition.

This approach has direct implications for the theorization of insurgency. John Beverley notes that

In subaltern studies, the subaltern is conceptualized as that which is not only outside the state, but also constitutively *opposed* to the state in some sense or another. To the extent that the state and modernity are bound up with one another, subaltern agency is not only antistatist but also *antimodern*, interruptive of the

²³ I should note that in many ways, the modernity/coloniality group emerges out of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group; not only has it explored a similar format through a research collective, but some of its founding members—namely Walter D. Mignolo—also formed part of the subaltern studies group, though they propose to approach a similar set of issues from a different angle by foregrounding the concept of coloniality. Perhaps the most striking difference between the two is the latter’s commitment to intercultural dialogue and its attempt to engage with non-Western epistemologies as a distinct alternative to a deconstructionist approach.

developmental narrative of the formation, evolution, and perfection of the state and civil society. (111)

As we have seen, however, the process of cultural revitalization often has just as much to do with critical and creative reevaluations of indigenous cultures themselves than with a sense of direct opposition to the State, dominant society, or Western modernity. Without a doubt, these movements are fundamentally concerned with demonstrating and contesting the ways in which the colonality of power has restricted their own means of sustenance and survival. Yet the form of that protest extends beyond the negative function of inverting and opposing the values of modern society, as it also manifests a positive reevaluation of the self.

Beyond merely critiquing Eurocentric discourse, then, indigenous movements also propose concrete alternatives based on non-Western, non-modern knowledges suppressed by the epistemic violence of modernity/coloniality. As the EZLN would put it, they issue “one no and many yesses.” Jeff Conant explains that

On the one hand, this movement of movements is *anti* because, apart from being against exclusion and exploitation generally, it is against the dominant narratives of history. [...] On the other hand, neither the Zapatistas nor the larger global movement(s) are limited to the ‘no’; like *Zapatismo*, the global movement is in favor of diverse, plural, culturally embedded community and is engaged in increasingly concrete efforts to build social and political structures that support food sovereignty, water justice, democracy in trade, and a revival of economic frameworks like the commons that propose alternatives to both government control and free market free-for-all—real, grounded, strategies, many of them based in notions of autonomy, liberty, justice, and dignity. (332-33)

More than *anticolonial*, as Walter Mignolo has argued, indigenous and alterglobalization movements are *decolonial*, as they engage a creative process of transformation beyond a direct expression of opposition. Rather than understanding insurgency as a negation of the State or elite sectors of society, then, it may be more productive to shift our emphasis to coloniality as the main site of political intervention in indigenous movements.

This change in perspective would entail understanding insurgency as a response to a complex geopolitical, epistemological, and socioeconomic matrix rather than to any single institution, social class, race, or cultural framework in particular. While either the State or white elites may manifest themselves as a principal adversary in the discourse of insurgency, foregrounding them as the main objects of protest can often be misleading. Given the diffuse yet pervasive nature of coloniality, indigenous insurgency will often articulate itself in opposition to these different elements of society but will nonetheless interact with them in different ways, according to the sociohistorical context of each movement and/or author. There may be ways in which social actors unintentionally reinforce coloniality in the very process of contesting it; they may also challenge State authority in some ways and reinforce it in others. If indeed indigenous movements' relations with the State are often paradoxical, I would argue that this fact speaks less to any ideological or conceptual shortcoming in the movements themselves than to the complexity of any endeavor to work within the parameters of existing systems while also claiming a certain extemporaneity to them. It also reflects the danger of using certain political and discursive tools that may come with undesirable consequences but that nonetheless prove useful to insurgents' more immediate (and perhaps even long-term) goals.

By proposing to resemanticize insurgency rather than simply replacing it with a “better” term,²⁴ I suggest that what is needed is not merely a shift in language but rather a different conceptualization of insurgency that would draw upon the theoretical contributions of indigenous movements so as to supplement its original meanings and thereby alter both the connotations and denotations of the term. This move would require not simply constructing a new theoretical model for a new kind of movement (marked by globalization, transnational arenas, democratization, multiculturalism, etc.) but rather opening a space for rethinking the history of indigenous insurgency in Abya Yala in light of recent developments. Since these movements both protest and advocate, my argument is not that we should replace one understanding of insurgency with another altogether but rather that, by supplementing it with additional meanings—by making “insurgency” more polysemic—, we might construct a more complex and productive understanding of its modalities and the ways in which power and contestation work by building upon the knowledge practices of insurgents themselves.

I have divided the dissertation into two halves corresponding to what I perceive as the principal functions of literature within the context of contemporary Amerindian movements. Part One focuses on the motif of *visibilización*, or the function of literature in rendering visible subjugated populations and forms of knowledge consigned to oblivion through the epistemic violence of modernity/coloniality. For Enrique Dussel, the very conquest of América and the

²⁴ In fact, the term “social movement” is not ideal either, as it might imply that its members all move as one—in other words as a single unity cast as a subject—rather than connoting a process enacted by a group of individuals marked by heterogeneous and often conflicting subject positions, modes of contestation, goals, and motivations.

advent of the colonality of power entailed not a *des-cubrimiento* or dis-covery but rather an *en-cubrimiento*, or covering over, of the continent's native inhabitants and their ways of life.²⁵ The question that follows, then is what the countergesture to that *en-cubrimiento* might look like.

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui has indicated that

Hay en el colonialismo una función muy peculiar para las palabras: las palabras no designan, sino encubren, y esto es particularmente evidente en la fase republicana cuando se tuvieron que adoptar ideologías igualitarias y al mismo tiempo escamotear los derechos ciudadanos a una mayoría de la población. De este modo, las palabras se convirtieron en un registro ficcional, plagado de eufemismos que velan la realidad en lugar de designarla. (*Ch'ixinakax utxiwa* 19)

By highlighting the ambiguity and polyvalence of poetic language, however, I suggest that a decolonial response to that condition does not entail simply uncovering that which was previously suppressed. To *rebelar* against the condition of invisibility, in other words, is not only to *revelar* that which was hidden or concealed through the violence of colonality but also to *re-velar*, to assert new forms of poetic obscurity that resist the scientific pursuit of panoptic knowledge and illumination. In this regard, I illustrate the necessarily partial nature of human perspective and the productive limits of poetic language as an instrument for constructing, rather than merely designating, alternative realities.

Focused primarily on Guatemala and Mexico, chapters one and two examine the complex interplay between revelation and concealment as a fundamental characteristic of insurgent poetics. Chapter one traces the recent emergence of the Maya Movement in the context of the Civil War, arguing that poetic language plays a central role in what Foucault has referred to as an

²⁵ See 1492: *el encubrimiento del otro. Hacia el origen del "mito de la modernidad"*. Conferencias de Frankfurt, octubre de 1992 (1994).

insurrection of subjugated knowledges. In particular, I foreground the motif of breath on the mirror in the *Popol Wuj* and contemporary Maya literature as an ethical postulate for limiting power/knowledge that structures Maya conceptions and articulations of insurgency. Chapter two further problematizes straightforward understandings of visibility politics by drawing on the Zapatista ski mask's paradoxical show of native invisibility and the Zapotec novel *Cantares de los vientos primerizos*'s narrative refusal to write. Emphasizing the productivity of paradox in this context, I pose a series of questions regarding subaltern silence and invisibility in the context of indigenous literatures.

Part Two, titled *Visualización*, focuses on what I propose as the second principal gesture of poetic writing within/for social movements: that of envisioning and awakening other possibilities of existence and points of departure. I argue that insurgent poetics functions not simply as an escape from an oppressive reality but rather as a vehicle for creating collective consciousness and for acting in and upon the world. Central to this framework are the figure of the shared dream and the prophetic function of indigenous literature. Anthony Wallace notes that dreams and visions are often a vital element of revitalization movements, as they provide a means of communicating with ancestral spirits and visualizing the imminent future ("Revitalization Movements" 267-78). Wallace recalls that following this initial revelation, he first appealed to psychoanalytic methods to interpret what he refers to as "personality transformation dreams," yet he soon realized that conventional dream theory was insufficient to capture the precise form and function of dream-visions that, "while essentially dream formations, differ in several respects from ordinary symptomatic dreams" (271). He thus echoes Erich

Fromm's observation that "dreams are not so much symptomatic of unconscious neurotic conflict as insightful in a positive and creative sense" (271).²⁶

More than fifty years after the publication of Wallace's article, these observations remain strikingly relevant. Rather than a kind of collective neurosis or a reflection of the repressed unconscious, the visions of indigenous movements are more akin to what Robin Kelley, alluding to the famous speech by Martin Luther King, Jr., refers to as freedom dreams, as a function of the radical imagination. As a collective, transgressive vision of the future marked by the resurgence of suppressed spirits and voices, indigenous dreams offer a provocative challenge to the traditional understanding of alienation and consciousness-raising. I argue that, instead of a simple progression from *soñar* to *despertar* as the awakening of an alienated consciousness, insurgent poetics foreground the complex interplay between sleeping/dreaming²⁷ and awakening as overlapping and interlocking actions. As such, they invoke the possibility of awakening *to* or *through* dreams or, as a verse by Leonel Lienlaf suggests, awakening from nightmares to the reality of dreams.

Chapter three compares Wayuu authors Estercilia Simanca Pushaina and Miguel Ángel López Hernández (Colombia) to Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko (United States) through the lens of what I call literary contraband, or dream trafficking. By linking indigenous interventions of the lettered city with a fluid conception of territory based on routes and paths rather than borders and fences, I argue that these writers challenge the assumption that by appropriating Western literary genres they merely acquiesce to or uncritically adopt the civilizational values that those genres express. Finally, chapter four asks how these new strains

²⁶ See Fromm, *The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales, and Myths* (1951).

²⁷ These are two meanings of the verb *soñar* that are lost in translation.

of literature affect and interact with the *indigenista* tradition. An analysis of two recent Bolivian novels by non-indigenous authors demonstrates the relevance of Amerindian epistemologies beyond the immediate confines of the *ayllu* (Quechua/Aymara community). In the case of *Cuando Sara Chura despierte* (2003) by Juan Pablo Piñeiro, I argue that his focus on the eve of the Entrada del Gran Poder, a massive festival held every year in La Paz, highlights the resurgence of an Aymara cultural logic that threatens to permanently rupture the modern/colonial order. Meanwhile, *De cuando en cuando Saturnina* (2004) by Alison Spedding shifts our perspective to the more distant future, envisioning a revolutionary society structured by Aymara forms of governance rather than the modern/colonial nation-State. In doing so, she destabilizes the State as the single or primary horizon of insurgent intervention and draws our attention to hierarchies and inequalities within the Aymara community, particularly in regards to gender. I conclude that indigenous movements face the challenge not only of contesting the power structures that restrict the exercise of autonomy and self-determination but also of critically revising and transforming oppressive traditions within their own communities.

Any comparative, inter-American study such as this one faces numerous limitations, as it is not possible to consider all the different spaces and cases that either confirm or contest my overarching claims. As such, the texts I have selected for analysis are more symptomatic than truly representative of the movements and sociocultural processes that I describe. The reader may notice certain crucial omissions, however: for instance, the relative absence of the Mapuche context as one of the most vibrant literary and political movements of recent decades. Indeed, the original plan for this dissertation had included a chapter on Elicura Chihuailaf, Lionel Lienlaf, and David Aníñir Guilitraro that would connect the Mapuche conception of the dream with political articulations of autonomy, emphasizing tensions and dissonances within the movement.

Due to time constraints and methodological concerns, I ultimately opted to save this chapter for the future book project, with the understanding that an in-depth, nuanced perspective of this kind would require more time that I can afford it at present. Meanwhile, a true inter-American project, as my former professor Earl Fitz would likely object, should incorporate Brazil and Canada in a meaningful way, as they not only bring distinct historical and political contexts into the mix, but they also represent two of the largest areas, in terms of land mass, in all of Abya Yala. Yet rather than strive for a kind of encyclopedic overview of all of the Americas, I have opted for an intersectional approach, allowing myself to be led by the movements and texts themselves in regards to the primary concerns they articulate. I trust, then, that this dissertation serves to open a series of questions and preliminary claims that leaves room for further intervention by other scholars (and myself) in future endeavors.

Perhaps more significant than these geographical concerns, however, are my own limitations as a non-native scholar approaching indigenous literature, social movements, and epistemologies from a distanced perspective. With the exception of a limited reading knowledge of Maya K'iche', for instance, my relative ignorance of indigenous languages imposes significant limits to my comprehension of these texts, particularly in regards to their poetic qualities (e.g. rhythm, tone, metaphor, word play, discursive traditions, etc.). However, I also know of no indigenous scholars or poets who would themselves be capable of reading and carefully interpreting texts in languages as diverse as K'iche', Wayuunaiki, and Sierra Zapotec within the confines of a single comparative study. While cognizant of my own limitations, therefore, I remain convinced of the importance of comparative studies such as this one and submit that a truly transformative political project must include the critical (and self-critical) interventions not only of indigenous poets and scholars but also of non-native individuals such as

myself who are committed to expanding the possibilities for interculturality and North-South dialogue both within and beyond academia.

Lastly, a note on terminology. While fully aware of the problematic implications of using terms such as “indigenous” and “Indian” to denote what are often vastly disparate and heterogeneous populations (who often do not identify themselves as such), I have chosen to deploy these terms as a heuristic, comparative tool rather than any essentialist denominative of a homogeneous or unified group of people. Indigenous movements throughout Abya Yala have advocated a wide variety of terms over the years—including, but not limited to, indigenous, native, Indian, American Indian, Native American, and Amerindian—while others prefer to avoid these denominations altogether in favor of more localized labels such as Lakota, Mapuche, and Maya (or, more specifically, K’iche’, Tojolabal, and Kaqchikel). Each of these labels has its advantages and disadvantages, not the least of which are the cultural stigmas that some of them carry. In an attempt to reflect the variety of approaches and perspectives, however, I have chosen to use all of these terms more or less interchangeably, though I tend to use “Native American” and “American Indian” more heavily in the context of the United States, where their usage is most common. Whenever possible, I refer to ethnicities by their individual names, giving preference to the way in which most of these groups and individuals tend to identify themselves to outsiders.

PART ONE: *VISIBILIZAR*

CHAPTER ONE

VERBAL ART AND THE INSURRECTION OF MAYA KNOWLEDGE

Han surgido hoy en muchas lenguas indígenas de América escritores que por vez primera, después de quinientos años, escriben en sus propias lenguas de sí mismos y para sí mismos. América escuchará su voz, ese pensamiento sobre el cual hemos hablado siempre los no indígenas. Es un surgimiento. Es uno de los acontecimientos más notables en la cultura de [A]mérica de este siglo.

—Carlos Montemayor

1.1 POETICS OF THE REARGUARD

It is July of 1998 in Guatemala City, and more than thirty poets and scholars from across North, Central, and South America, the majority themselves indigenous, have convened for the Primer Congreso de Literatura Indígena de América (the First Conference on Indigenous Literature of América). Gaspar Pedro González, Q'anjob'al Maya poet and novelist, inaugurates the conference with the following words:

Han pasado más de 25 k'atunes²⁸ desde que la tinta se secó en los tinteros indígenas en América; desde que los pinceles y los cinceles dejaron de grabar el pensamiento del hombre sobre la cara de la piedra, sobre las pieles de los venados, en el jade y en el papel. Pero el tintero no se ha roto, la memoria [aún] guarda y transmite en la punta de la oralidad las formas de ver el mundo, de percibir el mundo y de seguir creando cíclicamente el mundo. El mundo de afuera y el de adentro. La tinta [está] allí y ahora es cuestión de remojarla y resucitarla para seguir con el hilo de la escritura que da continuidad a la práctica de la cultura. ("Discurso inaugural" 6)

²⁸ The k'atun is a unit of time in the Maya calendar equal to 20 *tuns* or 7200 days. These units of measurement correspond to what is known as the Long Count calendar, which identifies a day by counting the number of days passed since a mythical creation date. This method of measuring time works in conjunction with a 365-day calendar based on the cycle of the sun and a sacred 260-day calendar based on the cycle of the moon. Maya calendrics have played a crucial role in Maya cultural revitalization over recent decades, in particular the ritual practices tied to the sacred calendar, known as the Tzolk'in or Cholq'ij. See Barbara Tedlock, *Time and the Highland Maya* (1992).

Although regional conferences held in Oklahoma (1992) and Ixmiquilpan, Mexico (1994) brought together indigenous poets and critics of different ethnic backgrounds, González notes that this is the first to propose the topic on a hemispheric scale (6). In many ways his opening address—alongside those of Carlos Montemayor (quoted above) and Rigoberta Menchú—frames the historical and cultural significance of this meeting and signals it as a true event marking the turn of the century.

The turn towards indigenous self-representation arguably defines the current historical conjuncture, as Guatemala wrestles with the aftershock of a bloody, genocidal civil war and the Maya struggle to transform their role in the new post-war nation. Following on the heels of the peace accords as well as the international fame and controversy of Rigoberta Menchú's testimony and Nobel prize, much of the Maya Movement from the 1990s on has centered on a revindication of indigenous ways of being and knowing and the revitalization of repressed and dormant voices. Illustrative of this tendency is the 2005 book *Maya Intellectual Renaissance* by Jakalteek anthropologist, poet, and activist Víctor Montejo, which compiles a number of essays published in Guatemalan newspapers and journals over the years. For Montejo, the Maya people need Maya intellectual leaders, now more than ever, as a guide for reviving and disseminating ancestral knowledge. He writes that the Maya "are now in the process of organizing themselves into a cultural movement concerned with self-representation. This cultural resurgence emphasizes the necessity of Maya being allowed to express themselves freely and to contribute from their own knowledge system, ideology, and communal politics to the construction of a multicultural Guatemalan nation-state" (80-81). Montejo protests the criticism that "by assimilating and using Western sciences and academic fields, [Maya intellectuals] are playing within the very system that has oppressed the Maya" (160). Such arguments, in effect, would

pose indigenous culture as static, non-modern, and ahistorical and would play into colonialist fantasies of a pure, unadulterated native other. Instead, he contends, the Maya must keep informed of advances in the hard sciences, social sciences, and humanities, but they also must strive to “bring indigenous knowledge to light and incorporate its insights into the knowledge shared by the world” (160). Claims that natives “sell out” or assimilate by gaining access and contributing to the world bank of knowledge—or by writing in Spanish or English, or producing Western genres such as the novel—thus overlook epistemology itself as a site of insurrection and resistance as well as dialogue and productivity.

At first glance, the culturalist approach of Maya intellectuals such as Montejo may appear less overtly political than the movement’s popular front, which has emphasized trade unions, class struggle, and mass mobilization over linguistic and cultural rights, educational initiatives, and the cultivation of traditional rituals. Yet a historical and political contextualization of the movement as a whole, as well as an awareness of the productive dissonance between the cultural and popular fronts, should caution against a depoliticized reading of the former. Through their focus on revitalization, ethnonationalists have sought to avoid the confrontational overtones associated with popular resistance “in order to circumvent the same repression that has plagued their more outspoken peers” throughout the country’s civil war (Sturm 116). In this context, linguistic and educational reforms may constitute the safest—and even the most promising—paths to significant structural change (Brown, “Mayan Language” 173). As Circe Sturm notes, this emphasis allows them to be perceived as less threatening to ladino authorities (116). Yet this strategy should not lead us to assume that cultural activists necessarily *are* less threatening to the status quo.

In this chapter I argue that the generally non-confrontational nature of the pan-Maya movement does not render it less insurgent than other forms of popular mobilization; rather, it suggests the need for a somewhat different understanding of insurgency capable of accounting for more indirect and covert forms of political action. Within this context, Foucault's notion of the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges' helps to shed light on attempts to recuperate local knowledge as a profoundly political and potentially radical intervention.²⁹ In a lecture at the Collège de France in 1976, Foucault defined this term as follows:

When I say 'subjugated knowledges' I mean two things. On the one hand, I am referring to historical contents that have been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systematizations. [...] Subjugated knowledges are, then, blocks of historical knowledges that were present in the functional and systematic ensembles, but which were masked [...] When I say 'subjugated knowledges' I am also referring to a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity. (81-82)

Foucault's delineation of these two distinct forms of subjugated knowledges underscores the doubly subalternized status of indigenous epistemologies: not only are they consistently dismissed as folkloric, superstitious, or even quaint forms of "native wisdom" rather than

²⁹ Numerous scholars have raised pertinent questions regarding the applicability of Foucault's theoretical framework beyond the immediate confines of the European history that informs his work. For instance, Aymara sociologist Esteban Ticona Alejo cautions against the assumption that Foucaultian power is universal in nature; he argues that while it can be useful in the context of colonial domination, it also has limited use value in describing the inner workings of *ayllus* (indigenous communities) in the Andes, where power does not imply absolute domination and the elimination of the adversary but rather the ritual maintenance of productive conflict and opposition. My intention, then, is not to conduct a "Foucaultian" reading of native revitalization projects but rather to explore the ways in which the notion of an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" dialogues with, and can enrich our understanding of, the political and poetic implications of the Maya Movement.

complex systems of thought capable of competing and dialoguing with the contributions of Western science and philosophy, but they also represent blocks of historical knowledges that were masked or covered over through the epistemological violence of the Spanish conquest. Numerous scholars, including Argentine philosopher Enrique Dussel and K'iche' scholar-activist Luis Enrique Sam Colop, have illustrated that the Iberian invasion of Abya Yala entailed the imposition of a Eurocentric conception of the world over all other forms of thought. As a result, this process entailed not a *des-cubrimiento* or dis-covery but rather an *en-cubrimiento* or covering over of the native inhabitants and their ways of life.³⁰ The “Indian awakening in Latin America,” to borrow a phrase from Yves Materne, thus manifests what Foucault perceived as an incipient restructuring of dominant systems of thought in the era of globalization.

As Montemayor implies, the (re)emergence of Maya literature in recent decades represents a *surgimiento* (“Memoria” 13), or transformative event. Miguel Rocha Vivas has argued that the Andean concept of *pachakuti*, or world reversal, is a more appropriate descriptor for the emergence of contemporary indigenous literature than either “boom” or “vanguard,” since these terms elicit associations with editorial/market trends and Marxist-Leninist forms of political action. Where vanguard projects of the 20th century throttled forward at breakneck speed, this *pachakuti* or inverse vanguard, in consonance with the Andean conception of time,

³⁰ Dussel’s elaboration of this concept in his series of lectures in Frankfurt in 1992, later published as *1492: el encubrimiento del otro: hacia el origen del “mito” de la modernidad* (*The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “the Other” and the Myth of Modernity*), is perhaps the most well-known and most thoroughly elaborated iteration of the juxtaposition between *des-cubrimiento* and *en-cubrimiento*. However, Sam Colop’s analysis is also relevant here due to his contribution from within the context of the Maya Movement. Prior to Dussel and Sam Colop, Edmundo O’Gorman, Beatriz Pastor, and Eduardo Galeano all contributed reflections on different facets of this topic. Perhaps most explicit is Galeano’s affirmation in a 1986 essay that “Ninguna empresa imperial, ni las de antes ni las de ahora, descubre. La aventura de la usurpación y el despojo no descubre: encubre. No revela: esconde. Para realizarse, necesita coartadas ideológicas que convierten la arbitrariedad en derecho” (Galeano 116; also qtd. in Sam Colop, *Jub’aqtun Omay Kachum K’aslemal* 10).

moves patiently towards the future with its eyes to the past (Rocha Vivas 76).³¹ In the words of Mapuche poet Paulo Huirimilla,

El conocimiento occidental se basa en el progreso unidireccional, es decir, una teoría va superando a la anterior hasta invisibilizarla. En la cultura mapuche tradicional, es al revés: en la medida que valores a tus abuelos no se pierden los conocimientos propios; en la medida en que entiendas a tus antepasados, que son los ejes fundamentales del conocimiento, mayor y mejor es tu forma de entender la vida y el mundo.

Juan Duchesne Winter, in turn, suggests that “There is really no lack of vanguard stances in the history of Latin American and Caribbean letters, at least in the Spanish-speaking area. What we have missed is an enduring rearguard” (“Literary Communism” 229).

Through the framework of insurgent poetics, I propose reading contemporary Maya literature as a manifestation of the ‘insurrection of subjugated knowledges’ in the form of a rearguard struggle: that is, from a place at the heart of resistance, yet removed from the fanfare and militarism of the vanguard—a place where strategies center on creation and reinvention rather than explosions and confrontations (Duchesne Winter 229). A reading attuned to Maya cultural revitalization as both a literary and a social movement should thus reveal a form of political action forged in the realm of poetic language as a site for the creative production and recuperation of non-Western bodies of knowledge. In this context, poetry provides a space not only for posing non-rational forms of thought but also for the regeneration and proliferation of

³¹ See *Pachakuti: los aymara de Bolivia frente a medio milenio de colonialismo* by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui for more on this conception of time, known as *nayrapacha*, as it relates to anticolonial struggles. Rivera Cusicanqui describes it as “pasado, pero no cualquier visión de pasado; más bien, ‘pasado-como-futuro’ [...] Un pasado capaz de renovar el futuro, de revertir la situación vivida” (44).

alternative rationalities centered on the multiplicity of meanings and the interconnectedness of signs and objects in the universe.

1.2 FROM “CIVIL” WAR TO CIVIL RESISTANCE

In many ways, the pan-Maya Movement of Guatemala is both representative of broader trends of decolonial struggle and exceptional in its particular emphasis on culturally-based forms of activism over more overt modes of political mobilization and public protest. It is therefore crucial to understand the historical context in which Maya cultural activism develops. Two major series of events in recent Guatemalan political and literary history help to shed light on this emergence: first, the end of three and a half decades of devastating and genocidal civil war through the new constitution and democratic opening of 1984-85, the subsequent de-escalation of the war, and the signing of the peace accords in 1996; and second, the publication of *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* in 1982, her receipt of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize, and the academic controversy that ensued from the publication of David Stoll’s *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* in 1999.³² The peace accords transpired in an era of increased international attention garnered by Menchú’s testimonio, and the war ended on a note of reconciliation and concession to indigenous rights in a few limited but significant ways. Specifically, as Victor Montejo notes, “the peace accords include the rights of Maya to freely use

³² A third event that is perhaps equally or nearly as important as these two are the quincentennial celebrations of the “discovery” of the Americas that took place in 1992, which were met by widespread demonstrations against ongoing forms of colonialism in the present and countercelebrations of indigenous cultural resistance.

their own languages, cosmovision, and spirituality” with explicit sanction and protection by the State (*Maya Intellectual Renaissance* 7).³³

Though limited in their gains—and faced with the challenge of transforming the conciliatory language of the accords into concrete political and social improvements—Mayas have before them a series of cracks in the existing power structures which they seek to penetrate, like plant roots in a rock’s crevices, in order to split open and crumble the mechanisms of internal colonialism. As Ixil leader Pablo Ceto explained to Arturo Arias in 1981, many Maya leaders cultivated throughout the war what they perceived as a “conspiracy within the conspiracy.” This tactic consisted of “trying to move up the revolutionary ladder as far as they could, not necessarily to promote all the revolution’s goals, but rather to advance the Mayas’ own secret goals of cultural agency” (Arias, “Conspiracy on the Sidelines” 169). Diane Nelson suggests in metaphorical terms that “Like hackers who work in the interstices of computer networks, the Maya-hackers are creating spaces for themselves inside the state” (257). In an attempt to combat romanticized, “ethnostalgic” visions of the Maya and to highlight strategic appropriations of Western technology and power/knowledge, Nelson argues that “the advanced Maya hacker is reading the binary codes of ladino-Maya and modern-premodern that structure the Guatemalan cyberspatialized nation-state, and they are decoding, reprogramming, and then networking to train others to do it” (267).

In other words, Maya cultural activism represents a strategy of effecting political change not by taking over the State and reconfiguring the institutions of power according to an overtly

³³ The democratization of Guatemala and the peace process as a whole transpired over the course of a decade and included key concessions to Maya demands, such as the recognition of the country’s linguistic diversity in the 1984 constitution and its provision for bilingual education in native communities; the establishment of the Guatemalan Mayan Languages Academy (ALMG) to establish a unified orthography for Maya languages and the allotment of \$900,000 annually to ALMG initiatives in publishing and bilingual education; and the Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, signed into effect in March of 1995.

radical indigenous agenda, but rather by penetrating and transforming the institutions from within. It thus enters in sharp contrast with the approach of certain movements elsewhere, most notably the widespread Quechua and Aymara protests and armed resistance in the Water and Gas Wars of 2000 and 2003, which led to the election of Evo Morales as Bolivia's first indigenous president and the subsequent declaration of a plurinational state.³⁴ Both countries have majority indigenous populations, and both saw revolutionary movements in the 1950s instigate significant land reforms and increased labor rights. Yet the more invasive intervention of the U.S. government in Guatemala and the devastating effects of the civil war led to a very different set of circumstances in the Central American country as it entered the 21st century. In this regard, the sense of what is possible and what strategies are most effective depend on the specific cultural and political climate in the post-war era.³⁵ Shied away from the implications of violent, open confrontations and haunted by the memories of a devastating and largely futile civil war, Maya activists in Guatemala seek out other avenues to effect political change. In the years following a war whose casualties were overwhelmingly Maya, it thus makes sense that native leaders would

³⁴ It is surely more than coincidental, however, that one of the most striking literary texts to appear in Bolivia in the past decade features a 'hacktivist,' Aymara, lesbian protagonist and repurposes the cyberpunk tradition within a distinctively Andean context. Saturnina's exploits as a hacker, however, also serve to undermine the increasingly institutionalized power of male Aymara leaders in the hypothetical society of Qullasuyu Marka in the mid 2080s. In this case, then, Saturnina's "deprogramming" is aimed not at the State and ladino/*q'ara* society but rather at the patriarchy of Aymara society itself. I will return to this point in chapter four.

³⁵ At the same time, Nelson notes that "These modes of 'working differently' are tactical responses to violence, but they also reflect a global historical shift. While many indigenous people are small farmers, agricultural peons, textile producers, or workers in Guatemala's industries and maquila production, increasing numbers have service and information management jobs, such as teachers, lawyers, bureaucrats, and merchants. Thus the conditions of possibility for the Maya hacker include the emergence of a critical mass of educated indigenous people, shifts in the transnational economy that increasingly emphasize the information economy, and technological changes that have made relevant hard- and software increasingly available" (293-94). This tension between local context and broader trends is illustrative of the resonances between indigenous movements in Guatemala and elsewhere, as well as the distinctive characteristics that determine each one, according to internal factors.

eschew the politics of the vanguard³⁶ and seek out alternative strategies for advancing their political agendas.

At the same time, illustrative parallels between the two contexts abound, suggesting the presence of broader patterns of decolonial struggle. Although the amount of contemporary literature by native authors in Bolivia is curiously sparse compared to Guatemala, an interview with Felipe Quispe dating shortly after the September 2000 uprising in La Paz highlights the poetic dimensions of Aymara insurgency:

Hemos utilizado nuestra propia ideología, por qué no decir el pachakutismo divino que viene de abajo a arriba... Estamos en el tiempo del Pachakuti, las Wak'as van a volver a hablar, las piedras van a revelar cosas insospechadas. Entonces, los ríos volverán a cantar. Todo lo que habíamos tenido lo hemos utilizado y eso nos ha servido de gran manera con lo cual hemos tenido que rebelarnos en el septiembre indígena. (170)

As Elizabeth Monasterios has observed, passage quote articulates of a poetics of rebellion (“Poéticas del conflicto andino” 559). Revolution is figured here as *pachakuti* and revelation as a poetic process through which the earth itself will once again speak and sing. This framework suggests not only the ‘visibilization’ of the injustices that the movement seeks to redress but also the performative power of poetry to reveal the unexpected (“revelar cosas insospechadas”) and, particularly, to unearth hidden or silenced voices. Quispe’s observations thus shed light on the centrality of poetics to Maya political thought in the context of Guatemala, where local

³⁶ I refer here specifically to the political conception of the vanguard associated with Marxism, guerrilla warfare and *foquismo*, yet I am not averse to the term’s evocation of the literary vanguard of the 1920s as well. As we have already seen, this term conveys a model of societal transformation predicated on a relentless drive toward the future and the negation of the past. As such, it tends to conflict with indigenous conceptions of temporal cyclicity, the interdependent relationship between past, present, and future, and the importance of ancestral knowledge.

knowledges informed by the logic and structure of native languages have shaped the articulation of insurgency. Where Quispe asserts the poetic and cosmological content of Andean insurrections, González and Montemayor allude to the insurgent content of Maya poetics and cosmology. In Guatemala, much more than in Bolivia, language itself becomes the medium of insurrection and literature a vehicle for social change. Meanwhile, the Andean notion of *pachakuti* dialogues with Maya understandings of the cyclical time and of violent destruction as a harbinger of new beginnings.³⁷ The post-war era thus acquires a particular meaning within the framework of Maya cosmology as a new era replete with the potential for significant transformations and the disarticulation of existing hierarchies.

Meanwhile, just as leaders of the Maya Movement build on the openings occasioned by the peace accords and the official recognition of indigenous rights in order to wedge themselves into national politics and reclaim their presence in the Guatemalan government, Maya writers have also drawn on the openings accorded by the testimonio genre and Menchú's international celebrity. Their simultaneous recognition of the significance of Menchú's text and their reservation regarding the mediation of Maya voices through the pen of an anthropologist contributed to a growing recognition of the need for self-representation. The marked increase in authorship by Mayas in the 1990s indicates an attempt to attend to this disparity and an affirmation that they can indeed write and speak for themselves.³⁸ The narrator-protagonist of González's second novel, who recounts his exodus to Chiapas as a child during the civil war and his return as an adult during the war's decline, begins his story with an explicit affirmation of self-determination through writing: "Ya me cansé de que otros, los charlatanes, hablen por mí

³⁷ I will return to this point below, in the context of the novel *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá* by Luis de Lión.

³⁸ For a representative selection of contemporary Maya poetry see *Uk'uux Kaj, Uk'uux Ulew: Antología de poesía maya guatemalteca contemporánea* (2010), ed. Emilio del Valle Escalante.

[...] Permítaseme esta vez tomar la palabra, esta palabra aunque no es mía, sin embargo la tomo para decir lo que siento y lo que pienso” (*Retorno* 4).³⁹ *El retorno de los mayas* makes clear that, like Menchú, its nameless protagonist (known only as *Meb’ixh*, or orphan) learned Spanish later in life—in this case, after his exile in Chiapas, where he found himself incapable of communicating either with the other refugees from distinct linguistic communities throughout the highlands or with the native Maya populations of Chiapas. Accordingly, his act of “taking” an alien tongue serves as a reminder of linguistic difference. Yet we might also interpret this declaration as a reference to the text’s novelistic form; the narrative voice appropriates both the Spanish language and a Western literary genre as a tool for expressing Maya experiences and political realities.

In many ways, *El retorno* also anticipates and countermands the academic controversy surrounding Rigoberta Menchú, which came to a head just a few years after the appearance of this novel. “La historia de mi vida, no es ficción,” the narrator insists; “Es testimonio de una realidad, de una verdad viviente como la de otros miles de hermanos míos, que ahora se multiplican allá en los basureros de mi patria” (6). The irony of a novel that declares itself non-fictional undoubtedly speaks to its political function for González as a direct means of expressing and transforming reality. As a ‘testimony of (a) reality’ *El retorno* thus plays an important role in rendering Maya experiences in the war visible and palpable. Significantly, González has described his first novel, *La otra cara*—which elicits numerous parallels with *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*—as a “testinovela” (“Entrevista”).⁴⁰ Yet the insistence of the protagonist of

³⁹ In addition to the *testimonio*, it is reasonable to assume that González is also referring to the literary tradition of *indigenismo*, which depicts indigenous life, customs, and oppression from a non-native perspective. Contemporary indigenous literature thus enters in contrast yet also in dialogue with this canonical body of writing.

⁴⁰ *La otra cara*, like *El retorno de los mayas*, represents a *novela de denuncia*, or novel of denouncement, yet it also diverges from the *indigenista* tradition that precedes it. Unlike the indigenist novel, González purposefully avoids portraying natives as victims without agency. If indeed the text makes perfectly clear the ways in which Maya

El retorno on speaking for himself also marks an attempt to transcend the problems of ethnographic mediation through a gesture of self-determination.

Meanwhile, Montejo has argued that the problem of mediation in *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* is not limited to Elisabeth Burgos's role in the production of the text; the academic controversy that ensued from Stoll's book in 1999 has had the effect of obviating other testimonios (like Montejo's) and silencing other experiences and voices ("Truth" 378).⁴¹ Montejo's argument should thus serve as a warning against overstating the centrality of Menchú's text in the emergence of contemporary Maya literature. While the so-called culture wars raged on in U.S. academia and scholars debated over multicultural education curricula and the nature of collective versus individual truth, Maya activists in Guatemala faced the sanguinary reality of ethnic conflict and continued to produce their own narratives of struggle and survival. It is also important to note that the roots of the contemporary Maya literary movement predate Menchú's text. As early as the 1960s, Francisco Morales Santos had published volumes of poetry in Spanish, and Kaqchikel author and guerrilla militant Luis de Lión produced what would amount to the first Maya novel; de Lión produced *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá* in the early 70s, though it was not published until 1985 after his "disappearance" by the military. Gaspar

populations have suffered at the hands of ladino racism, it also closes with a call to action directed at the Maya themselves. The protagonist of *La otra cara* is light years away from the indigenist trope of the native rebel whose violence against his oppressors signifies a purely physical, instinctual response that obscures any possibility for a clear, methodical insurrectionary ideology (as in, most famously, *Raza de bronce* by Alcides Arguedas as well as other works such as *Oficio de tinieblas* by Rosario Castellanos or even *Los de abajo* by Mariano Azuela). Lwin's personal development throughout the novel culminates in his effective labor as a grassroots community organizer. It is also worth noting that this form of life story differs from the Western Bildungsroman: as Hana Muzika Kahn observes, "although Lwin is the main character, the focus is not on his personal character development but on his role as a representative and spokesman for his community, and always in the context of the Mayan struggle for equal rights" (122). For more on *La otra cara* as it relates to the genre of the testimonio, see "La novelización del testimonio en *La otra cara*, de Gaspar Pedro González" (2007) by Henry Thurston-Griswold.

⁴¹ Emilio del Valle Escalante uses the same argument to place more emphasis on Menchú's self-authored *La nieta de los mayas* (1998) (published in English translation as *Crossing Borders*), which is often overlooked and overshadowed by her earlier collaboration with Elisabeth Burgos. See chapter three of *Maya Nationalisms and Postcolonial Challenges in Guatemala*.

González had also drafted an early version of *La otra cara* in Q'anjob'al in the late 70s, following his own improvised orthography (González, "Entrevista").⁴² Moreover, the 70s saw the emergence of a new class of Maya professionals and intellectuals, many of whom received training in linguistics and instigated efforts to produce materials for bilingual education and to develop a viable system of writing in Maya languages that would serve the drive for self-determination.⁴³ In this regard, the official sanction of the ALMG (Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala) alphabet in 1988 represents both the culmination of these efforts and an aperture towards a new proliferation of materials in native languages.

At any rate, the international impact of *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* and the tenacity of debates regarding subaltern representation and the function of testimonio as a tool in anticolonial struggles render it an important benchmark in Maya literary history. In his "Breve reseña de la literatura maya guatemalteca post-Menchú" delivered at the Primer Congreso de Literatura Indígena de América, R. McKenna Brown notes that the appearance of Menchú's testimony gave rise to a boom in publications by native authors, who strive to readjust the discourse on the "Maya question" in more equitable terms:

Esta estrecha relación entre la producción literaria y el contexto sociopolítico es uno de los rasgos más evidentes en la nueva literatura maya. Para que se pueda dar un cambio en la realidad social, se necesita un nuevo discurso, una nueva

⁴² The novel was later published in Spanish translation in 1992 and in a bilingual edition in Spanish and standardized Q'anjob'al in 1996.

⁴³ Prior to the development of the ALMG alphabet in the 80s, various different alphabets were used, without agreement on a single standard. However, the most widely used alphabet was the one developed by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, a Christian organization focused primarily on translating the Bible into native languages as a tool for converting the Maya to Protestantism. As a result of these evangelistic goals, the SIL alphabet was primarily designed to transition pupils to literacy in Spanish. In response to this assimilationist model, the ALMG deliberately rejected Spanish spelling conventions when they were not well suited to Maya languages. SIL, feeling their own efforts and dozens of publications threatened, widely protested the new ALMG alphabet through a massive propaganda campaign throughout Guatemala. See Nora England, "The Role of Language Standardization in Revitalization," pp. 183-84.

manera de enmarcar las temáticas, exigencias estas [sic] que son las que precisamente incluyen la forma y el contenido de la nueva literatura maya. Tanto en los títulos explícitamente políticos dirigidos al proceso de paz, como en las obras menos obvias, se nota un constante esfuerzo de armar a la voz maya con una nueva terminología de gestos y experiencias con qué defenderse de la presión externa y así mismo proyectarse hacia el futuro. Sería difícil encontrar una obra que se pudiera clasificar como puramente estética, cuando por el contexto político, el mero acto de escribir en voz maya es estorbar el orden establecido.

(238-39)

For Maya activists and poets, this process represents much more than a superficial appeal to indigenous languages as a folkloric gesture; rather, it indicates an attempt to “arm the Maya voice” with discursive tools capable of contesting the Eurocentric narratives that undergird the matrix of modernity/coloniality.

As a result, language becomes the primary focal point of cultural revitalization in Guatemala beginning in the late 1980s.⁴⁴ In communities where native languages are still widely spoken, the objective has less to do with reminding Maya communities that they are distinct from the national culture than with cultivating an appreciation for the value of vernacular languages and combating the increasing trend in language shift towards Spanish (Brown, “Mayan Language” 173).⁴⁵ In conjunction with these efforts, poetry also plays a key role in the

⁴⁴ See “The Role of Language Standardization in Revitalization” (1996) and “Mayan Language Revival and Revitalization Politics: Linguists and Linguistic Ideologies” (2003).

⁴⁵ Brown highlights the crucial distinction between bilingualism and language shift: “Bilingualism (the acquisition of a language of wider currency in addition to the mother tongue) is often a pragmatic response to political and socioeconomic forces. Language shift, on the other hand, usually is brought about by significant proportions of parents speaking their second language to their offspring, a choice motivated by affective factors” (“Mayan Language” 167). Nora England puts it quite simply: “an increasing number of Maya children do not speak a Mayan language” (“Role” 179).

preservation of ancestral knowledge and the struggle against colonial alienation. In the introduction to his collection *Raíces de esperanza*, Santos Alfredo García Domingo explains his appeal to poetry as a vehicle for recuperating the values and identity of the Jakaltek people in response to repeated assaults by educational, cultural, and military policies: “Esta colección de poemas y pensamientos cortos en prosa pretenden despertar la conciencia de mi gente de origen popti’ (jakalteko) que se ha ido ladinizando poco a poco y ha perdido el gusto por sus costumbres, tradiciones, música, lengua e, incluso, el respeto por nuestros antepasados” (xi). The objective of many Maya linguists and poets alike, as R. McKenna Brown suggests, is to “heighten awareness of the Mayan languages as both a symbolic and functional marker of identity, to change how people think and feel about their languages” and their cultural identity (“Mayan Language” 173). In this sense, the renovation and preservation of native languages becomes an epistemological imperative as the Maya struggle for their survival. Following the physical threat of extinction during the civil war, many activists now focus their efforts on combating the cultural threat of extinction in the throes of an increasingly globalized society.

1.3 *KOTZ’IB*: MAYA LANGUAGE AND POETIC KNOWLEDGE

In the context of post-war Guatemala, then, the very act of rewetting and reviving the dried inkwells of indigenous textualities constitutes a profoundly political act that draws upon a long poetic tradition and a not-entirely-Western conception of writing while simultaneously appropriating contemporary Euro-American literary forms (lyric poetry, the novel, the short

story, etc.) and reformulating them according to indigenous logic. If indeed González refers to the testimonial act of writing in *El retorno de los mayas* as “taking” an alien tongue and deploying it for his own purposes, his poem “La palabra” serves as a reminder that contemporary Maya literature also has roots in ancient forms of writing unassimilable to the Western tradition:

Y tomo la palabra:
ésta, con la que
tallaste los cerros de signos;
ésta con la que enjaulaste
los gorjeos en jícaras;
ésta con la que amarraste a las piedras
nuestra historia,
Abuelo Viejo. (*Sq'anej maya' 3*)

“La palabra” thus signals a very different process of appropriation than that referenced in *El retorno*; in this case, an appeal to pre-Hispanic writing practices gestures towards the continuous reconstruction of Maya culture and the elaboration of a pan-Maya sense of a shared ethnic history. This dual lineage suggests that texts bearing a resemblance to Western literary forms also correspond to a complex set of aesthetic prescriptions and linguistic structures tied to deep traditions of orality and varying uses of poetic language in Maya ritual, spiritual, and daily life. In *Kotz'ib': Nuestra literatura maya*, González warns against the epistemic violence of forcing Western parameters of literary genres and reading practices onto native writing: “*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” (7).

Moreover, the distinctions between science and religion or poetry and prose that characterize Western understandings of academic disciplines and textual genres often do not hold water in the context of indigenous worldviews, which perceive these realms as intricately linked and often inseparable. Most notably, the *Popol Wuj* or Book of Council, founding text of the Maya literary tradition, has been published in both prose and verse, yet in either format it constitutes a profoundly poetic text structured by numerous forms of parallelisms and reversions. Translator Alan Christenson, who highlights the poetic nature of the *Popol Wuj* yet opts to render it in prose, emphasizes that “Quiché poetry is not based on rhyme or metrical rhythms, but rather the arrangement of concepts into innovative and even ornate parallel structures” (42). Likewise, the aforementioned novel *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá* draws heavily on the composition of the *Popol Wuj*, not only at the metaphoric or allegorical level of plot and content, but also in terms of style; Laura Martin has argued that “Todo lo que se ha considerado más pos-moderno de *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá* está presente en el *Popol Vuh*” (“Luis de Lión” 6).⁴⁶ While this observation does not negate the possibility of identifying influences of the Latin American Boom on de Lión’s novel, it does indicate the danger of assimilating his work into that tradition at the cost of obviating its other aesthetic heritage.

Within this context, the term “verbal art” can be useful in framing indigenous poetic writing as a particular use of language not confined to one or another Western genre of discourse but rather a semantically dense form of writing strongly informed by a long, oral tradition of

⁴⁶ See also Laura Martin, “Traditional Mayan Rhetorical Forms and Symbols: From the *Popol Vuh* to *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá*” and Emilio del Valle Escalante, “Discursos mayas y desafíos postcoloniales en Guatemala: Luis de Lión y *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá*.”

Maya ceremonial language. Michela Elisa Craveri Slaviero proposes, for instance, that “Desde el punto de vista formal, creo posible considerar la poesía k’iche’ como un lenguaje formulario y polivalente que cruza diferentes contextos históricos, rituales y conversacionales, o sea que no se establece una separación entre un género y otro” (19). While she draws upon a universal understanding of poetry as a kind of polyvalent, metaphorical language, Craveri takes great care in examining the precise function of the metaphor within the context of K’iche’ verbal art:

El lenguaje metafórico es precisamente lo que permite la expresión de una realidad polisémica, en la que el hombre, los animales y las plantas se compenetran en una relación cambiante, según los contextos. Considero la metáfora como la expresión de la multiplicidad semántica del universo maya, que no se limita al contexto verbal sino que se refiere a todos los aspectos del mundo mesoamericano. (17)

Craveri concludes, as such, that the figure of the metaphor is useful in interpreting Mesoamerican cosmovisions and poetry, under the condition that it not be reduced to its Western rhetorical use (17). Her exploration of the function of ritual language in highland Guatemala is also illustrative of the inextricable relationship between Maya poesis and the political struggle to create a new kind of society: this ‘verbal art’ itself reflects the kind of multiplicity, interconnectivity, and reciprocity inherent to the Mayas’ worldview as a powerful, viable alternative to the colonialist, neoliberal power structures currently in play. Illustrative of this correlation is the *difrasismo*, a grammatical construction common to Mesoamerican languages in which two separate words are paired together to form a single metaphoric unit. Craveri notes that “La asociación de los términos en difrasismos binarios y disfrasismos múltiples, en efecto, representa la concepción maya del universo como equilibrio entre elementos complementarios,

que se contraponen dándose vida recíprocamente. Cada signo está inserto en una red de correspondencias simbólicas que amplían su carga de significación” (22). In this sense, the use of poetry as a vehicle for political change would seem to emerge directly out of Maya conceptions of the universe and the possibilities for a society based on plurality. Poetic language constitutes a space not only for expressing indigenous thought and aesthetic perception, but also for reconstructing and redefining multiple experiences of the world.

As Nora England indicates, it is worth asking here whether the Maya’s sense of “the importance of language as a direct transmitter of Maya worldview and philosophy” is warranted (“Role” 179). Yet in response to this question, England maintains that Maya languages convey structures of thought and knowledge that resist translation, particularly in regards to more abstract expression:

Mayan languages typically rely heavily on metaphor, puns, paired associative terms and concepts, and other literary and figurative devices in both ordinary and formal talk. They furthermore are grammatically quite distinct from Spanish in a number of very important ways. Basic word order, the verb-noun agreement system, the demonstrative systems, number, and ways of showing the direction of action are radically different. While Spanish is of course an adequate code for daily expression, it certainly is not the *same* code as a Mayan language and can hardly substitute for it without loss. (180)

It is not that indigenous poetry is fundamentally and unequivocally different than Western poetic forms, but rather that indigenous worldviews—which may manifest themselves in linguistic structural elements—provide a powerful conceptual framework that may at times resemble, but

cannot be reduced to, Western bodies of knowledge. In this regard, Craveri notes that contemporary K'iche' verbal art

[...] representa un instrumento de conocimiento, una forma de comunicación con la naturaleza y la comunidad de los hombres. El lenguaje poético k'iche', *como el de todas las culturas*, se configura como una tentativa de transformación de la realidad, de connotación y de acercamiento entre el hombre y su contexto natural. Es un lenguaje polivalente, que sugiere, deforma, implica, expresa vínculos simbólicos, connota y amplía la realidad. No la denota ni la describe, la vuelve a crear. (15, my emphasis)

My real point of interest, then, is not any inherent or essential characteristic of native languages but rather the ways in which Maya poets and linguists have elaborated a political cosmology on the basis of structural elements that they perceive as indicative of broader postulates in Maya thought.

As a representation of what Lévi-Strauss referred to as 'savage thought'—that is, not the mind of savages but rather “mind in its untamed state as distinct from mind cultivated or domesticated for the purpose of yielding a return” (219) —, these ideas have the potential to dialogue with other forms of subjugated knowledge and with discrete poetic traditions. Elizabeth Monasterios has suggested, for example, that Paul Ricoeur's exploration of the “savage uses” of language through the framework of the *métaphore vive* highlights the capacity of poetic language (and of metaphor in particular) to create new meanings in language and thus in reality itself. In this context, the creative imagination “obliga al pensamiento conceptual a *pensar más*, a ir *más allá* de lo conceptualmente conocido” and opens the possibility of contemplating a democratic society based on analogous tensions (“Poesía y filosofía” 54). While modernity/coloniality has

limited the possibilities for envisioning such a model in political terms, it is still conceivable through poetic subjectivities,

[...] sobre todo considerando que Latinoamérica, contra toda expectativa, continúa produciendo eso que Ricoeur tan acertadamente ha llamado *usos salvajes* del lenguaje, que se manifiestan cuando el mundo político de la elocuencia no está divorciado del mundo poético de la creación, y cuando hacer y leer poesía implica un *pensar más allá* de las fronteras de lo conocido. (“Poesía y filosofía” 54-55)

Ricoeur thus lays the groundwork for a dialogue with the nature and function of poetic language in indigenous societies, where politics remain unseparated from poetics. In a discussion elsewhere on José Emilio Pacheco’s incorporation of certain elements of Náhuatl poetics, Monasterios notes that

El concepto que solemos tener de lo que es un poema [...] se descoloca frente al modo en que la epistemología prehispánica concebía lo que hoy día llamamos expresiones artísticas y que entonces eran formas rituales de suscitar el pronunciamiento de lo desconocido y de este modo construir conocimiento. En la cultura náhuatl [...] la poesía (*Flor y canto*) es síntoma de las posibilidades que tiene el sujeto para salir de sí mismo y del sitio de lo efímero (la Tierra) para acercarse a formas alternativas de conocimiento. (*Dilemas* 269)

This understanding of poetry as a form of articulation capable of pronouncing the unknown and as a productive site for constructing alternative bodies of knowledge suggests the possibility of recovering hidden presences within Western/dominant/hegemonic discourses and cultural logics by thinking from the possibilities put forth by indigenous poetics. Meanwhile, it also suggests a

direct link between indigenous poetic production and broader efforts at epistemological revindication, such that poetry appears inextricable, in this case, from the struggle for political and intellectual sovereignty.

In short, the Maya Movement seeks to contribute to the construction of a polyvalent reality wherein multiple ways of being and knowing might thrive in complementary (though nonetheless conflicting) fashion, where a single meaning or way of ordering and understanding reality would no longer dominate over the rest, and where the hegemony of Western values would give way to a proliferation of heterogeneous voices.⁴⁷ The structure of indigenous languages, particularly their metaphoric and polysemous elements, reflects a complex understanding of the structure of the universe—that is, a multidimensional worldview that seamlessly integrates language, politics, and nature into a system of conflicting yet balanced interconnections—that contains the seeds for a different conception of human sociality based on reciprocity and complementarity. Meanwhile, this framework points to an understanding of the “cosmos” in terms of a *pluriverse* rather than a *universe*: an articulation of existence based not on a liberal, humanistic understanding of the individual as the center of his own world or on an all-encompassing and homogenizing view of the human (individual) as universal, but rather on a decentered, multiple view that looks to the community as its core unit. My point is not that indigenous languages lend themselves more to ‘poetry’ (in a folkloric sense) than more allegedly logical and scientific European languages, but rather that an understanding of certain differences

⁴⁷ The element of conflict here, in fact, is essential; the goal underlying these movements is not a utopia sans conflict and antagonism but rather a different methodology of conflict and a distinct way of channeling and structuring relationships of opposition within society. Illustrative of this point is the Andean form of the festive tinku, a sort of ritualistic combat in dance form that reflects a value in Andean cultural logic based on open irreconcilability between elements that resist or refuse a definitive mediation or conciliation. (See, for example, Verónica Cereceda’s “Aproximaciones a una estética andina: de la belleza al tinku” [1987].) The idea behind reciprocity, therefore, is not to eliminate antagonism as such but rather to repurpose it outside the confines of colonial hierarchy and oppression. See also Esteban Ticona Alejo, *Saberes, conocimientos y prácticas anticoloniales del pueblo aymara-quechua en Bolivia* pp. 139-51.

between Amerindian and Euro-American linguistics sheds light on epistemological differences that can be instrumental in perceiving the connections between poetry and political change. Nor do I wish to suggest that indigenous communities are heterogeneous and plural and the West is monolithic and singular. On the contrary, I would argue that indigenous knowledges and conceptions of the world can serve to undermine the version that the West presents of itself as uniquely scientific, modern, and universal and to reveal the possibilities for alternative forms of sociopolitical structure and human interaction already present within societies (Western and non-Western alike).

1.4 UNSETTLING THE PERMISSIBLE INDIAN

Yet if we are indeed in times of *pachakuti* and the insurrection of subjugated knowledges, it is worth asking what role these newly mobilized epistemes will serve within the neoliberal framework of 21st century Abya Yala. In other words, what assures that (re)emergent forms of textuality and alternative ways of knowing will open the way towards a radically different kind of society, rather than simply constituting yet another niche of cultural relativity and exotic otherness? As Foucault himself puts it,

[...] is it not perhaps the case that [...] the particular elements of the knowledge that one seeks to disinter are no sooner accredited and put into circulation, than they run the risk of re-codification, re-colonisation? In fact, those unitary discourses, which first disqualified and then ignored them when they made their

appearance, are, it seems, quite ready now to annex them, to take them back within the fold of their own discourse and to invest them with everything this implies in terms of their effects of knowledge and power. (86)

Foucault's questions seem particularly apropos in the context of a multicultural era in which, as Slavoj Žižek has argued, the logic of late capitalism quite easily subsumes cultural difference, stripping it of any radical potentiality and domesticating it for the purposes of the global market.⁴⁸ This new phenomenon clearly resonates with age-old stereotypes and idealizations, but it also reflects a contemporary sociopolitical climate informed by a neoliberal commoditization of cultural diversity and an appropriation of the language of 'cultural rights' as a tool for reinforcing existing power structures. In an era in which buzz words such as "plurality," "cultural rights," "diversity," and "ethnicity" serve as discursive markers in the ongoing reinforcement of a neoliberal model predicated on the multinational circulation of capital and the subsequent deterioration of the nation-State, the Maya project of a pluricultural nation⁴⁹ may in fact provide a crucial tool for the State to reinforce its power and legitimacy.

Indigenous culture thus becomes a crucial idiom through which national identity is (once again) redefined and strengthened. In fact, the neoliberal context of post-war reconciliation in Guatemala has resulted in a generally positive, even laudatory attitude towards Maya culture that contrasts with the depreciative trends of previous decades (Hale and Millamán 294). Indicative of this phenomenon is the curious fact that Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt, the most infamous perpetrator of genocide against the Maya during the civil war, was the very president to oversee

⁴⁸ See "Multiculturalism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism" (2007).

⁴⁹ For more on this particular formulation of Maya political objectives, see *Configuración del pensamiento político del pueblo maya* and *La difícil transición al estado multinacional* by Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil (Waqi' Q'anil) and *Nuevas perspectivas para la construcción del estado multinacional* by Waqi' Q'anil Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil, Ixtz'ulu' Elsa Son Chonay, and Raxche' Demetrio Rodríguez Guaján.

the congressional approval of the Ley de Idiomas Nacionales, or National Languages Law, in 2003, which guaranteed Maya cultural rights (French 1-2). In *Más que un indio*, Charles Hale points out that “To espouse intercultural equality, many ladinos have come to intuitively understand, requires them to give up very little in the way of inherited racial privilege and produces only minimal changes in their position in the racial hierarchy” (11). Moreover, while many indigenous activists in Guatemala and elsewhere have taken pains to distinguish interculturality as a decolonizing framework from neoliberal-style multiculturalism,⁵⁰ Emilio del Valle Escalante has demonstrated that even some Maya have used the language of interculturality to endorse an ultimately neoliberal model that favors Maya, Xinka, Garífuna, and ladino elites rather than the interests of indigenous peoples in conditions of subalternity (*Maya Nationalisms* 106-19).

This recent discursive shift in Guatemala and elsewhere marks a crucial paradox that defines the struggle for indigenous autonomy in the global era: in the words of Hale and Millamán, “‘cultural rights’ is both a battle cry of opposition to neoliberal regimes and a leading idiom through which these same regimes domesticate and govern their opponents” (283). The result of this phenomenon is what these authors, elaborating on a term coined by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, call the *indio permitido* to denote “the identity category that results when neoliberal regimes actively recognize and open space for collective indigenous presence, even agency” (284).⁵¹ While the *indio permitido* clearly builds upon age-old stereotypes such as the noble savage or the compliant, docile laborer, they argue that it also introduces new strategic

⁵⁰ See Catherine Walsh, “Las geopolíticas de conocimiento y la colonialidad del poder. Entrevista a Walter Dignolo” (2002) and “Interculturalidad crítica y educación intercultural” (2010).

⁵¹ In a footnote, Hale and Millamán clarify that Cusicanqui coined this term during workshop discussions at the University of Texas in the spring of 2001 but that, to their knowledge, the term had not previously appeared in print. It has come to my attention that Rivera Cusicanqui did in fact publish an essay dedicated to this concept prior to Hale and Millamán’s 2006 article. However, since I have thus far been unable to locate this essay, my analysis here will focus on Hale and Millamán’s own interpretation of the term.

challenges in the struggle against coloniality (284). A key question thus surfaces regarding Maya cultural activism: what ensures that the radically transformative potential of Maya poetics that I have been describing here will not simply be reduced to a folkloric gesture of inclusion in a new multicultural nation that leaves the general structure of elite privilege intact? If indeed it is problematic to assume that Maya are simply “selling out” by working through the existing parameters rather than tackling the system as a whole, it is worth asking what the costs and limitations are of this strategic approach. Are the figure of the *indio permitido* and the language of cultural rights merely tools for the relegitimization of the state? Or are they masks for a much more radical agenda? What are the conditions in which that alternative agenda might come to fruition?

By way of their own response to this issue in the context of Guatemala and Chile, Hale and Millamán emphasize the need to avoid letting the figure of the *indio permitido* colonize the space of Maya and Mapuche autonomy. They note that the cultural front of the Maya Movement has gained much more international and critical attention than the popular front and advocate a greater focus on modes of resistance that challenge the idiom of the *indio permitido*. Yet I want to suggest that beyond the strategy of shifting emphasis away from this figure, we might also consider the possibility of resemanticizing it and reading within it a potential for radical change that undermines its apparently conciliatory role. The corollary figure of the *mapuche* or *maya autónomo*, after all, is not a manifestation of the “true” native insurgent but rather yet another strategic position. We must therefore be careful not to simply reify a positive stereotype of the defiant Indian rebel whose oppositional politics maintain him in a position of complete exteriority (to the State, neoliberalism, the lettered city, etc.). A reading of the ways in which

these two strategic roles play off of each other can be productive in highlighting the internal tensions and limitations of each.

In other words, the push to avoid letting the *indio permitido* “settle” on its conciliatory meaning might entail shifting critical attention back towards the popular front of the Maya Movement, but it also might mean lending an ear to the hidden transcript of insurgency beneath the public role of the *indio permitido*,⁵² as in Arturo Arias’s reading of the Maya “victory” in the civil war. Arias protests the dominant narrative that Maya were mere victims of a political battle between the Left and Right that manipulated native populations without considering their interests in any significant or systematic way. In response, he highlights the surprisingly positive attitude of present-day Maya leadership, in spite of the devastating and haunting effects of the war on native communities. “They would never be so facile as to claim they won the war,” he notes,

and to this day they mourn their victims and search unmarked graves to exhume the bones of loved ones. But present-day Mayas walk with a quiet confidence and self-assurance they did not have twenty-five years ago. How did they regain this sense of agency? By exercising agency inside the war, despite being recruited as canon [sic] fodder. Simply put, Mayas took advantage of the war for their own constructions of future histories. (170)

Arias’s interpretation of the Maya’s conspiracy to advance their own secret goals echoes Nelson’s metaphor of the hacker; both insist on the possibility of reading a radical agency in what may otherwise appear to constitute yet another manipulation of native populations for the purposes of national hegemonic projects and elite reconstitution. As with the debate over the

⁵² I borrow this terminology from James Scott. See *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990).

respective roles of Menchú and Burgos in the elaboration of *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*, the question of who is using whom here points to a complex interaction between opposing forces that can be difficult to pin down. In dialogue with Hale and Millamán's nuanced reading of the ambivalent, often overlapping relationship between the *indio permitido* and the *Mapuche* or *Maya autónomo*, such interpretations can be instrumental in reading against the grain of dominant narratives, or even against the grain of the self-presentation of indigenous movements themselves.

An attempt to unsettle the figure of the *indio permitido* in Maya insurgent poetics might also mean troubling any narrative of the emergence of post-war Maya literature that divests it from a long history of militancy, both during the recent conflict and as far back as pre-Hispanic rivalries between native populations throughout Mesoamerica. It is curious, in this sense, that Luis de Lión's novel has occasionally been overlooked in discussions of contemporary Maya literature, as some (though certainly not all) critics look to González rather than de Lión as the "first Maya novelist."⁵³ Curiously enough, González confirmed this assumption in an interview with Robert Sitler in 1995, eliding any mention of de Lión. This oversight could reflect the conditions in which *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá* was published; though the novel circulated in manuscript form for over a decade, it only reached bookstores in published form in 1985 following the author's "disappearance" by the military the previous year. Laura Martin thus notes that "His politically motivated disappearance may explain why his work has been so much less well known than it deserves to be. During the Violence, merely to be seen reading at all was to be suspected of left-wing political activity. Reading the work of a political activist was that much more dangerous" ("Traditional" 44). It is for this same reason that González waited until

⁵³ See, for example, "Gaspar Pedro González: The First Maya Novelist" (1997) by Robert Sitler.

the early 90s to publish his own first novel; thus, when he drafted *La otra cara* in the late 70s, he may have been unaware of the existence of *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá*.⁵⁴ There is also reason to suspect that some scholars—and perhaps González as well—resist labeling the novel as Maya because it was written in Spanish and not an Amerindian language; as we have seen, Native authors themselves have argued over the definition of indigenous literature along linguistic lines, particularly in regards to the contrast between English-language writing in the U.S. and Canada and mostly bilingual publishing in Central and South America.

Yet a third possibility remains as to why some narratives of the emergence of the new Maya literature downplay the centrality of de Lión: in contrast to the post-war climate I have described thus far, *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá* is decidedly confrontational. The novel recounts protagonist Pascual Baeza's violation of the town's effigy of the Virgen de Concepción and her replacement by the town whore, a native named Concha (short for Concepción) who looks like her namesake in every other way except that she is dark-skinned, has breasts, and has slept with every man in town except her effeminate, impotent husband, Juan Caca. "La Virgen de Concepción era una puta," recounts the narrative voice; "Yo no la conocí. Pero la recuerdo" (10). Overcome by jealousy, the women in the town attempt to impede the sexual-religious devotions of their husbands to the new "virgin." The men respond by brutally and violently slaughtering their children, wives, friends, and aunts and subsequently turn their machetes on each other in a scramble to reach Concha as she bathes nude in the town's fountain.

The central events in de Lión's novel constitute a radical act of transgression that directly confronts Catholicism and its role in Maya self-alienation. According to the novel, the Virgin

⁵⁴ Despite not being published until 1985, however, this novel does seem to have had limited circulation within Guatemala during the 1970s, as it received first prize in the Juegos Florales Centroamericanos de Quetzaltenango in 1972.

Mary is, and always was, not a universal mother but rather an object of sexual desire, a Ladina body that the men in the town long to possess. This desire arouses the jealousy of the women when they realize that “sólo les servían [a sus hombres] para desahogarse, para tener hijos, para hacerles la comida...” (63). Their sons, in turn,

[...] veían en la Virgen a una madrastra y a los cristos de las iglesias como hermanastros, pero no hermanastros comunes y corrientes sino como una especie de invasores, de ambiciosos de las tierras que sus padres les dejarían como herencia, como opresores futuros... empezaron a amar a la virgen y a desamar a sus novias, a odiar a sus padres por no amar a sus mujeres, por estarles robando a ellos el amor de la única ladina del pueblo. (64)

This portrait of frustrated Oedipal desire suggests that the critical force of the novel lies not only in the replacement of the Virgin with an Indian prostitute but also in the illustration of the corruptive force of Catholicism in the collective psyche as an imposed, alien logic and a tool of epistemological and spiritual subjugation.

Meanwhile, the suggestive power of the rape of the Virgin also derives from its subversion of the Conquest and the violation of indigenous women that it entailed. The narrative defiantly inverts the colonial norm in which a white man takes an Indian woman by force (a recurrent trope in indigenist fiction); in this case the Indian male, newly invested in his masculinity, occupies the ladino's position of domination. Moreover, this reverse violation does not produce a mestizo child, since the new Virgen de Concepción is ironically infertile, as the novel reiterates on various occasions. Aida Toledo notes that “Estando incapacitada para tener descendencia, nadie procreará hijos con ella, anulando la posibilidad de revertir el proceso al crear la nueva nación bastarda, la mezcla entre ladinos e indios postcoloniales” (49).

Accordingly, the destruction of the community might serve to signal a rejection of religious syncretism as a beneficial mode of indigenous cultural survival; here annihilation refuses the creation of yet another transcultural symbol that would permit the incorporation of pagan beliefs within Catholic ideology in order to domesticate them. Instead, Pascual's gesture results in a violent dis-integration of Catholicism. Emilio del Valle Escalante notes that "When Pascual 'rapes' the image, the Indians become aware of what the image is: a symbol of colonial power. With the desecration of the Virgin, de Li3n symbolizes the spiritual and political decolonization of the community, as well as its rejection of the dominant ideology" (*Maya Nationalisms* 42). In light of this effect, del Valle Escalante interprets the novel as an allegory of a Maya nationalist political project. He argues that

[...] de Li3n intimates that indigenous peoples must engage in an epistemological and political struggle to break away from the hegemonic modes of seeing, being, and thinking that are blocking their capacity to see themselves as political agents. Instead of depending on the colonizers, Indians must look back at their own cultural heritage, history, and material conditions to reimagine, describe, and reinvent the world in emancipating ways. Crowning Concha as the new Virgin symbolizes an indigenous political alternative. (43-44)

For del Valle Escalante, *El tiempo* echoes Frantz Fanon's call for a violent, decisive break with coloniality, as well as Ranajit Guha's concept of negation, in which insurgents appropriate and invert symbols of the dominant culture (yet without disrupting the status quo in any lasting way).

Nonetheless, a key question emerges here regarding del Valle's interpretation: how can the central actions of the novel allegorize a positive political project when they entail rape and the annihilation of the community? The violation of the Ladina Virgin and her replacement with

an Indian whore may indeed constitute a powerful transgression of a colonial idiom of domination, but it does so at the cost of perpetuating other forms of subalternity, in this case along the lines of gender rather than race or ethnicity. The fact that the new cult to the Indian “virgin” leads to violent self-destruction undermines the viability of negation as a foundational political model for Maya nationalism. As Amy Olen has suggested, a simple inversion and substitution within the existing framework provides a temporary break with colonial alienation, but it does not constitute a sufficient foundation of a different sociopolitical order, as it reproduces what María Lugones has referred to as the coloniality of gender.⁵⁵ The rejection of values associated with the Catholic Virgin serves as a powerful critique of colonialism, but at the same time, this gesture remains limited to annulling or appropriating signs of authority rather than destroying exploitative relationships at their roots. If, as Guha claims, a project based on negation cannot represent a potentially hegemonic project because it remains self-alienated (*Elementary Aspects* 28), then the viable alternative must arise directly from indigenous symbology.

It is therefore crucial to understand the ways in which *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá*, as one of the first expressions of contemporary Maya literature, simultaneously protests coloniality and affirms other realities. De Lión’s inversion of Catholicism contrasts with (and complements) his appeal to the *Popol Wuj* as an autonomous source of knowledge capable of suturing the colonial wound and revitalizing a perennially subjugated population. Mario Roberto Morales notes that in the late 1960s, he and de Lión both proposed to write “una novela que no tuviera principio ni fin y que se pudiera leer de adelante hacia atrás y del centro hacia los lados; una novela en la que el lector pudiera llegar a su centro desde cualquiera de sus puntos de partida”

⁵⁵ See, for example, “Heterosexualism and the Modern/Colonial Gender System” (2011).

(“Continuidad” 2.5.1). While this challenge clearly reflects an ethos of narrative experimentation proper to the Boom of the 60s, for de Li3n it also meant infusing the novel with ancient Maya narrative structures and forms of textuality (Martin, “Luis de Li3n” 5). Tedlock notes that hieroglyphic writing on bark cloth warranted two distinct ways of reading. One involved a linear process moving from one page to the next, starting at the beginning and expanding across time. The other permitted the reader to start at any point in the middle by selecting the date of an occurrence, past or future, and contrasting it with others: “since the whole text was on a single long sheet of paper, folded back and forth like a screen to make pages, it was possible to compare two widely separated patterns by bringing them side by side, folding under all the intervening pages” (*Breath on the Mirror* 109-10). By linking the last sentence of *El tiempo* to its opening lines and transposing the order of events in the text, de Li3n constructs a temporal frame that challenges linear understandings of narrative plot and reflects a conception of temporality and textuality consonant with the *Popol Wuj* and the ancient codices.

If indeed *El tiempo* appears to support Guha’s thesis regarding the limitations of negation, its cyclicity also suggests an aperture towards a more lasting transformation. Significantly, Carlos L3pez emphasizes that the recurrent motif of binary antagonisms in the *Popol Wuj* does not indicate a simple relationship of symmetric inversion but rather a modality of reversibility and change (117-22). Furthermore, he notes that cyclical repetition throughout the text is not identical but transformative in nature, as each modular iteration differs from the one that preceded it (116). The annihilation of the community in *El tiempo* thus also signals the possibility for a new beginning. After pinching themselves to see if they bleed, searching the cemetery for open graves, and trying to discover at what moment they returned from heaven or hell, the town’s inhabitants discover that they are still alive:

[...] y cuando finalmente se dieron cuenta de que en verdad todo había sido un sueño, todavía para estar seguros buscaron las fotos más recientes y se miraron en los espejos para comprobar que no eran ya otros, recordaron sus nombres para que cuando pudieran hablar, si es que algún día hablaban, se dijeran a sí mismos que eran ellos mismos [...] (58)

The process of self-discovery depicted in this chapter, significantly located at the center of the novel, points to a necessary phase of reconstitution after the violent rejection and negation of colonial ideology—or perhaps, in a literal, historical sense, following the destructive force of the civil war. Moreover, the struggle to speak, to remember and pronounce their own names, intimates the recuperation of life through language and self-expression—in a sense, through the production of the novel itself. *El tiempo* portrays a messy, non-linear path to decolonization marked by contradiction and ambiguity. Yet rather than designating a vicious cycle in which native populations remain perennially trapped in the enduring effects of colonialism, the narrative structure of *El tiempo* points to the prospect of incremental change. Thus, where Guha is unable to see beyond the mode of negation, which Sherry Ortner attributes to his categorical dismissal of religion on Marxist grounds (181), de Lión's novel enacts a transformative politics through the recuperation and reconstruction of Maya cosmology. The crowning of Concha as the new Virgin represents a powerful decolonizing gesture, as del Valle maintains, but it also represents only the first step towards the creation of a new political order constructed on the foundation of Maya thought.

1.5 BREATH ON THE MIRROR AND THE POWER OF PARTIAL VISION

El tiempo principia en Xibalbá thus begs the question: what particular insights does the *Popol Wuj* provide into the legacies of and alternatives to coloniality? Carlos López opens his reflection on the text's epistemologies by asking whether "estos discursos y culturas que han estado sepultados en la marginalidad del olvido, podrán irrumpir y desarrollar toda su potencialidad en el mundo de la globalización" (17). In response, he proposes that the very context of globalization as an accelerated process of macro assimilations and disintegrations opens a door to the generative power of the *Popol Wuj*, given that "en esta realidad [actual] se abren grietas y espacios por donde se hace posible la emergencia de discursos escondidos por mucho tiempo" (17). López contends that the *Popol Wuj* is particularly revealing in this context given its heterogeneous composition. Rather than *el Popol Wuj*, he suggests we speak of *los Popol Wuj*: an assortment of texts corresponding to distinct periods in Maya history that represent various conflicting epistemologies (42). In this regard, the lack of internal coherence in the *Popol Wuj* may actually render it a powerful tool for reviving multiple silenced voices in contemporary society.

It is difficult to ascertain the precise context and purposes of the 16th century K'iche' document, which was transcribed by Dominican friar Francisco Ximénez in the 18th century only to disappear again shortly thereafter. Yet its content and use of the Latin alphabet suggest that it was not merely intended to "preserve" a series of oral traditions by recording them for

posterity, but rather to formulate a political response to the Spanish invasion. If writing served the colonial enterprise as a juridical instrument of subjugation and European self-authorization, it is reasonable to assume that the *Popol Wuj* served a similar legitimizing purpose on the part of the K'iche' who transcribed it following the Conquest. A narrative of resistance materializes in the links between the three principal sections of the text: 1) the creation of the world and the origin of the Maya as men of maize corporally and spiritually tied to the lands of Mesoamerica, 2) the exploits of the hero twins and their defeat of the lords of the underworld, and 3) the K'iche' ascent to power in the Guatemalan highlands.⁵⁶ The document thus establishes a claim to K'iche' dominance in the region as well as the epistemological substrate of Maya culture—its origin, lineage, cosmology, and moral principles—as a response to the imposition of a foreign code intended to negate and destroy local forms of knowledge.

Nonetheless, the last section of the *Popol Wuj* also poses a crucial question regarding the text's subversive qualities. Namely, how can the book constitute a source of insurgent knowledge when one third of it exalts the military triumph of K'iche' elites over the Kaqchikels, Achis, and other groups in their rise to power in the highlands of Guatemala? Ricardo Falla synthesizes this paradox well:

En el Popol Vuh, como tónica general, no encontramos a primera vista este espíritu [de liberación de un pueblo oprimido], ya que dicha obra trata más bien de legitimar a nivel mítico e histórico la existencia del pueblo quiché, la propiedad de sus tierras y la autoridad de sus jefes en lucha con otros pueblos que

⁵⁶ In reality, these three sections overlap somewhat, making them difficult to label and identify for academic purposes. Additionally, each translation and edition of the text divides it up differently. For these reasons, I have chosen not to follow any particular numeric designation of the sections and refer more broadly to the mythical portions, which comprise numbers (1) and (2) above, and the historical portion, which comprises (3), with the understanding that in the *Popol Wuj*, and for the Maya in general, myth and history are inextricably linked.

competían con el pueblo quiché por la supremacía de la región. Estas guerras se libraban entre pueblos de aproximadamente el mismo nivel de poder y no eran guerras de subversión de pueblos oprimidos contra sus jefes opresores. Mas [sic] bien, El Popol Vuh exalta a sus jefes y oculta las diferencias de clases que existen entre ellos y el pueblo campesino que los sustenta con sus tributos. (155)

Falla indicates that the K'iche' conception of power is in no sense equivalent to Spanish colonial domination (155),⁵⁷ but it does nonetheless highlight a class stratification that troubles any attempt to read the text as a straightforward narrative of subaltern resistance.

In response, Falla proposes a demythologizing reading of the *Popol Wuj*, not on the basis of an external critical apparatus, but rather according to tensions and dissonances within the text itself. Specifically, he juxtaposes the ambitious tenor of the historical section with the subversive exploits of the hero twins, Junajpu and Xbalamke,⁵⁸ as tricksters capable of undermining the inflated authority of figures such as the macaw giant Wuqub Kak'ix and his sons, Sipakna and Kabraqan. The conflict between these two groups and the triumph of one over the other provides the central narrative structure of this portion of the text:

Wukub Caquix, acaparador de riquezas, falsamente asentado sobre el poder que éstas le confieren, y los héroes en su elementalidad; Wukub Caquix engreído en una sabiduría aparente y los héroes generadores de cultura; Wukub Caquix

⁵⁷ See also chapter two in *Los Popol Wuj y sus epistemologías* (1999) by Carlos López, which analyzes a K'iche' model of hegemony articulated in the historical portions of the *Popol Wuj* through the framework of *nawalismo*, or the manifestation of the human spirit in animal form through voluntary and involuntary transformations (83). For López, *nawalización* represents a key feature of K'iche' constructions of hegemony and consistently appears in connection with expansionist militarism (85). This conception of human power as a manifestation of cosmic power paradoxically reflects both multiplicity and unity (100) and allows for the passage from one symbolic sphere to another without incurring contradiction (90). In this sense, while *nawalización* serves to legitimize a form of domination, it also derives its power from diversity rather than relying on forced assimilation and homogenization.

⁵⁸ Each of the different published versions of the *Popol Wuj* has introduced its own spelling variations of the proper names included in the text. I have opted here to follow the spellings used by Enrique Sam Colop in his 2011 edition, which vary only slightly from the ALMG standardized alphabet.

fundando ilegítimamente al pueblo, porque su ambición en vez de darle vida lleva a quitársela, y los héroes devolviéndole las riquezas y la vida al pueblo. (Falla 159)

Given Junajpu and Xbalamke's role as cultural heroes, Falla identifies their victory over Wuqub Kak'ix with the struggle of the people against their exploiters and oppressors (159).

This interpretation resonates with other episodes as well, particularly the twins' defeat of the lords of the Xibalba. As the story goes, Junajpu and Xbalamke must descend to the underworld in order to play the *juego de pelota* and either conquer the lords or lose their lives. Yet unlike their fathers, who died at the hands of Jun Kame and Wuqub Kame, the twins are able to use their own astuteness and creativity to outwit the lords. Significantly, Sam Colop's translation emphasizes the Xibalbans' defeat as a necessary reduction of power that restores a sense of balance to the face of the earth:

Provocaban enemistad,

Eran traidores,

Incitaban al mal y

a la discordia.

Eran diestros para esconder sus intenciones,

Eran hipócritas,

Malvados,

Engañadores, opresores, les decían.

Tenían pintadas las caras cuando se les encontraba.

Así fue entonces la pérdida de su grandeza y

De su poder.

Su dominio ya no volvió a ser grande. (106)

The repetition of similar triumphs throughout this section—including the defeat of Kabraqan and Sipakna and the various phases of the struggle in Xibalba—suggests the importance of this motif to the moral and epistemological substrate of the *Popol Wuj*.

Yet the imperative to limit disproportionate instances of power/knowledge applies not only to giants and supernatural beings; it also marks the definition of humanity itself as a necessarily imperfect creature with limited vision. The men of maize are superior to their clay and wood predecessors in their ability to give thanks to their creators (that is, to express themselves verbally and spiritually). At first they can see far and wide, endowed with the ability to discern everything on the face of the earth:

The moment they turned around and looked around in the sky, on the earth,
everything was seen without any obstruction. They didn't have to walk around
before they could see what was under the sky; they just stayed where they were.
As they looked, their knowledge became intense. Their sight passed through trees,
through rocks, through lakes, through seas, through mountains, through plains.
(Tedlock, *Popol Vuh* 165)

Yet the creators soon realize the danger of this gift; the men of maize, after all, must be human, not divine. As a result, the gods determine that “su vista sólo debe alcanzar lo que está cerca, / sólo deben ver un poco de la faz de la tierra” (Sam Colop, *Popol Wuj* 117). Through a slight alteration to his original design, Heart of Sky (Uk'u'x Kaj) partially blinds them “as the face of a mirror is breathed upon” (Tedlock, *Popol Vuh* 167).⁵⁹ As a result, “Their vision flickered. Now it

⁵⁹ Not all humans are condemned to such limited sight; Maya “daykeepers” and spiritual guides retain the divine ability to see further, across the expanse of time and space. In fact, this capacity is believed to reside in all Maya, though only some choose to activate it through their vocation as *aj q'ij*. Yet the divinatory responsibility of the *aj*

was only when they looked nearby that things were clear” (167). The gods’ reduction of human sight parallels Junajpu and Xbalamke’s deflation of Wuqub Kak’ix and his false assumption of power and wisdom; both episodes connote the continuous suppression and containment of authority as a necessary measure for the maintenance of equilibrium in the cosmos. Moreover, as Falla suggests, the reiteration of this pattern throughout the mythical portions of the text similarly undercuts the historical accounts of K’iche’ supremacy.

In strikingly similar terms, Donna Haraway proposes cultivating the privilege of partial perspective as a response to the hackneyed, polarized debate over modernist universalism versus postmodern difference. She argues that the purportedly neutral stance of Western scientific objectivism denies the embodied nature of all knowledge. This “conquering gaze from nowhere” is an outlook that “mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation” (581).⁶⁰ Through its ties to militarism, capitalism, colonialism, and male supremacy, Western science has claimed the perverse capacity “to distance the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power” (581). In contrast, Haraway advocates a form of feminist objectivity cognizant of its own locality and particularity that would, almost paradoxically, be more capable of “[translating] knowledges among very different—and power-differentiated—communities” (580). Her model thus resonates strongly with the motif of breath on the mirror; in both cases, limited vision provides a healthy antidote to the ‘god trick’ of disembodied

q’ij commands a sacred use of clear vision in the service of both the community and the gods and ancestor spirits. It is also worth noting that Tedlock emphasizes the centrality of this motif as a key underlying substrate of Maya thought. See *Breath on the Mirror: Mythic Visions and Voices of the Living Maya* (1999).

⁶⁰ Santiago Castro-Gómez has further analyzed this disembodied perspective through the framework of what he calls the “hubris of the zero point.” See, for instance, *La hybris del punto cero: ciencia, raza e ilustración en la Nueva Granada (1750-1816)* (2005). Similarly, Mary Louise Pratt has referred to it as the “monarch of all I survey” and David Spurr denotes it as the “commanding gaze.” See *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) and *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (1993), respectively.

knowledge. The Maya gods' response to the unwarranted capacities of their initial creation might just as well apply to Haraway's critique of traditional objectivists: "¿Acaso se anticipa que ellos también serán dioses?" (Sam Colop, *Popol Wuj* 117).

Haraway's framework thus helps to illustrate a parallel between Heart of Sky's attenuation of human sight and subaltern concealment as a means of resistance to a panoptic gaze. In this case, the original hieroglyphic version of the *Popol Wuj* 'hides its face'⁶¹ from the missionaries who strove to translate, record, and scrutinize native cosmologies as a step toward their elimination via evangelization. If indeed the Maya referred to codices as *ilb'al*, or instruments of seeing, the *Popol Wuj* as we know it retains limited capacities to transcend the confines of human perception, not only due to its alphabetic (rather than hieroglyphic) form but also because of the need to conceal divine insight from the inquisitive gaze of the conqueror:

Those who wrote in Holy Cross thought of their work as a successor of the original Book, but they never once called it an "instrument of seeing." They left out all the pictures, for one thing. Pictures would tell a prying missionary what little he needed to know at a glance, even a missionary who didn't know the language of the text that went with the pictures. (Tedlock, *Breath on the Mirror* 112)

The concept of situated knowledges thus highlights a dual gesture in the motif of breath on the mirror. On the one hand, obscurity constitutes a key element of spirituality and poetic ambiguity—it is limited sight, after all, that separates men from the gods and permits veneration of the divine—yet on the other, it indicates a method of resistance to overbearing authority.

⁶¹ The appearance of this phrase on the first page of the *Popol Wuj* refers to the ancient, hieroglyphic form of the text that the authors of Santa Cruz del Quiché transcribed into alphabetic form as well as their own anonymity: "There is the original book and ancient writing, but he who reads and ponders it hides his face" (Tedlock, *Popol Vuh* 71). In K'iche', the word for face refers metonymically to a person or entity as a whole.

Significantly, the hero twins defeat Wuqub Kak'ix by stripping him of his source of pride and arrogance: the jewels that comprise his eyes and teeth. With the help of their grandparents, Junajpu and Xbalamke thus succeed in diminishing the macaw giant's dazzling vision and speech and regain these riches for themselves.

In terms that could just as easily refer to the tenets of subaltern studies, Haraway observes that "there is good reason to believe vision is better from below the brilliant space platforms of the powerful" (583). In this regard, her framework resonates with Falla's gesture of reading against the grain of elitist elements in the *Popol Wuj* in favor of the poor and oppressed. While Falla explicitly identifies with the principles of liberation theology, his approach also anticipates the principal concerns of subaltern studies. In contrast with Guha's method of reading against dominant narratives by way of direct inversion,⁶² however, Falla's analysis counteracts the text's elitism on the basis of its own epistemological principles. This difference undoubtedly reflects the complexity of the text at hand; while the *Popol Wuj* contains instances of what Guha calls the "prose of counterinsurgency"—that is, a historical register of military triumph over rebel populations—, it also embodies an insurgent poetics through the mytheme of heroic subversion.

The text as a whole thus formulates an ambivalent response to colonial imposition that reflects the relative nature of subalternity and the complex interaction of competing hegemonies at work. Haraway insists that "The positionings of the subjugated are not exempt from critical reexamination, decoding, deconstruction, and interpretation" (584). On the contrary, she notes, "they are preferred because in principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and

⁶² For Guha, the framework of negation opens the possibility of reading a kind of insurgent agency into the prose of counterinsurgency by assuming that whatever is "terrible" for the elites is "fine" for the insurgents (and vice-versa) (*Elementary Aspects* 108). He argues that "The antagonism is indeed so complete and so firmly structured that from the terms stated for one it should be possible, by reversing their values, to derive the implicit terms of the other" (16).

interpretive core of all knowledge. [...] The subjugated have a decent chance to be on to the god trick and all its dazzling—and therefore blinding—illuminations” (584). The point, then, is not that the *Popol Wuj* encodes an inherent, primordial claim to liberation and equality simply by virtue of its indigenous authorship and pre-Hispanic origins. Rather, what is striking is its use value as a source of poetic, insurgent epistemology in the context of Pan-Maya decolonial struggles. In regards to a working group’s reading of the *Annals of the Kaqchikels*, a 1571 document that resembles the *Popol Wuj* in many ways,⁶³ Kay Warren has observed that intellectuals in the Maya Movement are striving not to “consolidate elite status in the ancient style of monopolies over literacy and knowledge” but rather to “democratize access to knowledge through an activist ethic of community service” (159). Their appeal to texts such as the *Popol Wuj* and the *Annals of the Kaqchikels* thus illustrates a critical approach to cultural revitalization consonant with these texts’ own philosophical assumptions. The colonial origins of these documents as well as their contemporary circulation through the Maya Movement construct an insurgent meaning that only takes shape through creative, politicized readings and activations of the text.

⁶³ The *Annals of the Kaqchikels* parallels the *Popol Wuj* as a colonial text that relates the foundational myths, cultural history, and noble genealogy of the Kaqchikel population. Nonetheless, its account of their defeat by the K’iche’ also provides an interesting point of contrast. Additionally, much of its value for Maya historians lies in its vivid and extensive account of the Spanish conquest.

1.6 CONQUERING THE RATIONAL ANIMAL

Not unlike the characters in de Li3n's novel, contemporary Maya poets instigate a process of reconstitution, seeking their own faces in the mirror to confirm that they have not become someone else altogether. We might venture to say that while the subjugation of native knowledges results in colonial self-alienation, Maya literature constitutes an attempt to remedy that condition by returning to the Maya an image of themselves articulated through their shared cultural origins—namely, the *Popol Wuj* and its epistemologies.⁶⁴ Though limited in its capacities and charged with productive silences and ambiguities, poetic writing provides the men and women of maize with an instrument of seeing. As a poem by Gonz3lez suggests, it supplies a means of clearing a clouded mirror so that they can recognize themselves once again. "Falsa identidad" depicts "un ser perseguido por los espantos / de su propia sombra" who is not identical to himself:

V3ctima de una alienaci3n impuesta,
del espejismo de su propio desierto,
de enajenamientos imaginarios,
de los sue1os por otros mundos,
y de a1oranzas por realidades distintas.

⁶⁴ I borrow this phrase from the title of Carlos L3pez's *Los Popol Wuj y sus epistemolog3as: las diferencias, el conocimiento y los ciclos del infinito* (1999).

Al contemplarse bajo esos efectos narcóticos,
—sin percatarse de sus propias riquezas—
opta por apartar la vista de sí mismo
lanzando lejos una parte de su ser
para abrazarse a la irrealidad
con que termina negándose. (*Sq'anej maya* ' 33)

Over time, however, this subject transforms the piercing arrows of racist abuse into weapons of his own making (35) and lifts the blindfold of oppression from his eyes:

Pero en la soledad, este ser,
se acurruca a lamer el dolor de la traición
y termina reconociéndose
en el más absoluto secreto,
como quien limpia un espejo empañado,
bajo el que aparece su rostro verdadero. (35)

“Falsa identidad” thus suggests that decoloniality does not unfold as a straight-forward act of *visibilización* in its more outward expressions; in this case, the mirror represents an intimate, and even secret, space of self-rediscovery sheltered from the conquering gaze. The reference to the inner self as an “absolute secret” echoes the famous closing words of *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*: “Sigo ocultando lo que yo considero que nadie sabe, ni siquiera un antropólogo, ni un intelectual, por más que tenga muchos libros, no saben distinguir todos nuestros secretos” (271). Like Menchú and the scribes of the *Popol Wuj* before her, the subject in “Falsa identidad” insists on ‘hiding his face’ to protect the integrity of self that he sets out to reclaim. The question of

false identity posed by the poem also evokes the demons of internal colonialism, conveying a complex process of self-discovery marked by contradiction and ambiguity.

We might conclude that Maya verbal art presents an ambivalent play between clearing the mirror as a decolonial reconstitution of the self and clouding the mirror as an obstruction to colonial power. Perhaps most evocative of this duality is the figure of the *animal racional*, *pensador* that weaves its way through Pablo García's collection *B'ixonik tzij kech juk'ulaj kaminaqib' / Canto palabra de una pareja de muertos*.⁶⁵ García's book depicts two souls, a man and a woman, trapped in Xibalba. From joy and exaltation to the gnashing of teeth and the grinding of bones, they have fallen from their hammocks into the underworld. Like festering sores they rot, boiling in the pots of Jun Kame and Wuqub' Kame, weeping and wailing, slogging through grimy waters, reduced to nothing but turpentine, withered pumice stones, or dry weeds barren of living buds. A rational animal, a thinking animal, consumes them; they didn't notice when it galloped in, and now it rides them like beasts.

It is surely not gratuitous that García ascribes the rational animal with the aggressive stride of the very beast that heralded the Spanish military conquest. Rather than riding the horse as humans might normally do, this *pareja de muertos* is mounted by the *animal racional*. “¿Por qué ya no sabemos montar al animal preguntón?” the *pareja* asks (44), signaling the need to invert this perverse scenario and set things right. Reason has ceased to be an instrument of human thought, the poem suggests; it is nothing more than the mistress to a universalizing logic that obviates all other ways of knowing. The cadavers' lament throughout the book assumes the form of a plea, an invocation: *forgive us our errors, our oversights, our offenses, forgive us for forgetting to listen, for forgetting to cultivate your wisdom and to sow our hearts, our maize, our*

⁶⁵ This first volume of poetry published by Pablo García received the Premio de Literaturas Indígenas B'atz' in 2007. His second collection of poems is expected to appear in bookstores later this year.

wheat, our rice. Deliver us back to life, to the face of the earth. We request to you, Señor, Señora, to be our companions and complements in the struggle for self-correction and self-realization. Much like Falla's reading of the *Popol Wuj*, *Canto palabra* presents an allegory of liberation through decolonial struggle: like Junajpu and Xbalamke, the dead couple in the poem must defeat the abusive "lords" who possess an imbalanced power over the face of the earth and return to life beyond Xibalba.

Yet curiously enough, this insurgent content is partially veiled in the Spanish translation, as if García anticipated the inquisitive gaze of the non-native reader—a potential *animal preguntón*—set on firmly grasping the text. The transposition from K'iche' to Spanish registers a shift from the language of Maya spirituality tied to the *Popol Wuj* and calendric rituals to a Catholic rhetoric of confession and the expiation of sins. Where the K'iche' version of the opening poem, "Tat, Nan, kuyu' alāq qamak / Señor, Señora, perdonen nuestro pecado" (16-17), refers explicitly to Xibalba, the Spanish translation opts for the term *infierno*, invoking a similar yet not identical concept tied to an entirely different set of spiritual and philosophical suppositions. More than eliciting a parallel with Junajpu and Xbalamke, or with Jun Junajpu and Wuqub Junajpu before them, the Spanish version of the poem evokes an image of two souls in purgatory (trapped between the navels of heaven and hell) pleading to God or Jesus (Señor) and the Virgin Mary (Señora) to forgive them their sins and deliver them from the pernicious grasp of the devil.

However, the K'iche' version reveals a different conception of this state of ruin.⁶⁶ In keeping with the polysemic nature of Maya languages and the ambiguity derived from the lack of specific plural markers, these terms might also denote "father" and "mother" or even "fathers

⁶⁶ My thanks to Rusty Barrett for his input regarding the precise cultural meanings of the K'iche' terms discussed here.

and mothers.” Not surprisingly, the notion of *mak*, (as in *kuyu’ aläq qamak*, or “perdonen nuestros pecados”) does not correspond to *pecado* any more neatly than *Xib’alb’a* does to *infierno*, nor does *kuy* equal *perdonar* in any strict sense. *Mak* can imply an error, an offense, or irresponsibility in regards to an intentional or unintentional act, while */kuy/* more closely resembles the English verb “excuse” than “forgive.”⁶⁷ The phrase “*kuyu’ aläq qamak*,” then, can be literally translated as “forgive us our sins,” but also, alternatively, as “excuse us for our error(s), offense(s), or irresponsibility/ies.”

The crux of the poem arguably rides on these distinctions, particularly in light of the final stanza:

Ya no nos miramos a nosotros mismos
en el corazón del cielo y de la tierra,
por eso, nos encontramos en el infierno
por eso, pedimos a ustedes

Señor – Señora

el perdón de nuestros pecados. (18)

We are no longer true to ourselves, the poem suggests; *we are simply the reflection of another culture, of another way of thinking the world*. The dead pair’s captivity in Xibalba thus depends less on the will of God to forgive them their sins than on their own responsibility for forsaking Uk’uux Kaj, Uk’uux Ulew—their creators, Heart of Sky and Heart of Earth—and for condemning themselves to this underworld. Ultimately, it is the couple’s responsibility to forge their own resurrection out of the ashes and remains of the ancestors in Xibalba. Where the Spanish version of these poems evokes an image of a Christian God capable of pardoning sins

⁶⁷ This is the verb used as a request for pardon in the ritual K’iche’ form of thanking someone, as in “Excuse me for any way that I might have failed you.”

and rescuing souls from purgatory, the K'iche' invokes the Maya ancestors, whose spirits have been offended by the transgressions of the living-dead: that is, their failure to cultivate ancestral rituals and practices, or *k'ojb'al*.⁶⁸ What might at first glance appear to constitute a poem infused with the discourse of Catholic prayer turns out to be deeply steeped in Maya ritual and poetic language. Significantly, the day of the Maya lunar calendar termed *ajmaq* (based on the same root as */mak/*) is the designated day to “invocar a las abuelas y a los abuelos para pedirles perdón por los errores y la vigencia de sus enseñanzas morales” (Cuma Chávez 33). In this sense, García's poem draws directly upon a context of ceremonial and spiritual language directly associated with the maintenance of ancestral wisdom and the errors of not following the motherfathers' moral lessons. The couple's transgression, then, is not having not been Christian enough but rather, quite the contrary, not having been sufficiently faithful to pre-Christian religious practices. In this sense, the irresponsibility or offense in question might refer to an excessive devotion to Catholicism and the neglect of Maya traditions. In accordance with the Maya conception of binary opposition, these two conflicting religious traditions need not necessarily represent a relation of absolute antagonism or suggest that one is inherently better than the other. However, a prolonged dominance of one element over the other might lead to an imbalance that Maya rituals must constantly seek to redress.

So why, then, does García opt for an explicitly Christian lexicon to express a conception of the cosmos tied to the revitalization and continuation of pre-Conquest structures of thought? Why not leave *Xib'alb'a* as Xibalbá for ladino readers familiar with the *Popol Wuj*? It seems, on

⁶⁸ Significantly, the day of the Maya lunar calendar termed *ajmaq* (based on the same root as */mak/*) is the designated day to “invocar a las abuelas y a los abuelos para pedirles perdón por los errores y la vigencia de sus enseñanzas morales” (Cuma Chávez 33). In this sense, García's poem draws directly upon a context of ceremonial and spiritual language directly associated with the maintenance of ancestral wisdom and the errors of not following the motherfathers' moral lessons.

some level, that the act of translation and the “loss” that it inscribes might function not only as a necessary and unavoidable transposition from one language to another, along with all the cultural presuppositions and beliefs embedded in it, but also, perhaps, as a resistance to the kind of exposure that a more “accurate” translation would entail. In other words, by making this shift himself into a Christian register, García prevents the imposition of such epistemological violence from above. The slippage in meaning between the *Bible* and the *Popol Wuj* undoubtedly reflects a post-conquest state of interpenetration between two spiritual worlds, where traditional ceremonies based on the *Cholq’ij*⁶⁹ are often practiced in conjunction with Catholic rituals. In fact, the use of certain Spanish terms like *infierno* may reflect the ambivalent products of bilingual cohabitation and the infusion of indigenous meanings into the dominant discourse. As a result, my interest here lies less in echoing purists’ assumptions that Catholicism (or even evangelical Protestantism)⁷⁰ corrupts the purity of Maya traditionalism, than in highlighting the infusion of Maya cultural meanings into the dominant discourse as well as the conflicting interplay between cooptation and subversion that it entails. Instead of overtly rejecting the language of Catholicism as an alienating force like de Lión, García dons it like a mask, hiding the face of K’iche’ spirituality and gesturing towards the multiplicity of identity and meaning.

We might venture to say that translation itself functions as a sort of clouded mirror, projecting an unstable duality in which opposing pages in the book reflect one another in an imperfect correlation. “Coming here among these Mayan nations,” writes Tedlock in *Breath on*

⁶⁹ See note 28.

⁷⁰ Evangelical Protestantism has been gaining significant ground in Guatemala, as well as other parts of Latin America, over the past few decades. Evangelists are known for actively discouraging alcohol consumption and as a result are often perceived as a positive presence, given the high rate of alcoholism in Maya communities. At the same time, however, Evangelism is much less tolerant of Maya traditional practices than Catholicism generally is and has been for a matter of centuries. As a result, some activists and scholars view in the incursion of Protestantism in Guatemala as a threat to Maya cultural identity, while others argue that it simply introduces new and varying ways of being Maya. See C. Mathews Samson, *Re-enchanting the World: Maya Protestantism in the Guatemalan Highlands* (2007).

the Mirror, “we seem to have entered a world where reflections are not simultaneous with the things reflected. Reading the Book, we may guess that reflections ceased to be simultaneous the moment vigesimal beings lost their perfect vision” (44). According to the *Popol Wuj*, the Sun rose to its pinnacle on the first day it appeared over the face of the earth. Yet overwhelmed by the intensity of its own heat, it then placed a mirror in the sky and returned back in the direction from whence it came. As a result, the Book sustains that “The sun that shows itself is not the real sun” (Tedlock, *Popol Vuh* 182). The bilingual poem, like the sun, is never identical to itself: its reflection through translation is necessarily (and productively) imprecise.

Yet rather than posing one version in terms of lack—that is, the meanings in K’iche’ not evident in the Spanish version—or in terms of an “original” poem and a flawed copy, we might consider the poem as a textual artifact to reside in both versions. In effect, it is not only a question of what is “lost” in translation but also the multiplicity of meanings that emerge in the process. After all, poetic language itself is never self-same; verbal art provides a means of articulating non-rational forms of knowledge that are nonetheless capable of apprehending and constructing reality. The process of poetic self-translation thus reflects what Walter Mignolo refers to as bilanguaging: not bilingualism as a skill or ability but rather a way of thinking that inhabits the dialectical space of ambiguity between two languages (*Local Histories* 264). The polysemy of poetic language in *Canto palabra* mirrors the opaque process of translation as a simultaneous act of revelation and concealment that cultivates subterranean currents of meaning and effectively frustrates any assumption of expansive knowledge and vision of subaltern cultures. My interest, then, lies not in rooting out all the text’s hidden meanings through my (limited) knowledge of K’iche’ but rather in highlighting the text’s own poetic resistance to being understood. Particularly relevant here is Juan Duchesne Winter’s call for a critical practice

of listening capable of inscribing delirium's "inseparable illuminations and opacities" ("Literary Communism" 230). This approach would "not count out non-knowledge nor assail that which hides from knowledge;" rather, "The active opacity of the subaltern should not be subjected to epistemological aggression, but should be counted as a premise for a different knowledge" (230).

So what does *Canto palabra* suggest about the nature and function of Maya knowledge in relation to the "rational animal" of Western modernity? Like the ancient Nahuas' conception of verbal art as *flor y canto*, contemporary Maya literature affirms the power of poetic language to pronounce the unknown as a means of constructing and deconstructing knowledge. The modality of breath on the mirror and the opaque process of translation in *Canto palabra* suggest the vital significance of non-knowledge, opacity, and ambiguity not only in the context of poetic language but also for the cultivation of ethical practices of learning and listening. The intersection between verbal art and the struggle for epistemic decolonization within the Maya Movement thus points not only to the recuperation of indigenous systems of knowledge but also to the possibility for poetic gnosis⁷¹ and non-systematic ways of knowing not easily digested by the *animal racional*, *pensador*. Maya insurgent poetics enacts a rearguard acquisition of knowledge that also affirms the necessary and productive limits of human perception. Rather than simply appropriating power/knowledge for themselves, Maya cultural activists strive to creatively reconfigure the relationship between these two terms. The result would be a conception of power predicated on respectful non-knowledge and the dialogic possibilities of a view from below.

⁷¹ Mignolo suggests that the mystical origins of *gnosis* as a spiritual encounter render the term useful in shifting the site of knowledge-production away from the Western philosophical tradition and its dependence on reason (*Local Histories* 12). Likewise, Duchesne Winter notes that for Cuban poet José Lezama Lima, gnosis connotes "el conocimiento como cohabitación erótica de lo conocido con lo desconocido, en contradistinción de una epistemología moderna donde el conocimiento sería operación técnica de liquidación del desconocimiento y apropiación de la verdad" (*Del príncipe moderno* 39).

CHAPTER TWO

NATIVE (IN)VISIBILITY AND THE NARRATIVE REFUSAL TO WRITE

Pareciera evidente que las máscaras ocultan y los silencios callan. Pero es verdad que las máscaras también muestran y que los silencios hablan. Ocultar y callar, mostrar y hablar, máscaras y silencio. Estos son los signos que ayudarán a entender este fin de siglo en México.

—Subcomandante Marcos

2.1 WORD AS WEAPON, IMAGE AS AMMUNITION

Just on the other side of the Guatemalan border, the Maya of Chiapas, Mexico have elaborated their own form of decolonial struggle, in this case through an explicit revolt against the Mexican government, first through armed struggle and later through discourse and negotiation. If any contemporary indigenous movement is known for its use of language as an instrument of

struggle, that movement is undoubtedly the Zapatista insurgency, whose participants have spent nearly two decades transmitting a series of declarations from the Lacandón Jungle, carrying out marches and public demonstrations throughout Mexico, and experimenting with new forms of self-government in communities known as *caracoles*. In *Zapatismo Beyond Borders*, Alex Khasnabish demonstrates that the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) “has exerted an imaginative and inspirational force far beyond its material capacity and its ‘concrete’ victories since 1 January 1994, a force rooted in and animated by a distinctive political imagination” (154). The international resonance of Zapatismo, he argues, is one born of poetry, “a resonance that speaks the audacious language of creativity, imagination, laughter, and hope rather than that of tactics, dogma, and structure” (8). In similar terms, Jeff Conant contends that the movement’s greatest contribution to our contemporary understanding of political action is the elaboration of a poetics of resistance as the primary armament in their war against oblivion (28).

Ranging from official declarations and communiqués directed to the State to an assortment of letters to civil society, opponents, allies, and potential supporters, Zapatista texts represent much more than political manifestos. Even the most overtly political documents are infused with Maya cosmology and characterized by Marcos’s quirky postmodern style. They render the marginal space of the postscript an appropriate site for discursive intervention from below and interlace political analysis with the parables and short stories of Don Durito de la Lacandona, a quixotic dung beetle who designates Marcos as his squire, and Old Antonio, a Maya elder who instructs Marcos (and, in turn, the Mexican public) in Maya cosmology and epistemology. Conant reflects that “while the Old Antonio stories serve to invoke native mythistory and put the old gods in the daily news, the Durito tales work at an opposite pole of the literary canon, building a mock-historic pastiche of Western literary figures and

contemporary pop symbols in order to undermine inherited cultural narratives” (213). In this regard, Durito and Antonio embody two distinct yet complementary forms of insurgent poetics—one based on the subversion of dominant narratives and another predicated on the affirmation of alternatives—that together present a powerful challenge to the hegemonic framework of progress, modernity/coloniality, and neoliberalism.

As Nicholas Higgins has indicated, then, these texts also exceed the bounds of literature in purely aesthetic terms; the fact that Marcos often appeals to genres like the short story—and, less frequently, poetry and the novel—“should not be mistaken as the signs of a purely literary indulgence, a vice to which he is by no means immune” (156). Instead, Higgins argues, “it should be recognized as a conscious and political statement concerned with just how, and by whom, the realm of experience can best be communicated” (157).⁷² The poetic content of the communiqués highlights the existence of alternative forms of cultural and political logic, not merely as a show of difference through an exotic *cosmovisionismo* but rather as the basis for an alternative sociopolitical paradigm freed from the constraints of cultural and economic imperialism.

At the same time, we might say that the EZLN also wages a war of images to complement its war of words. Marcos in particular draws upon the vast visual archive of the Mexican Revolution and popular resistance throughout Latin America, from the bands of ammunition strung across his chest a la Zapata and a pipe reminiscent of Che Guevara to the red star reminiscent of socialist iconography and the Zapotec movement of the 1980s.⁷³ Stencils and

⁷² “Lo que queremos es darle a la palabra otro uso,” Marcos commented in an interview in 1999: “No más allá del que tiene pero sí retomar el uso que había perdido... No pensamos que la palabra vaya produciendo una revolución, no le apostamos tanto. Pero sí pensamos que la palabra puede producir reflexión, puede producir conciencia de lo que está ocurriendo” (*Señor* 142).

⁷³ This movement could be seen as a precedent in many ways to the uprising in Chiapas in the 1990s and 2000s. Like the Zapatistas, COCEI (Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus) drew widespread national

photographs of his masked countenance adorn t-shirts, stickers, and posters available for sale internationally, and murals filled with Zapatista imagery grace the facades of buildings across the country, especially in Chiapas. A history of the movement titled *EZLN: 20 y 10, el fuego y la palabra* (1998; published in English as *The Fire and the Word: A History of the Zapatista Movement*) includes extensive photos of various members of the EZLN and historical moments in the uprising as well as pencil drawings on nearly every page. Likewise, the Old Antonio fable “Historia de los colores” appeared in 1999 as a bilingual children’s book with painted illustrations. Even on the level of content, the communiqués are replete with visual imagery and symbolism.

The conception of textuality here thus exceeds the bounds of the written word. “Just as speech and writing,” writes Serge Gruzinski,” the image can be a vehicle for all types of power and resistance. The train of thought it develops offers a specific matter, as dense as that of writing but often irreducible to it” (3). Marcos and the EZLN as a whole manipulate and resemanticize revolutionary iconography as a subtle challenge for Mexican society to contemplate the ideological and racialized meanings invested in images. Conant proposes reading this act of branding as a form of guerrilla marketing or product placement: an appeal to spectacle as a means of gaining popular appeal and disseminating their message. As with most forms of pastiche, such a strategy runs the risk of reproducing the logic invested in the images it

and even international support; Howard Campbell notes that “Juchitán became a cause célèbre of the national left-wing and a key symbol of Indian peasant resistance in modern Mexico for urban intellectuals. Juchitán also became known as the center of one of Latin America’s most active indigenous cultural movements” (xvi). Unlike the EZLN, however, it focused largely on ousting PRI at the local level and replacing it—through democratic elections—with Zapotec leaders. In 1981, the city of Juchitán became the first city to be controlled by the political left in Mexico since the Revolution. During the party’s brief stint in power, Zapotec became the preferred language of official and unofficial communication. The group also published extensively in the avant-garde magazine *Guchachi’ Reza*, which featured literary pieces in Zapotec, cultural critique, local history, opinion pieces, and articles by non-Zapotec critics and supporters alike.

peddles and parodies (a point I will return to below), yet it also contains the potential to destabilize and revise their original content.

In effect, the Zapatistas have undertaken a symbolic and counterhegemonic struggle to retrain the Mexican gaze and combat an imposed condition of invisibility. As a public spectacle as well as a military operation, the uprising on January 1, 1994 had the effect of drawing national and international attention to the exploitation of indigenous communities in Chiapas at a moment in which Mexico was supposedly poised to enter the “First World” through the implementation of NAFTA. For Mexican anthropologist Gilberto López y Rivas, “The social indicators that situated the indigenous peoples as the most impoverished sectors of the Mexican population were suddenly profoundly relevant, and were rendered starkly visible” (qtd. in Conant 52). “Suddenly, like never before,” Conant adds, “a spotlight shone on the indigenous problem, the poverty problem, the human rights problem, the democracy problem. In the course of a single night, the corrupt and violent nature of the Mexican nation was exposed like a patient in a surgical theater” (52-53).

To appeal to the terminology of social movement theory, we might say that the barrage of communiqués and letters to the press that followed those first moments of rebellion, particularly as the Zapatistas shifted their strategy away from military combat, served to *frame* the movement’s concerns to outsiders by focusing public attention not only on the spectacle of the masked rebels but also on their political objectives. In this sense, EZLN texts serve to “fashion shared understandings of the world [...] that legitimate and motivate collective action” (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 6) and to “sway others that their collective definitions of the situation are right and reasonable” (Benford 412). In a provocative word play on his own name,

Marcos has suggested that he serves, first and foremost, as a frame for the Maya and their claims for sovereignty:

Nosotros decimos el marco de una ventana que nosotros queríamos que sirviera para que ustedes asomaran a lo que somos nosotros, lo que está detrás de mí y detrás de nuestros comandantes: los pueblos indígenas. Y toda la situación que había de injusticia y de pobreza y de miseria, y sobre todo de tristeza, que había en las comunidades indígenas. (EZLN V: 194)

Marcos, the communiqués, and their circulation in the national and international press have thus been crucial in communicating the movement's demands and articulating shared grievances that transcend the particularities of Maya communities in southern Mexico. That is, the EZLN has been effective in appealing to a broader sense of economic and cultural injustice resulting from neoliberal practices and colonial mentalities, connecting their struggles with the worldwide alterglobalization movement. As I suggested above, the Zapatista uprising represents the most highly visible indigenous movement of recent decades; it may not be the first, but it is undoubtedly the most well known in popular culture and on an international scale. As a result, it has also played an important role in framing indigenous issues throughout the hemisphere, providing an international context for movements that may otherwise have remained local phenomena and opening space for similar forms of political intervention.

The problem, however, is that each of these framing devices runs the risk of minimizing what it is intended to frame; as Marcos puts it, the *marco* may detract from the *cuadro* rather than accentuating it (*Señor* 150-51). To begin with, the appeal to writing as an instrument of struggle has the unfortunate effect of exaggerating Marcos's role as *auteur* of the movement; his presence in the media often overshadows other voices, as well as other forms of poetic

expression (e.g. community radio and theater) and more localized publication efforts like those of the artisanal press *Sna Jtz'ibajom* (est. 1982). Much like the heated debate over the authenticity of Menchú's testimony, the popular and political concern with Subcomandante Marcos's "true" identity and his mediating role in the movement tends to detract from the object of protest itself and diminish the role of other leaders such as Comandanta Ramona, Mayor Moisés, and Mayor Ana María. It would appear, furthermore, that to some extent the international popularity of the EZLN draws attention away from other movements, even as it opens a space for their increased visibility. As Jeff Conant puts it, "The Marcos fetish—known in Mexico as Marcotrafficking—is a significant element of what has kept the Zapatista struggle in the public eye," yet that same phenomenon "serves well to obscure and confuse the real issue behind the ski mask: self-determination of the indigenous people" (243).

What interests me here is precisely this double movement of revelation and concealment, both as complementary forms of resistance and as an invitation to consider the limits of indigenous mobilization, intercultural dialogue, and the politics of recognition. Jan de Vos has rightly indicated that "the avalanche of interpretive and informative literature [about the Zapatistas], rather than stimulating the appetite, more likely provokes indigestion" (326). Yet it is perhaps for this very reason that the Zapatista uprising provides a productive opportunity to reflect on the ambiguities and contradictions of indigenous (in)visibility within the context of globalization. This chapter maintains that both the formulation of Zapatista poetics and its international reception provide insight into what Rolando Vásquez calls the modern/colonial regime of visibility, as they highlight the ways in which "commodities reign over the visible while the common people, the 'non-consumers', are made invisible, erased" ("Modernity, the Greatest Show" 2). However, the Zapatistas' response to that condition does not play out as a

straightforward demand for visibility. Rather, the paradox of the ski mask as a visual reminder of subaltern invisibility indicates a much more complex reflection on the politics of exclusion and racial othering.⁷⁴ The principal strategic and symbolic tools of the movement, from the balaclava to the word as weapon, serve the purpose of framing this critique and calling attention not only to subjugated bodies and bodies of knowledge but also, above all, to the power dynamics that led to their suppression in the first place. The objective, therefore, is not recognition and inclusion within the parameters of dominant society but rather the construction of a different paradigm altogether.

First, I explore the Zapatistas' use of the ski mask as a parodic commentary on race and visual culture in Mexico. Drawing on a series of metaphors concerning windows, mirrors, and frames in "La historia de los espejos" (1995) and other assorted texts, I explore what I interpret as a decolonial dialectics of seeing. I then turn to a novel not directly connected to the Zapatista movement in an attempt to counter the fetishization of the EZLN and explore these same concerns in a fictional text by a native author. I read *Cantares de los vientos primerizos* (1994) by Zapotec novelist Javier Castellanos Martínez as a narrative refusal to write, arguing that here, too, paradox constitutes a powerful critical tool for examining the utility and limitations of ethnographic writing for native communities as well as the dangers of appropriation of indigenous knowledge by dominant society. By placing these two contexts in dialogue with one

⁷⁴ In all three of his articles on the subject, Vásquez cites the Zapatistas as a prime example of resistance to the modern/colonial regime of visibility. At the end of "Modernity, the Greatest Show on Earth," for instance, he closes by suggesting that Zapatismo and other movements like it throughout the Global South "can be read as struggles for visibility, for recognition against oblivion [...] Their poetic of resistance shreds the veil of simulacrum" (15). However, my sense is that their protest against invisibility is much more complex than his brief analysis would suggest. More than mere anecdotal evidence of his theory, the case of the EZLN provides a complex critique on the modern/colonial regime of visibility that adds further dimension to the theoretical framework that he lays out in these essays. In particular, the ambivalent role of Marcos within the movement and the paradoxical function of the ski mask suggest that the response to colonial *en-cubrimiento* is decidedly more complex than a simple demand for recognition that "shreds the veil of simulacrum."

another, I hope to displace clear-cut understandings of visibility politics and subaltern representation in favor of a more nuanced perspective informed by the productive coexistence of multiple, conflicting meanings.

2.2 THE FACE THAT HIDES ITSELF TO BE SEEN

Building off previous reflections on commodity fetishism (Marx), spectacle and simulacrum (Debord, Benjamin, Baudrillard), and the coloniality of power (Quijano), Rolando Vásquez contends that the construction of modernity/coloniality rests on the conflation between what is visible and what is real. This hegemony of vision, he argues, is closely tied to the emergence of capitalism and the new world-system that developed following the conquest of the Americas. Although it began with the Age of Discovery, this construct is above all a child of the Enlightenment, when scientists and philosophers began to conceive of the acquisition of knowledge as a process of illumination, in contrast with the so-called Dark Ages. Conant explains that

During Europe's Age of Enlightenment, human reason—as opposed to faith or piety, for example, or unbridled passion—was held up as the key to liberty, and liberty was pronounced to be the highest aspiration of man [...] Francis Bacon developed the scientific method and the mandate to examine every living thing under the proverbial microscope; Descartes described the universe as a machine ordered and driven by reason; Sir Isaac Newton unveiled the mechanical laws of

that universe, making it clear that, with human reason, all things could be understood and thus brought under control. (68)

The aspiration to encyclopedic knowledge that characterizes the Enlightenment—as well as its contemporary legacy in the form of technological surveillance and the dogged pursuit of scientific knowledge at all costs—entails a panoptic gaze that establishes the parameters of reality on the basis of what can be seen, classified, and understood. “By establishing the real as visibility, as representation,” notes Vásquez, “all that is not visible (presented or re-presented) is discredited as unreal” (“Modernity, The Greatest Show” 7). It makes sense, therefore, that Pablo García’s response to the *animal racional*, *pensador* and the Zapatistas’ masked rebellion would problematize modern, rational attempts to understand and control the universe through their deliberate appeal to indigenous cosmology and poetic opacity.

Yet the modern/colonial regime of visibility does not stop at consigning to oblivion all forms of knowledge that do not fit within its parameters of legibility; it goes one step further, fabricating its own sense of superiority by naturalizing the classification of humanity in racial terms. Aníbal Quijano has demonstrated how modernity/coloniality constructed and legitimized itself through the inferiorization of the non-white body and the subsequent negation of her subjectivity (534). Particularly illustrative of this process, for Vásquez, are the circus sideshows of the 19th century, whose ethnographic exhibitions transformed the non-Western other into a spectacle. “Through the spectralization of difference,” he notes, “difference is subsumed under the logic of the commodity, the latest curiosity in the ephemeral market of novelty” (“Modernity, The Greatest Show” 13). This juxtaposition between the hypervisibility and oblivion of subaltern populations thus exemplifies the logic of what Joaquín Barriandos, in similar terms, has referred

to as the coloniality of seeing: it signals the matrix of coloniality that underlies any visual regime based on the polarization and inferiorization between the observer and the observed (15).

This framework says a lot, I would argue, about the ways in which the Zapatistas have been perceived and represented, particularly by the State. In 1995, the attorney general's office unveiled Subcomandante Marcos as the Marxist and former UNAM philosophy professor Rafael Guillén, effectively shifting attention away from the movement's demands in a performative act of dethroning. Alma Guillermoprieto recalls the magical way in which an aide visually "unmasked" Marcos by juxtaposing an image of Guillén with another of the EZLN figurehead:

After we were allowed to study the two for a few seconds, the aide slipped the slide over the photograph. Voilà! Subcomandante Marcos... The aide continued imposing the slide of Marcos on the photograph of Guillén and flipping them again and again—now we saw him, now we didn't—until the storm of camera flashes subsided, and then we left. (33-34)

Unmasking 'El Sup' became a game, notes Ilan Stavans, as the Mexican public attempted to guess his true identity while remaining fascinated with the mystery (388). In this light, though perhaps an unfortunate consequence of Subcomandante Marcos's anonymity, the apparent obsession with Marcos as enigmatic *enmascarado* and the spectacle of his "unmasking" are indicative of the kinds of social idiosyncrasies that the Zapatistas critique as part of the dynamics of race in Mexico. Paradoxically, the attempt to reveal Marcos's "true" identity constitutes yet another example of colonial concealment, as the media spectacle overshadows the political dimensions of the uprising, particularly the Maya's demands for self-determination and autonomy. His mask thus exposes the incoherences of the modern logic of the State, which is often effective at rendering invisible sectors of society that it does not want to see but unable to

respond to situations in which those groups reclaim political agency and presence.s Marcos insists, moreover, that Mexican political society itself is a “cultura de tapados” (*Cartas* 40), a play on words that alludes to the PRI’s tendency to rig elections; in Mexico, *tapado* refers not only to something that is covered or concealed, but also to a presidential candidate hand-selected by the dominant political party. The Zapatistas thus present their own performative act of unmasking through their denunciation of Mexican political subterfuge and corruption; “the discourse of Marcos serves to reveal historical ‘truths,’” writes Conant, “while that of the state serves to conceal them” (57).

The ski mask also has the effect of highlighting the invisibility of indigenous communities within that same political system. After all, Marcos is hardly the only *enmascarado* in the movement. Naomi Klein points out that “the paradox of Marcos and the Zapatistas is that, despite the masks, the non-selves, the mystery, their struggle is about the opposite of anonymity—it is about the right to be seen. When the Zapatistas took up arms and said, *Ya Basta!* in 1994, it was a revolt against their invisibility” (116). The mask thus reflects an ironic commentary on the problematic invisibility of Indians in society: to be seen, they must present a physical testament to that very invisibility. The resulting indistinction between them, in turn, suggests a parody of yet another racist cultural phenomenon: the tendency to homogenize indigenous populations, considering them a uniform mass of equally Indian faces. In this regard, the balaclava conveys a critique of what Shawn Michelle Smith characterizes as “a racialized attempt to shore up a (mis)recognized (white) self by obliterating the other’s subjectivity” (34).

It is plausible, without a doubt, that the mask actually serves a much simpler function: that of protecting insurgents from individual retaliation by the State. Over the years, Marcos has provided a variety of justifications for its use: protection from the inquisitive eye of the police,

political messianism, and the cold; homage to the black god of Old Antonio; even—in a typical instance of self-depreciative humor—as a cover for his own ugliness (EZLN II: 108-9). Yet I would argue that this semantic variability also affirms the potency of the ski mask as a vehicle for social critique. The insurgent poetics of the mask open a space for its transformation from a product of subaltern oppression into a symbol of resistance. As Jeff Conant puts it, “Anonymity, facelessness, is claimed with a ferocity and an intelligence that turns it from a deficiency into a source of power and a threat. In a classic *detournement*, the ski mask becomes the symbol of the underclass—the social majorities—rising up to confront the dominant power structures” (149).

The very act of donning the mask of anonymity thus connotes a satirical response to the ongoing process of racial othering. Like the nameless protagonist of Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, the Maya of Chiapas draw attention to their invisibility as a critique of the racist logic that produced it in the first place, while simultaneously using anonymity as a cover for enacting their own political agenda. “I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me,” explains Ellison’s protagonist:

Like the bodiless heads you sometimes see in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me. (3)

By donning their balaclavas and bandanas, the Zapatistas ostensibly demand dominant society to contemplate what W.E.B. Du Bois referred to as the color line, as they profess a critical awareness of the way in which ladinos project their own desires and preconceived notions onto the indigenous subject in a process of identity negotiation and inferiorization. In this sense, the mask constitutes a critical manifestation of Du Bois’s Veil, as it becomes that “cultural screen on

which the collective weight of white misconceptions is fortified and made manifest” (Smith 40).

In the first chapter of *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois describes his own childhood revelation of this process of misrecognition and the form of double consciousness that ensued:

Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil... the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. (10-11)

Much like the subject of Gaspar González’s “Falsa conciencia,” who chooses to look away from himself and embrace a reality that entails his own self-negation, the Negro, for Du Bois, must always look at himself through the eyes of others. At the same time, however, this phenomenon produces a form of consciousness that is—to borrow a phrase from Homi Bhabha—both “less than one and double” (139). The subaltern is endowed with a unique second sight that allows him to see the world from below, perceiving with clarity those elements that remain invisible to the non-racialized subject. For Shawn Michelle Smith, “Second sight is, finally, a vision split and multiplied by double consciousness, a vision that, in part, considers self through those filters, but one that also looks out from the dark side of the screen—and sees back through the looking glass” (42).

While the Zapatista model seems less concerned with the psychological effects of this process and more engaged with its political and sociological ramifications, the underlying

concern is arguably the same. In fact, Smith's characterization of Du Bois's model might just as well apply to the ski mask: "The Veil is the site at which white fantasies of a negative blackness, as well as fantasies of an idealized whiteness, are projected and maintained. The Veil thus shrouds African Americans in *invisibility* by making misrepresentations of blackness overwhelmingly *visible*" (40, emphasis in the original). By visualizing the separation that the Veil implies and making it complete, the Zapatistas simultaneously demand its abolition. In a sense, they hope to extend the second sight of the misperceived other to dominant society, using the spectacle of the mask to create a critical space for mutual identification outside the confines of the modern/colonial regime of visibility. Where González appeals to poetic language as a tool for awakening the Maya in the struggle against colonial self-alienation, the Zapatistas use it to awaken ladinos to the ways in which they have misconstrued the Maya and other racialized groups.

The problem, in other words, is not just indigenous self-alienation but mestizos' alienation from their indigenous cultural roots. In a different setting but in similar terms, Mapuche poet Elicura Chihuailaf has argued that Chileans, too, see themselves in a clouded mirror, denying the non-European side of their cultural heritage:

Es como cuando se entra a la ducha y el baño queda lleno de vapor y desnudos ante el espejo empañado podemos imaginarnos, por un momento, lo que queramos. El problema está en que no podemos transformar ese momento en una ficticia y permanente "realidad" en torno a la cual vivir lo cotidiano, pues en algún instante, tarde o temprano, llevados por un irrefrenable impulso interior o por la necesidad de que no se destruya el espejo... hay que limpiarlo, hay que sacarle esa "humedad". Entonces viene el rostro verdadero, nuestra morenidad en

todo su hermoso esplendor, que refleja también una manera de vivir. (*Recado confidencial* 88)

It is perhaps within this context that Marcos presents his own masked figure as a mirror to society, imploring individuals worldwide to see themselves in ‘El Sup’ and the EZLN as a source of political solidarity. “Si quieren saber qué rostro hay tras el pasamontañas, es muy sencillo,” he suggests: “tomen el espejo y véanlo” (*Yo, Marcos* 15).⁷⁵ Marcos constantly plays with his own anonymity as a means of suggesting the universality of the revolt, as evidenced in his famous declaration that he is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, Asian in Europe, Palestine in Israel... in short, that Marcos is any human, that he is all oppressed minorities resisting and crying “¡Ya basta! Enough!” (EZLN I: 243).

El Sup has acknowledged, in this regard, that “Marcos” refers less to himself than to the mask that he wears, to the role that he plays; in the words of José de la Colina, the mask is the message (365). He thus constructs himself as a polyvalent, metaphorical space in which conflicting meanings coexist, inviting a heterogeneous collectivity to identify with his persona. “Marcos” can be anyone, he claims:

puede ser todos y ninguno, no existe, es un invento inacabado, un modelo para armar al gusto de cada quien. Un hombre sin rostro no es necesariamente un hombre con el rostro cubierto. Es, sobre todo, un hombre con un rostro cualquiera, que no dice nada, que no nos lleva a nada. Un rostro inútil, un mero

⁷⁵ In many ways, the title of this text betrays Marcos’s attempt to counter the fetishization of his own figure. This mixed message may be owing to the fact that the book was not penned directly by Marcos but rather edited and compiled by Marta Durán de Huerta on the basis of personal interviews and fragments of published communiqués. The title of the text, then, is likely not of Marcos’s choosing, yet it nonetheless serves as an example of the ways in which his figure overshadows other leaders of the movement. When asked in an interview with Laura Castellanos in 2007 if it was all worth it, he responds that he would do it all again exactly the same then pauses and adds: “Si algo pensaría en cambiar sería eso, que no hubiera sido tan protagonista en la cuestión mediática” (Castellanos 46).

esqueleto para darle forma al pasamontañas narizón (“y mamón”, ratifican los machitos). (EZLN II: 108)

Kristine Vanden Berghe notes that by simultaneously inhabiting two different worlds, he creates a mutable persona whose specific form conforms to the discursive and political demands of the movement (96). In short, “Marcos” constitutes a sort of floating signifier, a symbol whose signification depends on context and on the particular interests of each reader.

El Sup also figuratively shuttles back and forth between Mexican civil society and the indigenous population, identifying with both groups and speaking on their behalf. The use of pronouns throughout the communiqués is particularly revealing; he often speaks of “nosotros los indígenas,” including himself within the community of Mayas that he joined several years prior to the public emergence of the Zapatista Army. For Emilio del Valle Escalante, this discursive orientation suggests that Marcos is no longer mestizo; he has become indigenous like the rest of his *compañeros* by consciously unlearning his metropolitan privileges and reeducating himself, so to speak, in Maya epistemology and cultural logic (*Maya Nationalisms* 97). The CCRI-CG (Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee, General Command) has confirmed this process of transformation, essentially sanctioning his inclusion in that indigenous “we”:

Desde el principio del año ha escogido nuestro andar armado y sin rostro la voz de un mexicano para que por ella hable nuestra palabra. Siendo clara la piel de este hombre y su paso anterior a estas tierras, vino a ser parte nuestra. Es su corazón indígena como cualquiera de nuestros muertos y tiene el alma morena como la entraña de estos suelos. No es más lo que fue antes. No es ya él sino nosotros. (EZLN II: 102)

The refrain “We are all Marcos” adopted by his numerous supporters (indigenous and ladino alike) effectively echoes and complements this gesture; together, both affirmations problematize

the foundations of racial difference—not as a step towards eliminating cultural particularity, but rather as a means of questioning the epistemological basis of racial classification as a mechanism of subjugation.

However, as Kristine Vanden Berghe has indicated, this particular use of the first-person pronoun is inconsistent; in other cases he refers to the Maya in the third person and portrays himself as systematically and openly different from them, emphasizing his large nose and his metropolitan background as distinguishing characteristics (*Narrativa* 71). By effectively inhabiting the interstice between two divided sectors of society, Marcos reduces the distance between the two and creates a point of contact, yet at the same time, he remains cognizant of his own role and the limits to his right to inclusion. Unlike del Valle Escalante, in fact, Yvon Le Bot maintains that Marcos has never tried to become indigenous; on the contrary, the trust he has gained within the communities of the Lacandón is due in part to the respectful distance he has maintained (17). As mediator and translator, Marcos arguably strives to extend that self-reflexivity to Mexican civil society, urging his readers to contemplate—and disrupt—their own complicity in the ruses of State power and the coloniality of seeing: “El pasamontañas es un espejo para que los mexicanos [...] se descubran, para salir de la mentira y el miedo que los enajenan. Un espejo que llama al país a interrogarse a sí mismo sobre su porvenir, a reconstruirse, a reinventarse” (Le Bot 16). So what, we might ask, would that process of reinvention look like, and what alternatives to the modern/colonial regime of visibility does the EZLN envision?

2.3 THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

Central to the Zapatistas' poetic theory of change, as Le Bot implies, is the figure of the mirror, which assumes a polyvalent, mutable quality throughout the communiqués. As such, it both dialogues with the motif of breath on the mirror that structures the *Popol Wuj* (and Maya thought as a whole)⁷⁶ and supplements it with new meanings and dimensions. In "La historia de los espejos," Marcos presents the mirror as a dark reflection or parody as well as a manifestation of the vanity of power, the complicity of opposition parties with the State, and modernity/coloniality's distortion of reality. This lengthy, composite text incorporates stories of Old Antonio and Don Durito that, when read in the context of the communiqué as a whole, impart a complex political allegory on the workings of power.⁷⁷ In the segment that lends the communiqué its title, Old Antonio recounts the creation of the moon: originally a lake who became lonely and wanted to see the world, she rides on the back of the mother *ceiba* tree, then flirts with the wind and ends up flung among the stars in the sky, converted into a celestial object by the gods as punishment for her vanity. The moon then travels across the sky each night,

⁷⁶ Gary Gossen argues that this motif is useful in understanding certain aspects of the Zapatista insurgency, including Marcos's function within it. He writes that "What we have seen in the Lacandon Jungle these past two years in Chiapas appears opaque to our own eyes, for it has undoubtedly been constructed and understood by the Maya as an effort to act in history in such a way that human uncertainty, the givenness of outside causal forces, and the effort to engage in instrumental behavior to effect change in a hostile environment, mesh together in a plausible, credible, and cautious pattern of counterbalances" (532).

⁷⁷ Brian Gollnick has noted that isolating the stories of Don Durito and Old Antonio from the rest of the communiqué for their inclusion in anthologies such as *Don Durito de la Lacandona* (1998) and *Relatos de El Viejo Antonio* (1998) tends to obscure their political implications by taking them out of context and treating them as stand-alone literary texts rather than allegories whose meaning depends on the relationship between the various different parts of "Historia de los espejos" as a whole (161-64).

seeking her image on the surface of the earth. What she sees, however, is not a clear reflection of her own countenance but rather the distorted features of corruption in Mexican society. As she travels through the communiqué itself, the moon serves as a structuring device, reflecting one aspect of Mexico after another in the search for her own image.

The first “chapter” of the moon’s journey illustrates the duplicity of power, particularly “la absurda coherencia del espejo puesto frente al espejo, de la doble duplicidad de la imagen del Poder” (EZLN II: 371). In this case, opposing mirrors serve to configure a political system limited to replicating itself incestuously decade after decade, perpetuating the paradox of an Institutional Revolutionary Party that conserves the ideals of the Revolution through their constant negation.⁷⁸ The form of power in question is what Quijano calls the coloniality of power, a particular mode of domination that constructs its own superiority through the negation of all other rationalities:

En el Poder el espejo refleja una doble imagen: lo que se dice y lo que se hace. No oculta nada este espejo. Los recursos se le agotaron, ya no es el mismo que antes. Tiene la superficie enmohecida y manchada. Ya no ‘invierte’ la realidad. Por el contrario, muestra una contradicción. Pero al hacerla evidente, la controla y la pone a su servicio. Ahora, simplemente, trata de que esa imagen contradictoria sea vista como ‘natural’, como ‘evidente’, como ‘incuestionable.’ (II: 371)

In the next section, Marcos explores the neoliberal dimensions of power in contemporary Mexico. In this particular formation, he argues, political representatives have renounced all

⁷⁸ PRI was founded in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution and remained the dominant political party for the rest of the 20th century. Its power waned somewhat at the turn of the century with the presidential election of Vicente Fox of the National Action Party (PAN) in 2000 and the end of PRI’s 71-year reign. However, PRI continues to be symbolic of the endemic corruption of the Mexican political system, as evidenced by widespread accusations of electoral fraud in the 2012 presidential election, when Enrique Peña Nieto (PRI) defeated Andrés Manuel López Obrador (PRD) by a slim margin. This election spurred a popular movement titled “Yo Soy 132” in response to a perceived bias towards PRI in the national print and television media.

attempts to legitimize themselves to their electorate. Instead, power now plays a new game: incapable of establishing its own legitimacy, it adorns itself with the cloak of “legality” (II: 373). The common Mexican citizen should not expect the government she (supposedly) elected to look out for her best interests; “En cambio, deberá conformarse con un gobierno que-representa-a-la-ley-que-representa-al-gobierno-que-representa-a-la-ley, y así hasta el infinito en ese rebote de imágenes de un espejo frente a otro espejo” (II: 373).⁷⁹ In effect, power presents itself as a kind of tautological mirror: *I exist because I am necessary; I am necessary because I exist; therefore, I exist and I am necessary* (II: 373).

Yet this carnival of horrors ultimately gives way to a carnivalesque inversion, an inchoate mirror of resistance capable of inverting the grotesque image of Power and moving beyond it. If viewed from just the right angle (down and to the left), this looking glass reveals men, women, children, and elders marching up from the south, accompanied by the lowly dung beetle Don Durito. In order to perceive this image, Marcos instructs, the reader must place herself comfortably in front of a mirror and repeat the following phrase three times: “*Soy lo que soy, un poco, lo que puedo ser. El espejo me muestra lo que soy, el cristal lo que puedo ser*” (II: 379, italics in the original). This final chapter in the moon’s journey over the earth thus poses a different model of self-reflection based not on duplicity and vanity but instead on critical awareness and solidarity.

After a staged letter by Don Durito on the transition to a new form of democracy, the communiqué closes with the beetle’s journey to Mexico City. Durito writes to Marcos,

⁷⁹ As this quote suggests, the Zapatistas object to the logic behind representative democracy, with the understanding that it does not truly communicate and act according to the interests of the electorate. As a result, the Zapatistas advocate a distinct form of participatory democracy that, unlike recent political experiments in countries like Bolivia and Ecuador, operates completely at the margin of the State rather than occupying it to implement a form of direct democratic representation. This conception of democracy predicated upon autonomy and the rejection of party politics is one of the signature characteristics of Zapatismo.

describing the city as an endless series of reflections, implicitly referencing Octavio Paz's definition of Mexican identity in *El laberinto de la soledad*: "cada soledad se multiplica con el número de soledades que la circundan. Es como si la soledad de cada uno se metiera en una de esas 'Casas de los Espejos' que hay en las ferias de provincia. Cada soledad es un espejo que refleja la otra soledad que, como espejo, rebota soledades" (II: 386). No longer the single reflection of Du Bois's inverted mirror stage where the individual confronts his own double identity, here the sprawling metropolis appears as a hall of mirrors endlessly reflecting inward on each other in vertiginous solipsism. By placing Durito's appeal to the postmodern trope of fragmented identity within the context of his political analysis, Marcos subtly connects the solitude of liberal individualism, the vanity and vacuity of political discourse, and the vertigo-inducing effects of a society fixated on a false image of itself. Before leaving, Durito bestows a gift upon the city, awakening the stiff, permanently posed ballerina in a store window with a song. "*¿Estarás siempre del otro lado del cristal?*" he asks, "*¿Estarás siempre del lado de allá de mi acá y yo siempre del lado de acá de tu allá?*" (II: 388, italics in the original). When he turns his back, the window cracks open, setting the dancer free. For Brian Gollnick, this final episode represents "an allegory for Mexico's corrupt political system that produced the same results for seventy years, with the electorate trapped in a preordained ritual just as the toy dancer is tied to a repetitive and artificial performance" (163).

From isolated postscripts and fragments of letters to Old Antonio's fable and Durito's journey, these disparate parts of "La historia de los espejos" comprise a composite yet thematically coherent text centered on the spectrality of power and the Zapatistas' desire to break free from the prism of political inertia and create a different model of governance altogether. The epigraph to the story—"Para cristal te quiero / espejo nunca" (II: 367)—and the ballerina's

liberation from her store window help to construct the text's central motif: the conversion of the mirror into a window, providing a glimpse into another side of reality. In many ways the opening lines of Part II sum up the political, social, and ethical goals of the uprising as a whole: "Tallado por el lado inverso, un espejo deja de ser espejo y se convierte en cristal. Y los espejos son para ver de este lado y los cristales son para ver lo que hay del otro lado. Los espejos son para tallarlos. Los cristales son para romperlos... y cruzar al otro lado..." (II: 386). As Durito's letter on democracy explains, the movement is concerned not with reforming the existing model of power but rather with breaking through and moving beyond it, with creating an entirely new paradigm outside the confines of this "cruel game of mirrors":

[...] cualquier intento de "reforma" o "equilibrio" de esta deformación es imposible DESDE DENTRO DEL SISTEMA DE PARTIDO DE ESTADO. No hay "cambio sin ruptura" [...] Se trata de lograr construir la antesala del mundo nuevo, un espacio donde, con igualdad de derechos y obligaciones, las distintas fuerzas políticas se "disputen" el apoyo de la mayoría de la sociedad [...] En suma, no estamos proponiendo una revolución ortodoxa, sino algo mucho más difícil: una revolución que haga posible la revolución... (II: 382, 384; emphasis in the original)

In this sense, the shattering of the mirror serves as a metaphor for the epistemic rupture that the Zapatistas propose, transposing the violence of that fracture onto a figurative realm. Obsessed with the masks of power and enchanted by its own grotesque image, Mexico is trapped in a spectral, cruel power game in which consecutive mirrors endlessly distort reality, denying the possibility of clear vision and apprehension. Bouncing constantly between these surfaces, the nation cannot move forward, as it cannot see beyond its own veiled reflection. Marcos suggests

that the way out requires first scouring the back of the mirror, destroying the surface of the Veil in order to see through to the other side. The ultimate goal, however, is not just to see more clearly but also to physically break the division and remove the distance between the stagnant present and a mobile future.

Meanwhile, by foregrounding mirrors and windows as a ripe semantic terrain for this critique, Marcos also opens a space for reflecting on the possibilities and limitations of solidarity within the modern/colonial regime of visibility. In a much more recent communiqué titled “Ellos y nosotros,” released in nine separate parts during January and February of 2013, Marcos reinforces the critical power of second sight through a series of juxtapositions centered on the proposition that “Ustedes y nosotros no somos lo mismo.” Rather than rely on an exclusionary, dichotomous conception of “you” versus “us”—something along the lines of Indians/Zapatistas/subalterns versus ladinos/the State/dominant society—the vague referentiality of pronouns here poses a relative binary that is more illustrative than determinative in function. Above all, this series of oppositions characterizes two distinct ways of seeing: “mirar para imponer o mirar para escuchar.” The poetic structure of Marcos’s epigrammatic comparisons—and I list here just a few—serves to illustrate major differences in perception based on minor changes in perspective:

Ustedes miran cómo se ven, nosotros miramos la mirada.

Ustedes se preocupan por los vidrios rotos, nosotros por la rabia que los rompe.

Ustedes miran muros infranqueables, nosotros grietas.

Ustedes buscan espejos, nosotros cristales.

Ustedes no nos vieron antes... y siguen sin mirarnos.

Y, sobre todo, no nos vieron mirarlos.

By emphasizing the importance of the gaze, Marcos draws attention to the ways in which superficial preoccupation with self-image impedes passage to more critical awareness and self-reflection. If for Du Bois the subaltern's double consciousness emerges from a sort of inverted mirror stage brought about by the rejection of a racialized self by a white other, Marcos suggests inverting it, flipping it around so that it might lay bare the structures of racial difference to dominant society itself.

Illustrative of this point is Major Ana María's well-known dictum "Detrás de nosotros estamos ustedes," which has become one of the many slogans of the movement since her public address at the First International Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism (Chiapas, 1996). The strange syntax of this phrase makes it difficult to render in English; literally, it translates as something like "behind us we are you," yet in the Spanish text, "*ser* is confused with the other stative verb *estar*, a distinction lost in English, in which 'to be' is the only possibility" (Mignolo, "Zapatistas' Theoretical Revolution" 254). The unexpected use of the verb *estar* thus deliberately sets it apart from the expected word choice, privileging affect over identity and emphasizing a transitory state of becoming rather than a fixed essence of being. It also avoids the implication of equivalence that the verb *ser* would imply (we = you). The syntax of the sentence thus paradoxically maintains a distance between "us" and "you," even as those subjective markers verge on collapsing in on each other; her point is not that all forms of suffering and subalternity are equal, but rather that recognizing similarity is an essential step in engendering collective action.

For Walter Mignolo, the unusual construction of this sentence is primarily due to the influence of Tojolabal on Ana María's Spanish. "Unlike any European vernacular/colonial language," he explains, "Tojolabal features an intersubjective correlation between first and third

persons, that is: a code devoid of direct and indirect object, instead structured in the correlation between subjects” (“Zapatistas’ Theoretical Revolution” 254). This linguistic difference certainly indicates an attempt to approach the issue of intersubjective exchange from beyond the epistemological limits of the Spanish language, yet it also leads Mignolo to a problematic conclusion. “If,” he writes, “a given language lacks a subject/object correlation as a basis for the elaboration of epistemic principles and the structuring of knowledge, the speakers of such a language do not engage in acts of ‘representation,’ but engage instead in ‘intersubjective enactments [sic]” (254). Abraham Acosta sums up the ensuing argument as follows:

‘Tojolabal has no subject-object correlation; therefore Tojolabal does not engage in acts of representation; therefore Western theories of language could not have been formulated by anyone thinking from Tojolabal [*darstellen*]; therefore Democracy could neither have been formulated by anyone thinking from Tojolabal [*vertreten*]; therefore speakers of Tojolabal, through an irreducibly post-representationalist linguistic structure, speak (and know themselves) beyond the limits of both senses of Western representation.’ (215)

In short, Mignolo performs a kind of magic trick; with a bit of logic and linguistic knowledge, he waves his hands and purportedly makes the problem of representation disappear. I would argue, however, that the purpose of Ana María’s declaration is not to bypass the problem but to confront it, appealing to the conceptual framework of her own language in order to lay bare the subject-object hierarchy embedded in the structure of the Spanish language. By infecting her Spanish with the logic of Tojolabal, she proposes an alternative model of intersubjectivity predicated on dialogue: not speaking *for* but speaking *with*.

The EZLN thus advances a kind of decolonial dialectics of seeing as an alternative to the modern/colonial regime of visibility. Within the realm of poetic and political discourse, they propose an ethical paradigm that complements Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's call for an anti-narcissistic mode of anthropology. Where Deleuze identifies the story of Oedipus as the founding myth of psychoanalysis, Viveiros names Narcissus as the patron saint or guardian devil of his own field. Anthropologists have always been a little too concerned, he explains, with what makes Western and non-Western subjects different—or, to put it another way, with what it is that other societies “don't have” that makes them non-Western and non-modern (19). The standard postmodern take on the discipline thus posits that it ultimately does little more than to provide insight into the construction of the self by way of contrast with the other. Yet Viveiros maintains that even as a postcolonial critique, this approach does little more than to reinforce its underlying Eurocentric assumptions: “A fuerza de ver siempre al Mismo en el Otro—de decir que bajo la máscara del Otro es ‘nosotros’ lo que nosotros mismos contemplamos—terminamos por contentarnos con cortar el trayecto que nos conduce directamente al final y no interesarnos más en lo que ‘nos interesa’, a saber, nosotros mismos” (15). By contrast, he argues, borrowing a phrase from Patrice Maniglier, a true anthropology “nos devuelve de nosotros mismos una imagen en la que no nos reconocemos” (19). Viveiros de Castro, Roy Wagner, Maureen Strathern, and others actively strive to counteract the violent force of the anthropological gaze, cultivating a practice of listening and learning to replace the old model of authority invested in the scientific observer. Amerindians are not objects of study, in this case, but interlocutors in the co-construction of knowledge (21).

At first glance, the ski mask as mirror and Viveiros de Castro's *Anti-Narcissus* may appear incompatible. After all, Major Ana María's theorem echoes Marcos's own invitation to

oppressed people of all backgrounds to see themselves in the Maya's own particular struggle for dignity:

Detrás de nuestros pasamontañas está el rostro de todas las mujeres excluidas. De todos los indígenas olvidados. De todos los homosexuales perseguidos. De todos los jóvenes despreciados. De todos los migrantes golpeados. De todos los presos por su palabra y pensamiento. De todos los trabajadores humillados. De todos los muertos de olvido. De todos los hombres y mujeres simples y ordinarios que no cuentan, que no son vistos, que no son nombrados, que no tienen mañana. (103)

Upon a closer look, however, her affirmation that “detrás de nosotros estamos ustedes” resonates strongly with Viveiro's framework, as both strive to displace the subject-object hierarchy with an alternative model based on dialogue and epistemic exchange. Likewise, Marcos's insistence on converting mirrors into windows suggests the need to transcend that initial moment of recognition and use it as the foundation for a decolonizing political praxis. In an interview with Manuel Vásquez Montalbán, he explains that any leftist social movement must pass through two separate phases—one of critique and another of transformation:

Debe afrontar una posición crítica respecto de lo que es el neoliberalismo y al mismo tiempo atravesar el espejo, hacer una propuesta, trascender la posición crítica o intercrítica como quieras llamarla y plantear una alternativa. Eso sería ir más allá del espejo, romperlo y convertir el espejo en cristal que nos permita ver hacia adelante. (*Señor* 137)

The Zapatistas' “wonderland,” so to speak, would be the inverse of modern/colonial reality and insurgency a rabbit hole, a portal to another possible world “in which many worlds fit.”

On the one hand, then, the ski mask as mirror invites civil society to identify with the EZLN as a gesture of solidarity and consciousness-raising, yet at the same time, the conversion from mirror to window urges against the narcissistic tendency to only see what one wants to see, to project one's own desires and anxieties onto the other. *See yourselves in us*, the Zapatistas seem to implore, *but don't stop there*. Scouring the mirror would entail looking past the constructed spectacle of indigeneity in order to perceive Amerindian populations on their own terms. They invite the spectator to intervene, not to save the Indian but rather to change herself and the world around her, to question and undermine her own complicity in the circulation and replication of power. This dialectics of seeing demands us not only to perceive the present more clearly but also, perhaps more importantly, to envision and break through to a different future.

2.4 IF A TREE FALLS IN THE FOREST...

It would appear, then, that Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" is both relevant and insufficient in capturing the dynamics of subaltern representation in the EZLN. As I have indicated, there is a definite risk that Marcos's attempt to "speak for" the Zapatistas constitutes yet another instance of silencing or covering over. Even so, the ambivalences and polysemic turns of the ski mask, mirror, and frame suggest that in this case, the questions of representation and mediation are much more complex than their outward appearance might suggest. In fact, part of what is so striking about Marcos's relationship with the CCRI-CG is that he destabilizes any kind of clear division between the categories of 'dominant' and 'subaltern.' By subalternizing himself within

the movement and insisting on his role as *subcomandante*, as squire to a dung beetle, etc., he is doing more than just playing a role of false humility in order to “lower” himself to the level of the subaltern; he is in fact questioning the basis of that category itself. Furthermore, by subalternizing himself in relation to the rest of the movement, he effectively de-subalternizes the Maya, if only on a discursive level. Within their culture, he is the outsider, even the non-educated one when it comes to indigenous languages and cosmologies. He thereby undermines the mechanisms of domination by presenting native communities as autonomous societies that operate according to their own cultural logic and epistemologies.

Additionally, if the mask itself serves to emphasize the problem that the Zapatistas wish to eliminate (their invisibility in society), it stands to reason that their mediation through Marcos might constitute yet another symbolic manifestation of their predicament. In this regard, the paradox of an indigenous uprising led by a *mestizo* arguably testifies to the necessity for the insurrection in the first place. After all, its very existence rides on the hope for its ultimate transcendence. At the end of Zapatista rifles is a white ribbon, Marcos indicates; “Significa, como todo aquí, una paradoja: armas que aspiran a ser inútiles.” (*Yo, Marcos* 120). The Zapatistas, he explains, have adopted a suicidal profession whose ultimate objective is to disappear: they became soldiers so that one day soldiers would no longer be necessary (EZLN I: 191). The extension of this logic to Marcos himself thus follows naturally; we might say that “Marcos,” too, is a weapon that aspires to be useless. When the revolution succeeds, he vows to remove his mask and disappear, fading back into the jungle in the reverse of his concealed emergence.

Kristine Vanden Berghe argues, as a result, that Subcomandante Marcos is far from the “first world intellectual masquerading as the absent nonrepresenter” who lets the oppressed

speaking for themselves without reflecting on his or her own role in the continuous construction of subalternity (Vanden Berghe, “Marca” 171; Spivak, “Can the Subaltern” 292). On the contrary, Marcos demonstrates a keen awareness of his own locus of enunciation and the implications of his position within the movement. The EZLN might not constitute a good example of a group of subalterns capable of disseminating their message without relying on a metropolitan spokesperson and cross-cultural translator (Vanden Berghe, “Marca” 172), but they do illustrate the dynamic, relative character of subalternity. If the ski mask both reveals and conceals, then so does Marcos, as translator and frame for the movement, bring to light certain aspects of Maya society while (intentionally or unintentionally) keeping other facets veiled to outsiders.

At the same time, even from Marcos’s first appearance on the national stage, his utility is already tempered by the growing presence of a new class of indigenous authors throughout Mexico. Parallel (and in fact prior) to the Zapatista uprising, a group of native writers has undertaken the task of producing what Natalio Hernández refers to as *yancuic xochitlahtoli*, or “la nueva palabra florida”: the poetic reawakening of indigenous languages. Although various authors had been publishing in their own languages since at least the 1970s and developing community projects in their home regions, they met for the first time at a national gathering in 1990. Soon after, in 1993, they founded the Association of Writers in Indigenous Languages, which just ten years later boasted seventy authors and more than thirty different languages (Hernández, *Despertar* 54).⁸⁰ In 1994, the National Council for Culture and the Arts established the Nezahualcóyotl Award for Literature in Indigenous Languages and a scholarship fund for

⁸⁰ Such authors include, to name just a few, Natalio Hernández and Ildefonso Maya (Nahua); Víctor de la Cruz and Víctor Terán (Isthmus Zapotec); Javier Castellanos Martínez (Sierra Zapotec); Jorge Miguel Cocom Pech, Briceida Cuevas Cob and Waldemar Noh Tzec (Yukatek Maya); Juan Gregorio Regino (Mazatec); Jacinto Arias and Alberto Gómez Pérez (Tzotzil); and María Roselia Jiménez (Tojolabal). See *La voz profunda* (2004), ed. Montemayor for a representative selection of poetry, narrative, theater, and essay by these authors and others.

native authors, and the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI) launched a publication series titled *Letras Indígenas Contemporáneas*. The emergence of a new indigenous literature, then, was just beginning to take hold on a national scale when the Zapatista insurgency itself came to light. In a brief essay titled “La literatura indígena en tiempos de guerra en Chiapas,” Hernández emphasizes the fortuity of this convergence, noting that from 1994 on the literary movement gained force as new institutional spaces opened up and civil society expressed a growing interest in indigenous languages (*In tlahtoli* 144).

This particular strain of insurgent poetics clearly serves a different function than the Zapatistas’ war of words; rather than engaging in direct combat and dialogue with the government, this group of authors has focused instead on cultural and linguistic revitalization. The bilingual format employed by most members of the collective suggests that verbal art exceeds the function of framing injustices and voicing movements’ claims to outsiders; it also serves a restorative purpose within native communities, as they use it as a tool for collaboratively recreating, relearning, and valorizing local knowledges. In other words, *visibilización* through literature promises to affect not only the ways in which dominant society perceives and interacts with subaltern populations, but also the ways in which native communities see themselves and put into practice the forms of knowledge that modernity/coloniality had consigned to oblivion.

The problem, however, is that very few people know how to read in the languages featured in these publications. Javier Castellanos Martínez has remarked that writing in Sierra Zapotec is like delivering a monologue, since the speakers of his language generally do not know how to read, and those who do read and write learn to do so almost exclusively in Spanish, rather than in their own native tongues (Bisbey 41). If indigenous authors don’t have readers, he worries, they also won’t have critics, editors, or translators, which essentially means that they are

condemned to writing in their mother tongues as a testimony of something that once was (Castellanos Martínez, “Escritor” 3). While indigenous and governmental organizations have made some headway in developing bilingual education programs, numerous practical concerns plague such literacy efforts. Linguistic diversity makes the standardization of Amerindian languages and alphabets difficult and in some cases nearly impossible; Mexico has over sixty different languages, each with its own significant dialectal variations from one town to the next. Moreover, strongly localized identities and personal allegiances often entail resistance to perceived attempts to impose a more “correct” version from above. This is frequently the case even when such standards derive from indigenous organizations striving to preserve their cultural heritage and provide a viable written lingua franca for use between different communities apart from Spanish.⁸¹ The Mexican government’s long history of implementing education as a tool for forced assimilation also justifiably elicits some mistrust of new multicultural initiatives as well as skepticism towards the use value of writing in expressing indigenous realities. As if these internal constraints weren’t enough, there are also numerous logistic and pragmatic concerns facing bilingual education programs, such as lack of monetary resources, institutional support, proficient teachers, and adequate instructional materials.

For this reason, Anna María Brígido Corachán argues that the Zapotec versions of Castellanos Martínez’s novels are “still desperately in search of a reader” (184); while some materials in this language do exist, Zapotec authors (among others) respond to an urgent need to generate a wider spectrum of reading materials with “a strong willed, almost visionary insistence

⁸¹ One example of this phenomenon is resistance to the spellings and neologisms recommended by the Academy of Mayan Languages in Guatemala. Although this association is comprised primarily by Maya linguists committed to language preservation through standardization and increased literacy, people often feel alienated by the “official” version of their language, which they feel a) bears little resemblance to how they actually speak and b) represents yet another case of a “correct” way of speaking imposed from above. Standardization efforts in Mexico and Guatemala alike have thus been fraught with internal conflict, much of which arises from the rich linguistic diversity of the region.

on the creation of both a local and national public for their stories” (180). “How can there be readers” she asks, “and how can there be bilingual students without reading materials in native languages?” (180). Brígido thus points to the performative function of indigenous literature, as it does not simply address an already existing audience but strives, instead, to create multiple decolonizing counterpublics through new reading practices. The objective would not be to simply create a ghettoized, compartmentalized “subaltern counterpublic” (86). On the contrary, she notes, native authors strive to address multiple audiences in a non-sectarian form so as to question the unbalanced dialectic that renders them subaltern in the first place (186).

Castellanos’s assumed task as a Zapotec author represents the inverse of Marcos’s own utopian impulse: where Marcos as intercultural translator professes the end goal of disappearing, Castellanos as self-translator exists in hope of proliferating, of preparing the way for more writers like himself to emerge.

The question of indigenous language literacy thus points to a different problem of subaltern representation than the one present in the EZLN: if a poet writes in a language that almost no one can read, we might ask, does he make a sound? If indeed it is problematic to dismiss Subcomandante Marcos’s intervention off-hand as yet another metropolitan intellectual attempting to speak for the subaltern, it would be equally specious to proclaim that, with the emergence of a new literature by indigenous authors, subalterns have finally, and simply, spoken for themselves.⁸² That is, despite the transformative potential of this event, we should be careful

⁸² In addition to this question of self-translation and indigenous readership, it is also worth noting that the Association of Writers in Indigenous Languages has benefitted significantly from the patronage and organizational leadership of mestizo intellectuals; in particular, the late Carlos Montemayor played an active role in encouraging native authors to publish in their own languages and in organizing workshops, seminars, and publications throughout Mexico. Most notably, Montemayor edited the anthologies *La voz profunda*, *Los escritores indígenas actuales* and the trilingual volume *Words of the true peoples / Palabras de los seres verdaderos*. Paul Worley has argued that Montemayor’s role as translator in these texts is problematic; in some cases he changes the titles of poems

not to underestimate the ways in which the power dynamics of silence and speech continue to circulate in this context. Take, for instance, Pilar Máynez's appraisal of indigenous authorship in her book *Lenguas y literaturas indígenas en el México contemporáneo*:

A través de estas publicaciones podemos aproximarnos al pensamiento de la compleja realidad pluriétnica de nuestro país, al sentir y padecer de sus propios protagonistas. En efecto, es a través de sus actores y no de estudiosos ajenos a estos distintos mundos de raigambre ancestral que podemos conocer su ser más profundo. (52)

Of course, Máynez is entirely correct in one sense: the decolonizing potential of indigenous authorship and the difference between insider and outsider perspectives are enormously significant. At the same time, however, we should be suspicious of the assumption that these authors finally provide clear, unmediated access to the elusive "essence" of indigenous subjectivity and ontology (Bisbey 41). María José Bustos Fernández has argued, in fact, that the presence of native languages alongside the Spanish serves as a reminder of unintelligibility and evidence of a world impenetrable by the monolingual reader (93). We know quite well that the Spanish text is not a "faithful" reproduction of the original, Bisbey notes, "porque tenemos la versión zapoteca al lado del castellano para recordarnos que por bien traducido que sea, el texto en español nunca va a ser igual al zapoteco, de la misma manera que la palabra escrita nunca va a ser igual a la palabra hablada" (47).

This effect is particularly striking in the case of *Wila che be ze lhao / Cantares de los vientos primerizos*, which differs from the layout used in most bilingual texts. Rather than alternating between the two languages on every other page, presenting the "original" on the left

unnecessarily, often changing the meaning of the poem and redirecting the potential interpretation of the reader (personal communication).

and the translation on the right, Castellanos Martínez alternates chapter by chapter. For Bustos Fernández, this format serves as a material and performative reminder of the metropolitan reader's cognitive limitations, since she must skip over entire pages of the novel before she can actually begin to read (93). Accordingly, the novel has the effect of privileging the Zapotec reader by inverting the standard set of operations (Brígido Corachán 175). Here it is the non-native who is at a disadvantage; even the Spanish version is interspersed with Zapotec terms with no footnote or translation provided. Not unlike the Zapatista ski mask, the bilingual format of *Cantares de los vientos primerizos* thus serves as a visual reminder of epistemological difference and the limits of intercultural knowledge. As I suggested in chapter one, it is not as simple as assuming that the Spanish version serves as a mask for the “true face” of the text, which remains concealed behind the veil of translation. Instead, the mask becomes yet another face through a process of becoming embodied in the assumption of two distinct poetic voices. Regardless, it is safe to say that *Cantares* addresses (at least) two different audiences in one breath:

It engages both a metropolitan (**benextira**) reader and a paisano (**bene warhalle**) reader—as the future of Zapotec culture lies in the hands of the two together.

Castellanos's novels aim to transform the consciousness of both of these national sectors by harshly criticizing the complex power-dynamics that still restrict his paisanos to a shockingly unjust regional corner. (Brígido Corachán 175)

In effect, Castellanos presents a complex reflection on the possibilities of being heard, not only by dominant society, but also by the Zapotec community itself.

Notwithstanding certain conceptual problems with Spivak's essay,⁸³ then, it is worth remembering here, reformulating it as a question pertinent not only to genres such as the testimonio but also to indigenous literature. The problem of mediation in this case is certainly not the same, but it is equally true that non-indigenous critics should not forget the naivety of the gesture of "letting the subaltern speak" that Spivak so aptly critiques in Foucault and Deleuze. That said, however, it may be more productive to shift the emphasis of our inquiry from binary, yes/no questions like Spivak's to more qualitative ones focused on *how*, rather than *if*. Namely, who are the intended and actual readers of contemporary indigenous authors, and what are the conditions for their being heard—and read—by native and non-native communities alike? Or, to put it another way, what are the conditions under which indigenous knowledges might become more visible without falling into the limiting trap of recognition or being reduced to mere spectacle or commodity? Furthermore, how does the author him- or herself negotiate these ambiguities and contradictions within each text?

In the pages that follow, I attempt to answer some of these questions in the context of *Wila che be ze lhao / Cantares de los vientos primerizos*. I argue that through its narrative structure, *Cantares* simultaneously issues a warning against the cooptation of indigenous knowledge by dominant society and a call to native readers to recuperate their own lost histories of resistance. I propose reading its appeal to paradox and irony not as a sign of impotence in the face of irreconcilable contradictions, but rather as a call to action and a critical examination of

⁸³ My general objection, as I explained in the introduction to this dissertation, is that while her argument draws out important distinctions on representation and the role of the intellectual, her decision to frame the issue as a yes/no question reduces its complexity and obscures the acts of speaking and contestation as part of a process of political change. Furthermore, the binary nature of her question remits to a center-periphery logic that casts subaltern representation solely in terms of opposition to a dominant other.

the key challenges facing epistemic decolonization and the mobilization of indigenous knowledges at the turn of the 21st century.

2.5 MEMORY, INTOXICATION, AND REVELATION

The basic plot of *Cantares de los vientos primerizos* can be summed up as follows: After growing up in an orphanage and obtaining a formal education in the country's capital, the novel's protagonist, Jaime, returns to his hometown in Oaxaca with the task of writing an ethnographic account in Zapotec for a government institution. However, this project falls to the wayside when he meets and falls in love with Trhon Lia, whose series of inebriated "revelations" reconstruct a Zapotec cultural and political history for the reader, while distracting the protagonist from his own autoethnographic task. Jaime expresses enthusiasm to his employers over transcribing an old notebook in Zapotec that once belonged to his father, prompting them to send along a female anthropologist to help him with this task. Yet when the two finally manage to lay their hands on the text, it remains indecipherable to the both of them. The end of Jaime's employment comes after a town *fiesta*, when he becomes drunk and makes a pass at his pretty, young colleague. When she refuses his advances, he insists and she calls the police, landing him in prison under the charge of sexual assault of a government employee. Despite these machista indiscretions, Jaime expresses genuine affection for and attraction to Trhon Lia. In the end he chooses life with her and the Zapotec cultural values she represents, reluctantly foregoing his material ambitions and suffering a life of poverty as a result. The final chapter indicates that the

entire narrative is a transcription of the oral history recounted by the protagonist, now 56 years of age, to an unidentified interlocutor while he awaits prosecution for stealing corn from a neighbor's fields.

Cantares thus constructs a complex interlayering of competing forms of textuality by juxtaposing the oral tradition embodied by Trhon Lia and the novel as a record of those memories ambivalent towards its own status as written and published text. Moreover, the structure of the novel imparts a striking paradox: Castellanos himself presents his readers with the Zapotec ethnography that Jaime never produces. Through Trhon Lia, Castellanos attempts to recover local histories from oblivion and render them visible to his readers (indigenous and non-indigenous alike). Through Jaime, however, he cautions against baring too much too easily and against shaping this discursive intervention solely in the terms pre-established by dominant society.

The consensus in town, Jaime tells us, is that Trhon Lia is “not right in the head”: when she gets drunk, she begins to tell strange things. For Trhon this misperception is a symptom of her own personal failure; she has fallen short of her inherited duty as *Yib’edao* (*estrella errante*, or shooting star), the traditional guardian and purveyor of Zapotec oral history. “Yo soy todavía una de las ramas de aquel Viejo tronco de donde nosotros surgimos,” she explains; “conmigo termina el aliento de la vida que sembró *Berhjashirha*, aquel que nos trajo cuando los viejos *sa* decidieron salir del valle donde surgió nuestra sabiduría y nuestra zapotekeidad” (71).⁸⁴ Her first revelation begins with a self-condemnation stricken with guilt: “Hasta dónde me ha llevado la falta de luz en mi pensamiento, sábelo tú, Jaime. Hasta dónde me ha llevado mi desprecio hacia

⁸⁴ *Sa* and *Berhjashirha* are both Zapotec words that Castellanos chooses not to translate for the reader; *zapotekeidad* is a term in Spanish invented by Castellanos to refer to Zapotec indigeneity or Zapotec identity. As Brígido Corachán notes, “Castellanos always defines *Zapotequeidad* not as an essentialist ethnic identity but as related to the idea of *paisanazgo*, **bene warhalle**, which literally means ‘people like me,’ fellow countrymen” (157).

las cosas. Mira nada más lo que me pasa por no saber aprovechar la bondad del designio de nuestros señores” (71). This self-censure sets the stage for the importance of the words that she, through Jaime’s retelling, is about to share, indicating that these are the keys to Zapotec cultural survivance.⁸⁵

What follows is an account of the foundation of new towns in the Sierra Juárez after the arrival of the Spaniards and the internal conflicts that ensued:

Con la llegada de estos, lo primero que se vio como la novedad, fue el hecho de que la gente, a la que se creía ignorante, precisamente ellos fueron los que empezaron a atreverse a decir lo que debía hacerse y hasta entonces conocimos la palabra ‘respeto’, porque a partir de entonces, aquellos que tenían como tarea aconsejar a los pueblos, ya no lo hicieron, y los que seguían haciéndolo, la gente del pueblo, ya no les hizo caso, porque les decían que “ahora ya hay otra verdad” y fue cuando decían: “Ya se perdió el respeto.” (72-73)

Trhon notes that the process of colonization elicited two different attitudes amongst the natives: those who wanted to run the Spaniards off (*correrlos*) and those who preferred to welcome and join them (*saludarlos para unirnos con ellos*) (73). Ever since then, there are two ideas amongst the Zapotec people: “la de los que no fueron y que siguieron hablando con su verdad y la de los que fueron y que empezaron a aprender a usar la nueva verdad en estas tierras, pero esta nueva verdad era tan filosa, que pronto metió miedo en nuestros pueblos y desde entonces vive la desconfianza entre nosotros” (73). In response, a group of community leaders decided to leave and form a new set of communities; these would become the *Xan* towns and Trhon Lia a direct descendent of their founders. “Cuando llegaron a estas tierras,” she recounts,

⁸⁵ This is a term coined by Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor to connote both survival and resistance. See *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (2008), ed. Vizenor.

trataron de conservar la inteligencia que se le había herenciado y de ahí es que vinimos y vengo yo. Y el andar en ese camino muchos se han desanimado o han caído en ese caminar, porque son muchos los obstáculos los que aparecen y también son muchos los que han sido fuertes y han logrado mantener viva esa luz que nos trajeron nuestros abuelos. (75)

This first revelation thus serves to trace Trhon's lineage back to the founders of the town where the novel takes place and to delineate a historical precedent for the internal fault lines that continue to divide it up to the present day.

The following two revelations pick up where the first leaves off, describing the Castilians' materialism and their exploitation of native labor, which disrupted local agricultural practices and limited the Indians' ability to sustain themselves as they had done before. Instead, Indians were now expected to feed the Spaniards, producing the agricultural crops and commodities preferred by the colonizers at the expense of their own livelihood. A key female rebel,⁸⁶ Lia Kaxhon, defiantly condemns these practices as she drives a particularly cruel Spaniard out of her town:

¡Para que sepas que no es que no podamos ser como ustedes, solo que nuestra hambre no es grande como la de ustedes. Nos conformamos con vivir, ¿qué más podemos pedir? son ustedes los que, hasta de su imaginación han buscado sus necesidades y nosotros los que sufrimos para complacerlos y ahora, de eso, nuestra voluntad ya tropezó, y ahora, encuentren su camino y váyanse, hemos decidido ya no tolerarlos! (105)

⁸⁶ It is worth noting here that that the primary actors in Trhon Lia's history—both the leaders of the resistance and those who betrayed their own people—are women. Castellanos thus emphasizes the centrality of women in Zapotec society as the principal repositories of oral history and ancestral knowledge.

Trhon suggests that, like “respect,” the concept of poverty was primarily introduced to Zapotec communities through the experience of colonialism; though economic disparities certainly existed prior to European conquest, Spanish greed and materialism significantly shifted indigenous modes of production and socioeconomic structures, transforming native self-sustenance and sustainable cultivation into a widespread struggle for survival. Some years later, when Jaime complains of the meager state of the home they share, she reiterates this distinction, reprimanding him for his material aspirations and his misunderstanding of poverty. “Lo que pasa es que nuestra situación está así por nuestra forma de ser,” she explains; “la riqueza es lo contrario de lo que nos gusta ser, por eso nuestros antepasados nunca se propusieron ser dueños únicos de la tierra y por eso toleraron al extranjero” (122).

Far from imparting an apologia for poverty as an intrinsic value of *zapotekeidad*, Trhon’s comments serve to critique the consumerism of Western modernity and to demonstrate that scarcity and economic dependence are the products of colonialism. Bustos Fernández explains that “El camino elegido por Trhon⁸⁷ establece las resistencias básicas al pensamiento mercantil, a la premisa moderna, racionalizadora, pragmática y utilitaria de que hay una única versión de desarrollo en virtud de la cual la marginalidad se supera” (98). Jaime’s failure to recognize that fact signals his internalization of modern/colonial values as a result of his education in the city. His complaints serve to reinforce Trhon’s observations regarding the lasting psychological effects of the conquest; it was not enough for Spaniards and their descendants to destroy the

⁸⁷ The name Trhon Lia appears throughout the novel with several different spellings (Trhon Lia, Thron Lia, Tron, Trhonlia, etc.). I have chosen to use the most common spelling used throughout the novel, though Bustos Fernández opts for Thron. Brígido Corachán rightly indicates that “This grammatical anarchy does not at all resemble the studied randomness of avant-garde poetry [...] but is a mere reflection of the oral open-endedness that lies beneath. The alphabet becomes then a vehicle to express the stories and not a system imposed on them. Thus, the fixity of the Zapotec alphabet used by Castellanos is only so in appearance. In his writings, he generally adopts the alphabet put together by the Coordinadora para la Lecto-Escritura de la Sierra, although he always ends up using it randomly, noting down the graphic symbols as he hears the words in his head” (170).

natives' sources of material sustenance; they also insist(ed) on erasing indigenous knowledges and ways of life, compelling them to think like Europeans as well (100).

Trhon's narrative thus reads as a denunciation of the coloniality of power as well as of her own inability to sustain the traditions of her ancestors. Her personal failure to carry on their insurgent legacy and to disseminate their wisdom responds to the alienation of those around her, who perceive her revelations as mere lunacy. So divided is her community, so entrenched in the corrosive "truth" (*verdad filosa*) of the Spaniards, that many are no longer capable of seeing any sense or value in Zapotec histories and insurgent knowledges. Her use of the word *filosa* in this context effectively signals the double epistemic violence of the conquest; as a synonym for both "ravenous" and "sharp-edged" in many parts of Central America, this term communicates the power of colonialism to divide native communities and set them against each other, as well as its tendency to absorb and obliterate all other rationalities. Her comments at the close of the second revelation shed light on this phenomenon and delineate her reasons for renouncing her efforts:

Hoy platicué la historia de mi hermana mayor, de la cual yo aún traigo su sangre y por lo mismo, su carácter y su bondad, si es que yo quisiera ser bondadosa, pero no lo soy ni lo seré porque sé que desde que llegaron los de Castilla hemos sido anulados, nuestra simiente ya no crece, por eso no quiero afligirme en cumplir con lo que está dicho que es mi deber, aunque sé, que me espera un castigo por no cumplir, no me importa, olvidaré a mi pueblo. (106)

Castellanos suggests that modernity/coloniality has succeeded in supplanting and delegitimizing local ways of knowing to the point where they often are no longer conceivable even to the populations they concern the most. Trhon Lia's guilt over her failure to sustain her Zapotec heritage arguably serves as an admonition to the indigenous reader, and the novel itself

represents a struggle to revive local memories of resistance and to raise native consciousness of the persistence of internal colonialism.

In this regard, Castellanos's use of the term "revelations" in reference to Trhon Lia's episodes is significant. These are not epiphanies in the Joycean sense of the term, where a sudden realization leads to change of heart; instead, they entail the resurgence of suppressed voices and the disclosure of subaltern histories rendered invisible even to the Zapotec themselves. Under the influence of alcohol, Trhon enters into a kind of waking dream or reverie not unlike what Walter Benjamin referred to as *Rausch*, or "intoxication,"⁸⁸ recuperating in the process a series of truths that undermine the logic of coloniality. Translator Howard Eiland indicates that for Benjamin, intoxication enabled the transformation of reason, "Which is to say: transformation of the traditional logic of noncontradiction and the traditional principle of identity" (*viii-ix*). Similarly, Tim Mitchell interprets ritual practices of intoxication in Mexico as "spirited forms of temporal mutiny" (64) and "somatic semiotic resistance" (65). As such, they entail the invocation of other rationalities in which "Formerly hidden transcripts emerge in all their queerness, and incoherence becomes a coherent strategy of resistance" (65). As a character in Juan Pablo Piñeiro's *Cuando Sara Chura despierte* puts it, "Beber es intentar olvidar recordando" (20).

Trhon's revelations destabilize the standard narrative of alcohol consumption in indigenous societies; in this case, inebriation serves not as a means of escape from reality or a coping mechanism but rather as a conduit for repressed, collective memories and non-rational

⁸⁸ Translator Howard Eiland explains that this term, which he uses alternately with "trance," is not an entirely satisfactory translation of the German word: "The noun *Rausch* comes from the onomatopoeic verb *rauschen*, 'to rustle; rush; roar; thunder; murmur.' The English word 'rush,' cognate with *rauschen*, actually brings out a significant aspect of the German concept [...], not to mention its use in the argot of the 1960s drug culture, where it meant an intensification of intoxication" (*xii*). Given these connotations, some have protested that the term sounds excessively clinical. At the same time, however, the use of this term in English translations of his works has ultimately infused it with new meanings. For Benjamin, intoxication refers not only to the somatic and corporal effects of drug consumption but also, more generally, to an altered state of consciousness or trance and its potential to transform perceptions of reality. See *On Hashish* (2006).

forms of knowledge. In the indigenista novel in Latin America, alcohol almost always has a negative connotation; it is seen as detrimental to native societies, either as a result of personal indulgences that interfere with familial responsibilities and perpetuate conditions of poverty, or because authorities exploit Indians by giving them alcohol to keep them pacified, incapacitated, and unthinking (Vásquez-González, *Visión* 147).⁸⁹ Thierry Saignes notes that Spaniards and *criollos* often interpreted Indian *borracheras* as a sign of laziness and barbarity—or, in the best of cases, as a means of escaping a world “that no longer made any sense to them” (43). However, such interpretations were oblivious to—or chose to ignore—an entirely different history and function of alcoholic beverages in indigenous societies. In the case of Quichua speakers in Ecuador, Barbara Butler explains that inebriation produces an altered state of consciousness that serves a spiritual and social function; as with many other ethnicities with pre-Hispanic traditions of alcohol consumption, “Intoxication is sacred because it facilitates exchanges among people, between people and spirits, and between people and the Christian God—exchanges that can change essential states of being” (12-13).

Trhon Lia’s drunken revelations thus serve to undermine and subvert the colonial deployment of alcohol as an instrument of subjugation, using it instead as a tool of resistance. My point is not that the novel simply celebrates drinking and drunkenness or even the state of altered consciousness that they allow. Rather, just as Elizabeth Monasterios indicates of the Bolivian poet Jaime Saenz, I would argue that Trhon Lia’s particular consumption pattern “resiste las etiquetas culturales de *borracho* o *alcohólico* [...] y pone de manifiesto a un sujeto en lucha consigo mismo y a una conciencia que plantea el problema de consumo de alcohol desde

⁸⁹ In many cases, alcohol was deployed deliberately as an instrument of subjugation. Christine Eber indicates, for instance, that “From 1545-1824, during what Larson and Wasserstrom (1982) refer to as the ‘forced consumption’ period in Chiapas, clergy, settlers, and provincial governors used rum, appropriately named ‘*aguardiente*’ (‘burning swater’), to exploit and control Indigenous people” (19).

perspectivas filosóficas y epistemológicas” (*Dilemas* 232). In this case, alcohol prompts Trhon Lia to unleash a series of concerns that she is otherwise unable to express; by lowering her inhibitions, it allows her to confront her own weaknesses as well as the societal conditions that have engendered them.

In the end, however, she does manage to spread the seeds of Zapotec wisdom through her personal impact on Jaime. Bustos Fernández notes that “Las revelaciones de Trhon en la novela pretenden desandar el camino que lleva a Jaime indefectiblemente a la alienación de sí mismo. Así, se subvierte el poder supuestamente liberador que el proyecto modernizador preconiza” (97). Trhon eventually manages to convince him of the value of *zapotekeidad*, the results of which reach far beyond the intimate confines of the couple’s household; years later, Jaime chooses to recount his story to an unnamed interlocutor, who presumably transcribes the narrative and publishes it as *Cantares de los vientos primerizos*. Trhon’s failure as *Yib’edao* is offset by the production of the novel itself, which disseminates her oral history to a wider public than she ever conceived possible.

2.6 AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AND THE NATIVE (NON)INFORMANT

At the same time, however, the existential crisis⁹⁰ facing Jaime serves as a counterpoint to that of Trhon Lia. His own failure to fulfill his assigned function—in this case, not propagating Zapotec

⁹⁰ I borrow this term from Leonor Vásquez-González, whose article on the novel, titled “Problemas y crisis existencial indígena mexicano contemporáneo en la novela zapoteca” (2006), reads Trhon Lia and Jaime’s personal dilemmas as indicative of broader societal concerns in a country such as Mexico that is permeated with two visions of the world in conflict.

knowledge within the community but transcribing it for outsiders—also serves to question the ultimate purpose of that production. That is, if Trhon Lia serves as a symbol of the limitations and challenges facing Zapotec cultural agents in propagating traditional knowledge within the community, the figure of Jaime indicates the dangers of that knowledge’s cooptation by outsiders. By constructing him as a kind of native (non)informant—who both facilitates and refuses insight into indigenous society—Castellanos presents an ambivalent reflection on the function of indigenous literature and the institutional dimensions of interculturality in contemporary Mexico.

As we have seen, Jaime’s unfinished project ultimately comes to fruition thanks to the unnamed listener who, much like Jaime decades before him, has arrived in town “en plan de trabajo” (147). Presumably this transcriber could represent Castellanos himself; at one point in his narration Jaime addresses the narrator/ethnographer directly as a Zapotec who, like Jaime, has been educated in the city: “Usted que también viene de la ciudad y que hace mucho no ha vuelto a su pueblo, comprenderá como [sic] lo vi cuando volví a él” (35). However, there is no indication, either within the novel or in interviews following its publication, that the text is based on an actual ethnography. Instead, I suggest that these interlocking narrative frames function as a metafictional device through the author reflects upon his own role as an indigenous author in contemporary Mexican society.

The political implications of Jaime’s ethnographic assignment become somewhat clearer if we consider the history of governmental organizations dedicated to such efforts in Mexico. Perhaps most relevant is the National Indigenist Institute (*Instituto Nacional Indigenista*, or INI), which was founded in Mexico in 1948 and remained active until 2003, when it was replaced by the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (Comisión Nacional para

el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, or CDI). Drawing on the principles of Manuel Gamio (the reputed father of Mexican anthropology and INI's first director), the Institute emphasized education as a solution to the "problem" of Indians' lack of integration into Mexican civil society. INI often selected and trained Indians as teachers and then sent them back to their home communities to teach, under the premise that as members of the community they would be more effective agents of assimilation than a ladino outsider. The idea was that, having been educated themselves—and therefore inducted into dominant, mestizo society and (purportedly) commanding the respect that such a position invokes—they would be able to further the project of indigenous modernization. Meanwhile, these educational practices significantly overshadowed the emergence of alternative educational projects by indigenous leaders themselves that remain largely unknown and understudied up to the present day.

Judging by a limited number of time markers dispersed throughout the novel, it is reasonable to posit that Jaime receives his education during the late 1950s, at the height of INI's efforts in the region. Yet the nature of the assignment itself identifies it much more closely with the objectives of CDI, which focuses its efforts on funding publishing and research programs in indigenous communities. "[H]ay una idea de producir materiales en idiomas y queremos que aquí, tú te encargues de hacerlo," Jaime is told; "Puedes escribir algo sobre tu pueblo o lo que a ti se te ocurra" (24). In this sense, Castellanos establishes a subtle parallel between Jaime's unfinished assignment and his own role as author. The back cover of the novel reads as follows:

Letras indígenas contemporáneas constituye una propuesta para que los escritores de las diferentes lenguas originarias de México encuentren un espacio permanente para la publicación y difusión de sus obras literarias. Esta serie se

realiza en colaboración con las Direcciones Generales de Culturas Populares y de Publicaciones del Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes.

Dentro de esta colección se incluye la presente novela histórica en lengua zapoteca y en español: *Wila che be ze lhao* (Cantares de los vientos primerizos). En ella está contenida la memoria histórica que los pueblos zapotecos de la Sierra Juárez, aún conservan en su cotidianidad. En la novela se recrean las formas en que se expresan el origen y la cosmovisión de este pueblo, así como sus propuestas para el futuro.

Javier Castellanos Martínez nació en el estado de Oaxaca, en la comunidad de Yogovi de la Sierra Zapoteca, el 20 de septiembre de 1951. Es promotor cultural; fue ganador del concurso “Monografías sobre el maíz” que realizó el Museo Nacional de Culturas Populares en 1982. Becario del fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes del área de Literatura en Lenguas Indígenas; ha editado varios audios con letra y música de cantos en idioma zapoteco.

This editorial overview speaks clearly to the intended reception of this novel on the part of the *Letras indígenas contemporáneas* series: Castellanos Martínez provides us with valuable insight into the wisdom and traditions of the Zapotec people as part of the cultural heritage of modern Mexico. The book, it tells us, provides access into the historical memory and cosmovision of the Sierra Zapotec people, which (remarkably!) remain intact still to this day. Even more noteworthy, however, is the biographical blurb on the author, which highlights his own vocation as “cultural promoter” and as a recipient of governmental grants to produce texts in Zapotec and Spanish about his people.

My point here is not to criticize Castellanos or to suggest that by working for the government he has somehow “sold out” to a multicultural model that simply replicates INI’s efforts at national integration. Certainly the financial and logistical support of organizations such as CDI (which oversees the publication of *Letras indígenas contemporáneas*) have collaborated positively with indigenous groups and made possible the publication of books like *Cantares*. Rather, the fact that this parallel between Jaime and Castellanos is not a mirror image—the former never produces a written ethnography, while the latter does—arguably signals a critical reflection by Castellanos on the precarious relationship between native intellectuals and government institutions. In other words, the contrast between Jaime’s passive refusal to write and Castellanos’s own narrative intervention highlights a resistance to the appropriation of the novel via the exaltation of cultural otherness for a self-congratulatory inclusive politics. It thus signals a crucial distance between radical multiculturalism as a decolonial move (Lugones) and neoliberal multiculturalism as a politics of recognition whose superficial celebration of diversity does nothing to change the colonialist and neoliberal power structures that are constitutive of racial, ethnic, gender, and class inequalities.

This ambivalence toward the role of the government is most evident in the novel’s depiction of the female anthropologist, who expresses good intentions on behalf of her employers yet nonetheless belays a paternalistic attitude towards the Zapotec as objects of study. She arrives in town academically prepared for her first experience “in the field”—armed, that is, with a set of preconceived ideas about what she will find there—only to encounter a reality that does not match up to her expectations. Upon learning of a civic celebration soon to take place, she expresses excitement over attending; “me fascinan las fiestas indígenas,” she proclaims. Yet when Jaime accompanies her to the festivities he notices a significant drop in her enthusiasm:

Tal vez ella se imaginaba una gran fiesta por lo que le había contado Doña Madarhen y es que a una paisana que nunca ha salido de su región, cualquier cosita se le hace mucho, pero para la antropóloga, acostumbrada a una infinidad de espectáculos, ir de un lugar a otro, se le hizo aburrido y a mí sólo se me ocurrió decirle ‘vamos a tomar un refresco’. (125)

This passage belays the stereotypes that inform metropolitan scholars who are often inclined to respect an idealized conception of indigeneity yet averse to perceiving indigenous cultures on their own terms. On a previous occasion, she and Jaime visit his brothers’ house in hopes of acquiring the old notebooks that once belonged to his father, where she explains that “al gobierno le interesaba proteger lo que tienen las personas y pueblos que no hablan español desde nacimiento” (97). Much to Jaime’s surprise, his brother—perhaps startled by this news of a government invested in indigenous cultural survival—hands over the notebook without a fight. “¡Interesantísimo!” the anthropologist exclaims, clueless as to what the text might actually say. She begins to plan for the translation of the document, and the two leave the house happy with their find.

Perceiving her task as a kind of cultural rescue mission, the young scholar thus appears as an emissary of a benevolent government that, once committed to obliterating indigenous cultures through assimilation, now intervenes to save them. Yet that mission is cut short when she abruptly returns to the city and abandons Jaime without looking back; after the incident between them the night of the *fiesta*, the young scholar disappears from town, presumably taking the notebook with her, never to return. Leonor Vásquez-González indicates that, feminist concerns aside, this reaction demonstrates little to no real commitment to intercultural collaboration;

“aunque se pueden entender las actitudes de una persona ofendida, llama la atención el uso casi reflejo de las prerrogativas de poder por parte de la antropóloga citadina” (58).

Through the figure of the anthropologist, Castellanos imparts an incisive critique of government initiatives predicated on a superficial, paternalistic model of multicultural recognition. He also mocks the notion of cultural authenticity, opposing the romantic image of noble savages and colorful, exuberant *fiestas* with the sordid reality of drunken, machista men and the lackluster materiality of everyday life. The purpose of this inversion is not to replace a positive stereotype with a negative one but rather to demonstrate the imperfections and complexities of contemporary Zapotec society. When Jaime first arrives in town, for instance, he discovers he has difficulty speaking and understanding Zapotec after being away for so many years. Thus, when he hears a song in the language, he asks the musicians to sing it again and painstakingly transcribes the lyrics. After completing this arduous task, he asks them for the title and author of the song, to which they reply, “No sé nada de eso, la sacamos de un disco y la pasamos al zapoteco” (41).

In this way, Castellanos illustrates an acute awareness of preconceived notions of *zapotekeidad* as well as a mistrust of government programs keen on acquiring knowledge of indigenous communities in order to reinforce a feel-good nationalist ideology or to strengthen the mechanisms of surveillance and control. His narrative refusal to write flags a warning sign to the reader: *be careful how you read me, lest you aim to conquer*. It insists, moreover, in undermining the privilege of its written status. While Jaime never actively refuses to perform his assignment, his deferral in the form of procrastination and delinquent behavior effectively shifts the emphasis within the novel from writing to orality. After all, it is Jaime’s infatuation with Trhon Lia and her revelations that postpones his assignment (if, indeed, it is his sexual assault on

the anthropologist that finally terminates his employment), and that oral history only reaches the eyes and ears of the reader through the transcription of Jaime's testimony.

This tension is compounded by examples throughout the novel that undermine the presumption that writing is an effective means of communication and political struggle. As we have seen, the Zapotec manuscript that belonged to his father ultimately proves to be useless for his purposes; he is unable to decipher any of its contents, despite his presumed literacy in the language. On another occasion, when he finds himself behind bars in chapter VI, he learns that his cellmate is a lawyer, who promptly promises to help him get out of jail. Yet Jaime is later disillusioned to learn that the old man was not right in the head: "lo único que hacía era copiar una página de ese libro y al terminar, nuevamente a empezar y ya tenía montones de hojas copiadas de esa misma página" (128). Here too, it would seem, literacy and institutional knowledge have little to offer Jaime; much like Subcomandante Marcos's music box ballerina, this figure of an old lawyer condemned to endlessly copying the same page of text suggests that the Mexican legal system is trapped in a series of preordained rituals that increased literacy in and of itself is insufficient to confound. We might say that Castellanos appeals to literature to recuperate, vindicate, and legitimize a forgotten Zapotec cultural and political history, yet he simultaneously demonstrates the limitations of writing in that process. That is, the novel exhorts its native readers to recuperate their own histories as a tool for resistance and regeneration, yet it suggests that the key lies both in and beyond poetic writing as an instrument of struggle. Through his ambivalent presentation of Jaime as a kind of native (non)informant, Castellanos cautions against the ways in which indigenous literature and autoethnography, in the hands of dominant society, may work against the interests of indigenous communities as much as for them.

That said, however, the novel as a whole imparts a testimony of indigenous resistance in the face of threatened cultural and linguistic demise at the hands of neoliberal globalization. The respective “failures” of Trhon Lia and Jaime are counterbalanced by the production of the novel itself as an artifact that, while hesitant as to its own intrinsic value, performs the acts that its protagonists were both unable to achieve. If, indeed, the subaltern has appropriated writing but has not overcome its contradictions (Bisbey 41), the novel’s own awareness of this difficulty and its reflection on the conditions for speaking and listening may in fact be its greatest critical contribution. We should be wary, then, of interpreting the shortcomings of the two protagonists as a sign of subaltern impotence in the face of oblivion and internal colonialism. Bustos Fernández has argued, in this vein, that

El hombre y la mujer que lanzan una mirada irónica a la historia de la humanidad se encuentran así situados entre un pasado que los abandona y un futuro que se les niega, condenados a vivir ‘sin memoria, sin esperanza’. La conciencia a la que ha llegado Thron [sic] y a la que ha arrastrado a Jaime no los potencia para comprender la realidad, menos aún para ejercer algún control sobre él. (100)

Not only does this reading overlook an essential layer of irony that lies in the distance between Jaime and Castellanos, but it also leads her to the problematic conclusion that the final image the novel imparts is one of impotence and marginality. Underlying Bustos’s interpretation is a postmodern conception of irony as an expression of “un mundo altamente fracturado y un universo social en disolución” (100). Yet this model ultimately falls short in explaining the function of paradox in this context.

What is in question, I would argue, is not a postmodern, apolitical celebration of aporia, nor a fatalistic acceptance of a world without meaning. On the contrary, for Castellanos as well

as the EZLN, paradox and irony represent a hyper-conscious political stance articulated on the basis of multiple positionalities and the coexistence of conflicting meanings and perspectives. To recall our discussion of intoxication and the resurgence of alternative rationalities, they present a poetic alternative to “the traditional logic of noncontradiction,” proposing a mode of political praxis based on open questions and contradictions rather than fixed answers and dogmas. Above all, these rhetorical figures communicate a critical awareness of a society fraught with ambiguity and an understanding that the road to a different reality must be able to navigate the twists and turns of that gnarled forest.

Castellanos’s hesitations regarding the capacity of writing to apprehend reality have less to do with his own linguistic and poetic abilities, therefore, than with the challenge of producing emancipatory literature in a context predetermined by the power dynamics and civilizational models embedded in the institution of literature. The ambivalent quality of his narrative refusal to write thus calls for a different kind of reading, as it compels its readers to reflect on their own positions within that tangle of roots and begin to forge their own pathways through it. By anticipating and redirecting the terms of its reception, *Cantares de los vientos primerizos* imparts a critique of political indifference and a call to action directed to metropolitan and native readers alike. However, it does so by commanding caution on all sides. “If signs of refusal to fit into a reader’s agenda are transmitted,” alerts Doris Sommer, “we should stop to notice” (*Proceed with Caution* 4).

2.7 VISIBILITY AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Castellanos Martínez's narrative refusal to write thus parallels the Zapatista ski mask as a revelation of invisibility. Much like the coyness of the ski mask, the figure of the native (non)informant serves as a reminder of the limits of outside perception and panoptic knowledge; even invisibility, it would seem, is polysemic. Silence, too, has its purposes. Marcos notes that while the use value of speech was evident from the very first moments of insurgency, the power of silence became clear somewhat later: "descubrimos que el gobierno estaba más interesado en que habláramos, no importaba que mentáramos madres, pero que dijéramos algo porque pensaba que así sabía lo que estábamos haciendo" (Muñoz Ramírez, *Fuego* 273).⁹¹ In other, words, the ambivalence of these two rhetorical gestures (the visual display of invisibility and the narrative refusal to write) effectively illustrates the fine line between imposed silence and invisibility as colonial *encubrimiento*, on the one hand, and assumed silence and invisibility as anticolonial resistance, on the other. Both Castellanos and the EZLN simultaneously convey a demand to be seen and heard and a refusal to be examined and controlled.

Paradox constitutes a useful critical tool, therefore, as it clues us into the kinds of complexities and contradictions that characterize the terrain of political action in society today:

⁹¹ The intervals of silence that have since mitigated the outpour of communiqués and declarations coincide, in fact, with intense activity within Zapatista communities, particularly the development of the *caracoles* and Good Government Boards. In this case, then, silence represents not a lull in the insurgency but rather its transposition onto other realms; not direct opposition to the State but the creation of autonomous spaces outside of it.

both speaking and silencing, increasing visibility while creating new forms of concealment, challenging the status quo in some ways and reinforcing it in others, and so on. Paradox also illustrates the limitations of a binary, fixed conception of subalternity and hegemony like Spivak's; José Rabasa notes that "Offhand, she would seem to dismiss subalterns who learn languages of the West while continuing to dwell in their native worlds: one either is a First World intellectual who speaks or a subaltern bound to silence" (105). Instead, Rabasa proposes a theoretical framework predicated on the coexistence of multiple, conflicting worlds. Rabasa's conception of insurgency is productive, therefore, as it interprets the field of action as a complex, ambivalent series of interactions that simultaneously involve processes of affirmation and negation, expressions of autonomy, and conflictive dialogue.

We need to find ways of reading, I would argue, that don't either a) interpret everything in terms of agency or consciousness, overlooking the problems of colonial alienation, or b) categorically deny the possibility for agency and consciousness as an *a priori* condition of subalternity. Rather than trace the foreclosure of the native informant within dominant discourse, as per Spivak's approach in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, *Cantares de los vientos primerizos* invites us to contemplate the ways in which insurgent texts themselves attempt to foreclose their own appropriation. This mode of interpretation thus calls for a different approach to subaltern agency that nonetheless remains cognizant of the other fundamental question underlying "Can the Subaltern Speak?": "What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern?" (90).

If anything, what Castellanos and Marcos both illustrate is the need to reflect on our own positions as speaking and listening subjects and to circumvent the risk of becoming yet another incarnation of the *animal preguntón*. Such an approach would entail recognizing what Doris

Sommer has referred to as the “slaps and embraces” of subaltern texts and respecting their limits of legibility rather than tackling the intellectual challenge of their complexity as an opportunity to conquer an unyielding book (*Proceed with Caution* 11). Otherwise, we run the risk of replicating a gesture of unmasking that paradoxically continues to conceal the mechanisms of subjugation and self-authorization. Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver observes that “Today well-meaning Amer-Europeans want desperately to pierce the Veil. They want us to rend the Buckskin Curtain for them, and they are wounded when we say we have grown to like it just fine as a way of maintaining a demarcation, much like a border between nation-states” (“Splitting the Earth” 37).

We might venture to say that the Zapatistas propose rending the Veil in one sense (moving past misrecognition and racial othering) yet preserving it in another (using concealment as a protective mechanism to maintain distance and difference). Like Castellanos, they enact a protest against subaltern invisibility that simultaneously demonstrates the insufficiency of *visibilización* in transforming indigenous realities. In particular, they question the utility of a formal recognition of the plurality of cultures and ways of life within a predetermined socioeconomic framework predicated on their marginality and exclusion (Vásquez-González, “Problemas” 61). Instead, these texts propose what Catherine Walsh has referred to as critical interculturality, which is predicated not on the recognition of difference but on the construction of concrete alternatives to modernity/coloniality:

[...] su proyecto no es simplemente reconocer, tolerar o incorporar lo diferente dentro de la matriz y estructuras establecidas. Por el contrario, es implosionar—desde la diferencia—en las estructuras coloniales del poder como reto, propuesta, proceso y proyecto; es re-conceptualizar y re-fundar estructuras sociales,

epistémicas y de existencias que ponen en escena y en relación equitativa lógicas, prácticas y modos culturales diversos de pensar, actuar y vivir. (“Interculturalidad crítica” 79)

In short, Castellanos Martínez and the EZLN invite us to break through the mirror and intervene in the creation of a different reality, supplanting the hegemony of modern/colonial reason, neoliberal-style multiculturalism, and statist historicity with a collective yet heterogeneous vision of a world in which many worlds fit.

PART TWO: *VISUALIZAR*

CHAPTER THREE

LITERARY CONTRABAND AND THE SPATIAL POLITICS OF RESISTANCE

Books have been the focus of the struggle for the control of the Americas from the start. The great libraries of the Americas were destroyed in 1540 because the Spaniards feared the political and spiritual power of books authored by the indigenous people. [...] Now, fewer than five hundred years after the great libraries of the Americas were burned, a great blossoming of Native American writers is under way.

—Leslie Marmon Silko

3.1 IN THE BLACK MARKET OF THE LETTERED CITY

From the very first moments of “discovery,” writing was an integral part of the colonial enterprise. The conquest itself, and the linkage between the Old and New Worlds, was forged through the *crónicas* and letters addressed to the monarchy—specifically, a kind of writing not just *about* but in some sense *upon* the “New World” and its inhabitants. Columbus describes the Caribbean natives in terms of lack: they are without clothing, without religion, without writing, and without civilization. They are, in a sense—as is América as a whole—cast as blank slates waiting to be filled, *inscribed*, with European civilization. As Ángel Rama shows in his classic essay (1984), the lettered city emerges from the foundations of this nefarious illusion: the dream of an order imposed on an allegedly empty, nascent continent without a past. While the weight of history constrained the “Old” World, América was cast as a vast, open plane awaiting a predetermined future. “Having cleared the ground,” observes Rama, “the city builders erected an edifice that, even when imagined as a mere transposition of European antecedents, in fact represented the urban dream of a new age. The cities of Spanish America were the first material realization of that dream, giving them a central role in the advent of world capitalism” (2). As Silko indicates (and as Rama seems to ignore), such a process entailed not only an imposition but also a violent act of erasure that negated all other cultural geographies, dreams, and archives.

It is from this tradition that the lettered city and the foundations of Latin American literature emerge, which contribute, in turn, to an increasingly global marketplace. For Marx and

Engels, world literature is a direct product of capitalism and the world market, as “National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature” (59). As a result, as Aníbal Quijano would remind us, it is linked to the emergence of the modern/colonial world-system. Meanwhile, the very the concept of “literature” is the product of a process of institutionalization, codification, and commoditization that emerges out of a precise historical and ideological context in 18th century England (Eagleton 16), yet it is often cast as a universal, timeless category: Literature with a capital L is “great books,” writing that speaks to the human condition. In presenting itself in this fashion, “World Literature” tends to naturalize a historically contingent category and represent a particular set of values and uses of language tied to dominant Western modernity as universal.⁹²

So what does it mean to speak of indigenous literature in this context? Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver writes that “To discuss something labeled ‘Native American literature’ is to enter a thicket that would make Brer Rabbit⁹³ [...] envious. Almost immediately, briarlike questions arise” (*That the People* 4). For instance: How are we to define the terms *indigenous* and *literature*? Furthermore, given that alphabetic writing has often served as an instrument of subjugation and colonization, how do authors appropriate it as a tool for liberation while navigating the existing power dynamics at work in the links between *letras* and the ideology of modernity/coloniality? How might native texts both vindicate subjugated knowledges and frustrate their impending appropriation for purposes contrary to social movements’ objectives?

⁹² In regards to the common definition of literature as “non-pragmatic discourse” (7), Eagleton observes that “In many societies, ‘literature’ has served highly practical functions such as religious ones; distinguishing sharply between ‘practical’ and ‘non-practical’ may only be possible in a society like ours, where literature has ceased to have much practical function at all. *We may be offering as a general definition of a sense of the ‘literary’ which is in fact historically specific*” (8, my emphasis).

⁹³ Brer Rabbit is a folkloric figure that emerges out of the encounter between Cherokee and African oral traditions in the Southeastern U.S. As such, Weaver notes, to speak of Brer Rabbit is already to appeal to a hybrid construct (4).

As we saw in chapter two, these are some of the key questions facing not only literary critics but also indigenous authors, as they explore the tensions between oral traditions, their own forms of textuality in textiles and graphics, and Western alphabetic writing. As Quechua activist Hugo Blanco noted in 1972,

Hay que comprender que durante siglos los opresores del campesinado le han hecho ver el papel como un dios. El papel se ha convertido en un fetiche. Las órdenes de arresto son papeles. A través de “papeles” aplastan al indio en los tribunales. El campesino ve papeles en la oficina del gobernador, del párroco, del juez, del escribano, donde todos los poderosos; también el hacendado hace las cuentas en papeles. A cualquier razonamiento suyo, a cualquier argumento lógico, le refutan mostrándole un papel; el papel aplasta la lógica, la derrota.

Es célebre la frase “Qelqan riman” (“El escrito es el que habla”). Nosotros combatimos a muerte este fetichismo, y una de las formas de combatirlo es, precisamente, mostrándole al campesino que así como el enemigo tiene “sus” papeles, nosotros también tenemos “nuestros” papeles. Que al papel que está contra la razón y la lógica del campesino oponemos el papel con esa razón y esa lógica. (90)

The point of this gesture, I would argue, would not be to proclaim, “We, too, can write!” but rather “We can use writing too (against you but also for ourselves).” Such counter-writing does not seek recognition and equality, a move that would merely reaffirm dominant values and reinforce the reification of paper. On the contrary, it manifests an attempt to de-link the tool

(alphabetic writing, the novel) from its product (modernity/coloniality, “universal” literature) and to construct alternative affiliations between indigenous peoples themselves.

Blanco’s observations also open the possibility of reading indigenous literatures beyond the terms of adoption or adaptation, as models ultimately tied to the colonizing logic of assimilation. Yet perhaps the notion of appropriation, as an act of taking exclusive possession, is not entirely germane here either. More than *adueñarse de las letras*—becoming their proprietor or *dueño*⁹⁴—indigenous oral literatures arguably march in the opposite direction: they signal a process of expropriation of a common good. Suppressed voices penetrate that walled lettered city not to conquer it, but rather to expand and disjoint it, twisting its narrow, angular streets and scrawling graffiti on its ivory towers in protest. To appeal to a recurrent theme in the works of Miguel Ángel López Hernández—a Wayuu poet from the Guajira Peninsula of Colombia and Venezuela and recipient of the Casa de Las Américas award in 2000—we might say that these texts engage in acts of literary contraband. As is the case for many indigenous communities worldwide, Wayuu contraband invokes a practice that is less against the law than prior to the modern State; originating in pre-Hispanic practices for the exchange of goods, it represents routes of travel later proscribed by federal and local laws and alternative circuits of economic growth. More than an offensive strategy or an attempt at material accumulation, it thus serves as a defensive mechanism: mode of preservation of a society in constant flux. Above all, the smuggler or *contrabandista* serves to displace a product from its official spheres, delinking it from its designated and regulated uses and placing it in circulation in other spaces.

⁹⁴ I am thinking in particular of the feudal connotations of this term.

Connecting the practice of smuggling in border societies⁹⁵ and pre-Hispanic trade routes with indigenous interventions into the lettered city, this chapter explores the framework of what I call literary contraband in the short fiction and poetry of Estercilia Simanca Pushaina and Miguel Ángel López Hernández (Wayuu, Colombia/Venezuela) and the novel *Almanac of the Dead* by Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo, United States). By resemanticizing the concept of contraband and positing it as a key modality of insurgent poetics, I highlight a process of rising up and surging in that threatens to reconfigure the domain of literature, the nation-State, and politics-as-we-know-it. Like a tidal wave, this surge washes over and destabilizes the ground we stand upon, opening space for alternate paths and the erection of new structures on the indigenous foundations of the nation's architectural and scriptural palimpsests. Yet beyond simply heralding the fact that Amerindian literature has "finally arrived" (as some scholars have been wont to do) I suggest that this incipient reconfiguration of the lettered city commands the continued development of decolonizing critical approaches cognizant of the power dynamics at work in the production and reception of indigenous literatures.

3.2 AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE GUAJIRA

From pre-Columbian times to the present, the Wayuu have migrated throughout the Guajira Peninsula according to the seasons, responding to the demands of a harsh desert landscape where

⁹⁵ In this case, I focus on two borders straddled by indigenous communities whose conception of territory predates and conflicts with the boundaries of the modern State: the Guajira Peninsula of Venezuela and Colombia, inhabited by the Wayuu, and the Mexico/U.S. borderlands, where the Yaqui ritually migrate across the border and indigenous laborers from Mexico and Central America pass through on their way north.

extended drought and intense rains can both prove deadly (Perrin, *Camino* 166). Today many spend part of each year in the rural Alta Guajira in small settlements known as *rancherías*, and then migrate across the border to Venezuela during the dry season in order to find work in Maracaibo. As a result, the concept of mobility represents one of the fundamental pillars of Wayuu cosmology and ethics. “¿Qué hombre wayuu no es básicamente un caminante?” Rocha asks:

Cada uno parece personificar a su manera el principio móvil, poligámico e itinerante que es en sí mismo Juyá,⁹⁶ como lo plantea Michel Perrin en *Camino de los indios muertos* (1980). No olvidemos que esa misma sed de vida interminable precede los roles de los wayuu como pastores, agricultores, comerciantes... en el trasfondo es el origen nómada de una cultura de cazadores y recolectores que aún se expresa en las estrategias de movimiento con que han afrontado las sequías, hambrunas, y, hoy en día, la “falta de oportunidades”. (164)

In this context, the concept of contraband evokes a long history of resistance to colonization, as well as a distinctly Wayuu conception of movement and exchange intimately tied to the environment of the Guajira. From colonial-era piracy to contemporary drug trafficking, the strategic position of the peninsula at the northernmost point of the continent has rendered it a crucial corridor for commercial trafficking between inland South America and international trade routes via the Caribbean. Historian Eduardo Barrera Monroy indicates that the intensity of smuggling throughout the 18th century was facilitated by a pre-existing inter-regional trade network developed by the Wayuu and other indigenous groups over an extended period of time

⁹⁶ Juyá is a principal Wayuu deity associated with rain, life, and procreation, while his female counterpart, Pulowi, signifies drought, death, and infertility. Together, the two represent the natural cycles of life on the Guajira Peninsula as opposing yet complementary forces.

(119).⁹⁷ Following the Spanish invasion, the Wayuu quickly incorporated certain European goods into their own culture—becoming, for instance, the first indigenous group in South America to adopt the use of firearms. Likewise, the arrival of horses, cows, and goats to the region resulted in a transition from hunting and gathering to small-scale agriculture and cattle-raising as the primary means of subsistence. The Wayuu’s participation in smuggling activities, then, is both a condition of their semi-nomadic lifestyle and a response to *alijuna* attempts to undermine it.

In her study of polygamy and contraband in the Guajira, Giangina Orsini Aarón proposes that it was the Wayuu’s cultural value of adaptability, combined with their intimate knowledge of a hostile terrain, that allowed them to resist Spanish conquest for the duration of colonial rule; their indiscriminate trade with the French, Dutch, English, and Spanish not only enabled them to maintain economic independence, but it also provided them with the weapons and ammunition needed to fuel an ongoing series of rebellions against the Spanish crown (6). However, the nature of such cultural adaptation generally corresponded to the material and immaterial needs of Wayuu society, in accordance with their own norms and customs. While the Wayuu played a part in the trans-Atlantic trade circuit that was so central to the formation of the capitalist world-system, the type of commerce they engaged in differed fundamentally from that of their foreign trading partners. Namely, they operated through the logic of reciprocal exchange and bartering, rather than adopting the mentality of accumulation that sustains capitalist enterprise (Barrera 123-27). Barrera notes that many Wayuu still adhere to these principles today: “En el estudio sobre la Alta y Media Guajira del Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi, se estableció que los

⁹⁷ For an in-depth look at the construction of roads and the complex web of trade networks in pre-Columbian South America, see *Caminos precolombinos: las vías, los ingenieros y los viajeros* (2000), ed. Leonor Herrera and Marianne Cardale de Schrimpf.

aborígenes contemporáneos conservan la noción de haber cambiado un burro por maíz, aún cuando la transacción haya sido mediada por el cambio del burro por dinero en una venta directa” (132-33). The point here is not that Wayuu merchants are somehow exempt from or outside the terms of capitalist interaction; on the contrary, the history of contraband illustrates a mode of participating without belonging, a practice of using foreign cultural mechanisms at the service of indigenous sustenance and survival.⁹⁸ Such dealings are inevitably fraught with ambiguity—as evidenced, for instance, by the Wayuu’s involvement in slave trafficking during the colonial period—but they also productively trouble any conception of indigenous peoples as mere victims of coloniality and capitalism.⁹⁹

As with other groups throughout the Americas, the Wayuu successfully resisted colonial efforts at forced assimilation not only through armed rebellion but also, perhaps paradoxically, through the strategic adaptation of foreign goods and practices as a means of sustaining native traditions. Drawing on the history of the Ojibwe’s centuries-long migration from the mouth of the St. Lawrence River to the Great Lakes region (which, as legend has it, was based on a prophecy of the European invasion), Scott Richard Lyons contends that “If anything can be considered an enduring value for the Ojibwe people, it has got to be migration” (3). Whether by choice or by forced relocation, the Ojibwe—like the Wayuu—were a people always on the move (4). Lyons concludes, as such, that Native American “X-marks of assent” on treaties with the

⁹⁸ Chippewa scholar Duane Champagne has distinguished between Western and tribal forms of capitalism, arguing that participation in capitalist markets does not necessarily entail loss of Native American traditions, institutional relations, and cultural values. In the context of the fur trade in colonial North America, for instance, he observes that “Native middlemen engaged in a form of barter but not in the organization of production for a capitalist market” (314). Even in the early 21st century, he claims, capitalist entrepreneurship on U.S. reservations tends to be communitarian rather than individualistic, and tribal leaders generally prioritize Native American cultural values over economic development and prosperity (322).

⁹⁹ The Wayuu were known to own African slaves, whom they often bought by selling captives acquired through periodic wars with their indigenous rivals (Barrera 155). However, as was the case in other native groups such as the Aztecs, the conception and practice of slavery also most likely differed from that of the Europeans.

U.S. government signal a general pre-disposition to change amongst indigenous peoples; they simultaneously represent agency and lack of agency in the face of European colonization and modernity (1). Similarly, Gary Gossen has indicated that since pre-Columbian times, Mesoamerican peoples have always appropriated cultural elements from other societies, particularly those more powerful than themselves. For the Maya, such a move does not represent acquiescence to power, but rather an attempt to situate themselves in an ever-evolving present and to strengthen their own culture by imbibing another (535). As Elicura Chihuailaf puts it, there is no justifiable reason to understand such processes of cultural transformation only in terms of assimilation and integration rather than the voluntary appropriation of foreign cultural elements “que, por surgir de una necesidad ineludible de amable confrontación fortalecen [...] la cultura de origen” (*Recado confidencial* 46).

The framework of contraband thus poses the possibility of reading indigenous insurgency into the lettered city as an act of defiance rather than compliance, as well as a mode of cultural reinforcement and ongoing self-recreation. While *contraband* literally means “against the law,” its connections to pre-Hispanic trade routes in the Americas indicate less a direct form of opposition than a *disregard* for the law predicated on the exercise of autonomy. Barrera points out that the Wayuu had no reason to perceive their actions in terms of illegality; rather, they engaged in practices of exchange with various groups, where the Spanish represented just one trading partner among many (138-39). Contraband challenges the power of the State—and, by extension, the logic of modernity/coloniality—by engaging in lateral exchanges that refuse to acknowledge imposed hierarchies, laws, and boundaries. “To law enforcers,” notes U.S. historian Joshua Smith, “[borderland smuggling] was a crime that deprived the state of needed income, threatened the standing order, and undermined deference to political and social leaders.

But to others, smuggling was a form of self-help, a way that neighbor helped neighbor in the grim business of survival” (1).

Perhaps more than mere survival, however, this practice exemplifies what Gerald Vizenor has referred to as *survivance*: an exercise in resistance expressed through an ongoing, active native presence. Karl Kroeber explains that in reviving this previously obsolete term in the English language, “[Vizenor] uses *survivance* to subordinate *survival*’s implications of escape from catastrophe and marginal preservation; *survivance* subtly reduces the power of the destroyer.” (26). Like Vizenor’s related concept of native transmotion, ‘survivance’ undermines colonialist attempts to reduce Indians to historical relics, or to portray revitalization as a simple return to the past disengaged with the modern world. Suggestively, he proposes framing sovereignty in terms of mobility rather than tribal governments and treaty boundaries, insisting that “Motion is a natural human right that is not bound by borders” (*Fugitive Poses* 188-89). “Transmotion is survivance,” he insists, “not an absolute power over people or territories” (189).

The history of smuggling in Wayuu society thus illustrates a struggle to preserve millenary traditions anchored, paradoxically, in transience and fluctuation. The ethical and methodological assumptions that underlie this practice—which I will call an epistemology of transmotion—thus offers a provocative intervention in the debate over tradition vs. modernity. In particular, it destabilizes the need for strategic essentialism by positing indigeneity as a fluid construct whose basic organic composition, much like water, remains fundamentally the same even as it changes in shape and form. The implications of this conceptual framework for indigenous literature are considerable; the emphasis on appropriation, circulation, and exchange problematizes the notion that indigenous uses of the Latin alphabet, “Western” literary genres, and the publishing market constitute yet another instance of cultural assimilation. On the

contrary, the epistemology of transmotion suggests that such practices might serve as a means of reinforcing autonomous practices through reinvention and constant recreation. They might, as Hugo Blanco suggests, entail combating the fetishism of the written text by juxtaposing the colonial language with “unintelligible pages” in Kechwa, Wayuunaiki, or Zapotec, displacing the modern/colonial conception of writing and putting it to the service of indigenous intellectual sovereignty. Even within texts produced only in Spanish, the irruption of an alternative epistemological code destabilizes and cannibalizes the logic of modernity/coloniality and redefines the parameters of intervention.

Illustrative of this practice is a brief testimonial narrative by Wayuu designer, lawyer, and author Estercilia Simanca Pushaina. In a gesture akin to Javier Castellanos Martínez’s narrative refusal to write, Simanca imparts a written testimony against colonialist uses of writing. The title of her story, “Manifiesta no saber firmar,” evokes a resistance to alphabetic literacy amongst Wayuu elders, yet it also suggests that the narrative itself refuses to acquiesce to the logic of written consent. The first page of the text explains the origins of this phrase, which has since become a slogan of resistance in the Guajira: “Desde pequeña me llamó la atención el que la mayoría de los miembros de mi familia materna manifestaran en sus documentos de identidad ‘*no saber firmar*’” (2, italics in original). The author recalls that as a child, she attempted to teach her seventy-year-old grandfather to write, without much success. Upon receiving a diploma certifying him as a peasant, Abuelo Pushaina opted to “make his mark” with a fingerprint rather than signing his name as Estercilia had tried to teach him. “Mi abuelo miraba el diploma como si lo estuviera leyendo”, recalls the author, “pero él no sabía que lo tenía al revés” (2). Years later the old man explained his lack of willingness to learn: “*él ya estaba muy viejo para hablar con el papel (escribir) y tampoco el papel quería hablar con él (leer)*” (2, italics in original). For

Abuelo Pushaina, paper is not a static object but a non-human subject, a strange interlocutor with whom he refuses to talk.

The rejection, in any case, is mutual; paper does not want to communicate with him either. In an insolent inversion, it is paper that objectifies humanity: in the Guajira, as Simanca illustrates, writing has served primarily to certify the State's contempt towards indigenous citizens. During election campaigns (the only time politicians show any interest in the Wayuu), political candidates present them with food, toys, and transportation into town to obtain the documentation needed to vote. Yet these records do not register the real names of their holders. In the face of the malevolence and ignorance of the notaries, the names of many Wayuu undergo a grotesque mutation between the spoken and the written word: Tanko Pushaina transforms into Tarzan, Castorila into Cosita Rica, Cotiz into Alka-Selzer, Teyruma into Napoleon, Tashalein into Brandy, ad nauseum (Simanca 7).

Be they political celebrities, stereotypical 'noble savages,' corrosive products of consumer society, or insults charged with sexual intent (Rocha 95), such counterfeit names not only violate the sanctity of selfhood and the right to self-determination; they also signal the imposition of an alien social code charged with perverse meanings. These identification cards, designed in theory to register and certify human life, end up mocking the very existence of the Wayuu, negating their humanity. "En la mayoría de pueblos originarios", notes Miguel Rocha Vivas, "el nombre suele ser la quintaesencia, la identidad oculta. De esta suerte, fragmentar y desconocer los verdaderos nombres es descaradamente burlar, socavar" (95). Significantly (and not surprisingly), if neither the Wayuu nor the *alijuna* (non-indigenous) official understands the other, the Indian who does not read and write will suffer at the hands of the *alijuna* who does not listen.

In an attempt to recover silenced voices, document abuses, and reclaim the sovereignty of the name, Simanca's stories thus present a kind of counter-writing that contests the legacy of the lettered city by turning it on its head. Paradoxically, the first page of the text includes an imprint of the author's own signature, which suggests that literacy in *alijuna* cultural and legal language can provide an important tool for Wayuu resistance and self-determination. In contrast to the false pretenses of signed consent that have so often served governments as a tool for usurping indigenous land, identity, and sovereignty—particularly in the U.S. and Canada—, Simanca's signature conveys a message of dissent. That is, by signing her name on a document that declares a refusal to sign, she contests the exploitation of “illiterate” Wayuu and enacts a powerful self-affirmation intended to restore a sense of self to the community. At a forum at the University of Pittsburgh with fellow Wayuu writers José Ángel Fernández Silva and Miguel Ángel López Hernández, Simanca emphasized the juridical function of her writing as a concrete instrument of struggle: after winning second place in a poetry contest, she realized that her work must be more than just poetry—it must not only “hacer un canto a la Madre Tierra, sino también mostrar una realidad e ir creando desde la narrativa un tipo de denuncia” (Forum). “Un abogado no puede ser poeta,” she contends; “no puede tener esa sensibilidad. No se lograrían respuestas colectivas como las que se dieron con ‘Manifiesta no saber firmar’. [...] Tiene que ser un tipo de narración que pueda entender el juez, de modo que se pueda usar en procesos de denuncia” (Forum).

Simanca's comments suggest that if the denigration of the Wayuu proceeds from the city of protocols, contemporary avatar of a vast colonial bureaucratic administration, her own narrative of protest must combat that baroque and arcane legal code with plain, ordinary language. In other words, it must be capable not only of creating consciousness within the Wayuu community about a shameful and often silenced phenomenon, but also of bolstering a

claim for social justice beyond the community. For Dipesh Chakrabarty, the dilemma of the subaltern activist (as well as that of the subalternist historian like himself) lies in how to mediate between the time of history—understood as a logical modernity linked to a naturalized conception of linear and uniform temporality—and the time of the gods—wherein agency in the world is not limited to humans and time is circular in nature. Chakrabarty observes that

One cannot argue with modern bureaucracies and other instruments of governability without recourse to the secular time and narratives of history and sociology. The subaltern classes need this knowledge to fight their battles for social justice. [...] When has the International Monetary Fund or the United Nations listened to an argument involving the agency of the gods? (48)

However, he adds, what is essential remains inadequate (51); the translation of the time of the gods into the time of history should leave uncomfortable traces of the subaltern code, allowing plurality to thrive in unexpected moments. The translation of that experience into ‘ordinary’ or ‘universal’ language should be marked by a disquieting ambiguity: enough like secular language to make sense but different enough to shock (51).

In this sense Simanca’s apparently anti-poetic position is profoundly linked to a process of verbal defamiliarization proper to insurgent poetic labor. “Manifiesta no saber firmar” demystifies the *alijuna* world by revealing it through a Wayuu perspective and exposing its hypocrisies with an incisive humor:

Esa vez llevaron unos papeles grandotes que tenían la imagen de ese hombre que se llamaba ‘*Candidato*’. Ellos tienen nombres extraños que nada de raro tendría que ese señor se llamara así. [...] La casa del señor *Candidato* también tiene nombre, se llama *Gobernación*. Pero creo que no es de él, porque cuando pasaron

tres veranos ya no vivía ahí. Después vivía otro que se llamaba igual, pero cambian de nombre cuando llegan a vivir a esa casa porque la mayoría termina llamándose ‘*Señor Gobernador*’. [...] ¿No saben ellos que tantos nombres los pueden confundir?, pero prefiero a *Candidato* porque él es bueno. Él regala comida, y cuando nos lleva al hospital nos atienden; caso contrario cuando se cambian el nombre por el de *Gobernador*, *Alcalde* o *Senador*, ya no nos conocen. Siento que no sólo cambian el nombre, sino también el alma. (5-6, emphasis in the original)

Like the moon in Subcomandante Marcos’s “Historia de los espejos,” “Manifiesta no saber firmar” takes on the form of an opaque mirror of *alijuna* society. More specifically, it produces a counter-ethnography, or what Viveiros de Castro calls an inverted anthropology, by upsetting the hierarchy of scientific knowledge and returning the anthropological gaze: *see yourself as I see you*, it demands. Her satire highlights the duplicity of politicians who manipulate indigenous communities for their own personal gain and exposes the false pretensions of a so-called ‘representative democracy’ that merely perpetuates colonialist hierarchies. By playing off the Wayuu’s purported ignorance of “civilized” political culture, Simanca exposes its fundamental incoherence.

In this regard, her testimony articulates a poetics of defamiliarization, but not in the style of Russian formalist *Ostranenie*; rather than combining unexpected images by isolating them from daily reality, Simanca proposes to modify that same reality by casting it in a different light. The injurious uses of bureaucratic writing are displaced, in the end, by the irruption of a creative writing that renames and restores life, and that aspires, above all, to become a new part of Wayuu oral tradition (Forum). Through her short story, Simanca turns the modern/colonial conception of

illiteracy on its head, positing the refusal to sign as an indication of Wayuu cultural agency and using legal writing for the benefit of her own community.

3.3 DREAMS OF AN INTIMATE REBELLION

Yet if Simanca's testimony illustrates the process of appropriation and transposition proper to what I have called literary contraband, Miguel Ángel López Hernández engages the concept in a more much explicit manner, projecting smuggling and bartering as practices that shapes his own poetic intervention and return to the self.¹⁰⁰ Works such as *Contrabando sueños con aríjunas*¹⁰¹ *cercanos* (1992) and *Encuentros en los senderos de Abya Yala* (Casa de las Américas Award, 2000) look to poetry—and the dream as a configuration of poetic origins and modalities—as a space for the creation of new affinities and decolonial possibilities.¹⁰² Instead of refuting injurious *alíjunas*, *Contrabando sueños* assumes the task of creating links of solidarity with sympathetic and receptive outsiders, perceiving in such a possibility the seeds of change. As such, López uses poetry as a vehicle for creating community, perceiving the world in terms of what Grimaldo Rengifo Vásquez describes as a community of relations: an open congregation of

¹⁰⁰ López Hernández elaborates on the centrality of migration and mobility to his own experience as a Wayuu and the impact it exerts on his writing process in an unpublished interview with Juan Duchesne Winter titled “Escribir es un viaje de contrabando.” He also commented on these issues in a forum at the University of Pittsburgh in 2011 with fellow Wayuu authors Estercilia Simanca Pushaina and José Ángel Fernández Silva Wuliana.

¹⁰¹ Given the lack of phonetic distinction between the /l/ and /r/ in Wayuunaiki, this spelling is often used interchangeably with *alíjuna*. For the sake of consistency, I have chosen to use the latter of the two, except in the case of titles and direct quotations.

¹⁰² In 2010, López also published the collection *En las hondonadas maternas de la piel*. My analysis here, however, will focus on the two earlier texts referenced above.

potential relatives, in affect and reciprocity rather than blood or parentage.¹⁰³ The poem “Culturas” manifests the function of the poet in contrast with that of the *jayechimajaachi*, traditional purveyor of Wayuu stories and histories:

Tarash, el jayechimajachi de Wanulumana, ha llegado
para cantar a los que lo conocen...
su lengua nos festeja nuestra propia historia,
su lengua sostiene nuestra manera de ver la vida.
Yo, en cambio, escribo nuestras voces
para aquellos que no nos conocen,
para visitantes que buscan nuestro respeto...
Contrabando sueños con aríjunas cercanos. (*Contrabando sueños* 7)

This notion of dream trafficking entails not a process of *alejamiento* or disassociation, as in “Manifiesta no saber firmar,” but rather an *acercamiento*, or increasing proximity, as López provocatively juxtaposes the image of contraband as an insubordinate, illicit act with an atmosphere of intimacy and respect.

Although López diverges from the legal sphere transited by Simanca, his writing is no less politically charged. In fact, *Encuentros en los senderos de Abya Yala*, published under the heteronym Malohe, exhibits a somewhat ponderous ideological orientation that arguably takes precedence over its poetic sensibilities. Works attributed to the heteronym Vito Apüshana, such as *Contrabando sueños*, are lyrical and brief, those by Malohe more prosaic and tendentious. As Rocha puts it, “Vito es el wayuu que escribe para ganar el respeto de los visitantes para

¹⁰³ For Rengifo, this understanding of community comprises not only human actors but also the plants and animals that we cultivate and that cultivate us in turn. See Rengifo, “La crianza recíproca: biodiversidad en los Andes” (1995) and Rafael Bautista, “¿Qué quiere decir comunidad?” (2012-2013).

contrabandear su literatura intercultural con *alíjunas* cercanos. Malohe es un ideólogo, un escritor supranacional, un poeta que procura trazar caminos entre mundos originarios” (158). The focus of each poetic voice, then, is distinct, yet both are engaged in expanding the possibilities for dialogue and mutual transformation.

Moreover, his evocation of a practice of “dream trafficking” conveys a distinctly Wayuu understanding of political transformation. In the aforementioned forum with Simanca and Fernández, López affirmed that contraband and dreams both exert a daily presence in Wayuu society; as a result the notion of trafficking dreams is “lo más normal” and represents “[un] camino para el encuentro.” As ethnologist Michel Perrin explains in *Los practicantes del sueño* (1992), the ritual practice of oniromancy (the interpretation of dreams) functions simultaneously as a mode of narration, a practice of interpretation, and a model of action. Personified in the form of Lapü, one of the principal figures in Wayuu cosmology, dreams not only predict but also proscribe actions in daily life. As a middle realm between the *other* world of the gods, ancestors, and specters (*pülasü*) and the present, tangible world of the profane (*anasü*), they function as a meeting ground where knowledge is created and transmitted. Most notably, dreams provide a means of maintaining contact with Wayuu cultural roots and ancestral spirits. Yet Perrin notes that they are also a space of encounter for the living; the verb *alapüjewaa* means “to want to dream with someone,” and *alapüjanaa* “to sense that you will dream with someone” (*Practicantes* 77). The idea here is not to dream *about* but rather to dream *with*, to meet in the dreamworld as a cohabited space. For Perrin, the daily practice of sharing and interpreting dreams provides an opportunity for inter-cultural dialogue and communication with his hosts, Iishu and Jusé:

Yo expresaba mi deseo de meterme en su mundo “soñando wayuu” o sometiendo mis sueños a la interpretación indígena. [...] Además, nuestros sueños mostraban a veces un entrecruzamiento revelador. Yo mezclaba imágenes de mi sociedad y de la suya; ellos tomaban imágenes de la suya para decir lo que les ocurría en la mía... (87)

While this process of oneiric exchange conveys a gradual process of mutual *acercamiento* as Perrin gains fluency in Wayuu cultural language (and vice versa), it also simultaneously reinforces a necessary gap in ethnographic knowledge; he concludes that “Para acercarse al otro cuando es tan lejano, hay que amar su diferencia y admitir que será por siempre irreductible” (196).

In this sense, *Los practicantes del sueño* sheds light on López’s turn to poetry as a tool for bartering dreams and as a verbal space for epistemological exchange. Whether through a trenchant narrative of protest or a kind of *amable confrontación*, Simanca and Apūshana both explore the restorative function of poetic writing within the Wayuu community and its engagement with alijuna society. Yet, as Perrin’s reflections suggest, the very possibility for such *cercanía* hinges on an awareness of the necessarily partial nature of intercultural knowledge. In this regard, Simanca’s model of cautious, critical reserve serves to complement and attenuate the dangers of proximity. Where Vito looks to relationships of solidarity with non-indigenous outsiders as a propitious site for political transformation, Simanca highlights the obstacles to such alliances, reminding us that interculturality remains a horizon of possibility more than a tangible actuality.

Meanwhile, *Encuentros en los senderos de Abya Yala* assumes a markedly different poetic voice and interlocutor than *Contrabando sueños*: through the voice of Malohe, López

shifts the focus away from direct engagement with dominant society and looks instead to the possibilities for collaboration between disparate indigenous communities united in a set of shared epistemological precepts and political objectives. *Encuentros* thus adds another dimension of contraband not present in *Contrabando sueños* by reinforcing a tradition of inter-tribal exchange that predates European and indigenous interactions. Through a turn to what he calls “la multiplicación de los encuentros” (11), each section of the text positions itself at a different juncture of Abya Yala, informed by each region’s particular cosmovisions and poetics. López thus enters in dialogue with other *oralitores* or native authors across the continent, writing from their own respective corners of the world: “Desde la ruka de Lorenzo Nahuelcoy / se observa el universo del sur ordenado en sendas,” he writes in “Más allá de la frontera” (19).¹⁰⁴ Though *Encuentros* as a whole recalls the appearance of *indigenista* literature, with its glossaries and anthropological explanations, it is primarily addressed to the non-Wayuu native as a possible poetic and political interlocutor, proprietor of a shared history and a common future: “Hemos llegado hasta aquí, hasta los leños ardientes de tu fogón, / para volver a reconocernos en los esfumados rostros del pasado” (20). The duality of voices and approaches multiplies to reveal a juxtaposition not only between Estercilia and Miguel Ángel, but also between Vito and Malohe as discrete personas of the same poet, and in the polyphonic dialogue that comprises *Encuentros* as a whole.

Yet these two markedly distinct collections converge in the practice of trafficking at the core of his work. Amongst many images, that of the *camino* (route or path) predominates; the opening poem of *Encuentros* highlights the journey as a space for “el reconocimiento del rostro, desde el mundo-origen de Abya Yala (América) hacia las latitudes del otro” (11). Even the

¹⁰⁴ According to the glossary corresponding to Encuentro I, *ruka* means “home” in Mapundungun.

poet's encounter with his own culture entails a journey to the family cemetery as a site of contact with his spiritual and corporeal roots (27). Vito and Malohe represent distinct gestures that, together, point to the possibility for a poetic, ethical, and political encounter between disparate worlds. His motif of the "dreaming wayfarer" or *caminante soñador* (Rocha 152) evokes Camēntsá poet Hugo Jamioy Juajibioy's conception of writing with one's feet, beating a path across the land and recording a people's story through its travels:

La historia de mi pueblo
tiene los pasos limpios de mi abuelo,
va a su propio ritmo;
esta otra historia
va a la carretera
con zapatos prestados,
anda escribiendo con sus pies
sin su cabeza al lado [...] (117)

This notion of tracing a history in living steps invokes a conception of contraband-writing as the circulation of indigenous stories through a borrowed vehicle of communication. As a Wayuu, writes Rocha, López is a *contrabandista*: "un camión que va de aquí para allá y de allá para acá, trayendo y llevando sueños, experiencias y palabras" (153).

In the face of a Western, modernizing obsession with constructing fences and domesticating the wild—perhaps best epitomized by the foundational Venezuelan novel *Doña Bárbara*—López presents an alternative poetic cartography that does not seek to partition, seclude, and enclose, but rather to expand and connect. Yet destroying fences would not mean erasing difference; on the contrary, it would imply freedom from the homogenizing gestures of

positivist and generally racist classifications. Literary contraband thus offers a non-hierarchical, unsettling vision of the world proper to indigenous thought, wherein “a refusal to divide and compartmentalize in any reductionist way is accompanied by an adherence to recognizing all things existing in relation to one another” (Haig-Brown 927).¹⁰⁵ That is, the practice of *contrabando* not only challenges the physical boundaries between nation-States, but it destabilizes the epistemological borders as well, including those that perceive humanity as a separate entity from the rest of the natural world. The arbitrariness of the Colombia-Venezuela border that bisects the Guajira Peninsula—and the Wayuu population along with it—speaks to the modern/colonial desire to divide and conquer, compartmentalize and confine. The neo-colonial nation-State has inherited the geopolitical violence of the *sueño conquistador*, and the illegality of contraband derives from the imposition of a national border over an irreducible territory. In contrast, the Wayuu’s epistemology of transmotion posits a different kind of relationship between people and the land, human and non-human subjects, and natives and non-natives that embodies a *sueño liberador* and an alternative conception of space and place predicated on constant movement.

In this context, López’s use of the name *Abya Yala* is significant; as we have seen, the provocative power of this term lies in its ability to transcend the geopolitical boundaries imposed through the process of colonization and nationalization. Although *Encuentros* remains limited to the confines of Latin America, spanning no farther north than the Nahua of Mexico, elsewhere López has expressed the need to expand the scope of the term and to construct meaningful alliances between native poets across both continents.¹⁰⁶ Significantly, this pan-Indian and inter-

¹⁰⁵ Haig-Brown references here the definition of world indigenous thought developed by Maori scholar Makere Stewart-Harewira.

¹⁰⁶ Personal communication.

American vision diverges from the Bolivarian supranational dream of a united Latin America. That is, the Abya Yalan model is less interested in uniting Central and South America against its northern foe than in breaching the divisive political boundaries imposed first by colonial rule and later inherited by the nation-State (be that the United States, Canada, Colombia, or Chile). By emphasizing the international character of contraband, Malohe engages a fluid, mobile conception of indigeneity that transcends the individual Wayuu community and contests the imposition of borders onto Amerindian lands.

3.4 A BURNING NECKLACE OF REVOLUTION

It is no coincidence then, that the implied map traced in López's poetic crossings strongly resonates with the "Five Hundred Year Map" sketched in the opening pages of *Almanac of the Dead*. Leslie Marmon Silko's own depiction of the Americas reintegrates time and space, traces routes of human and commercial traffic (drugs, weapons, migrations, and revolutions), and negates the primacy of national boundaries that would deny indigenous rights to the territories inhabited by their ancestors' spirits. "Native Americans acknowledge no borders," the map proclaims; "they seek nothing less than the return of all tribal lands" (front matter). In this case, the pivotal link between North and South lies not in Panama or the Guajira but farther north. Published less than three years before the onset of the Zapatista uprising, *Almanac of the Dead* prophesies a people's revolution spreading outward from Chiapas, the Mexican state just south of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, which divides North and Central America in physiographic

terms.¹⁰⁷ At heart, the novel embodies the promise of liberation encoded in an upper-class Mexican character's nightmare: "Alegría imagined a map of the world suspended in darkness until suddenly a tiny flame blazed up, followed by others, to form a burning necklace of revolution across two American continents" (507).

Envisioning a massive northward march of native peoples, *Almanac* casts the recent trend of immigration to the United States as a revolutionary reclamation of stolen land and a radical negation of borders. In part, Silko's migration story reprises a Chicano mythology of return based on the reoccupation of Aztlán, the Aztecs' legendary place of origin. However, by looking past mestizo Mexicans and contemporary Nahua to focus instead on the Maya at the Mexico-Guatemala border, she also circumvents and undercuts the standard orientation of border narratives, activating *other* possible mythologies of return. John Muthyala has argued that *Almanac of the Dead* challenges the perspective of writers and critics such as José David Saldívar, Gloria Anzaldúa, and others who view the Mexican-American population as paradigmatic of the border experience (358); while Anzaldúa does "acknowledge Mexican antipathy towards Indians and seems eager to undercut the internalization of this colonial mindset in Chicanos/as," she also places primary emphasis on *la mestiza* as border subject (360). Silko revises this approach by reinscribing indigenous transnational histories of dispossession, removal, and migration "as the structural framework within which to envision the final uprising of the dispossessed and marginalized of the Americas" (Muthyala 360). Given that the U.S. Southwest provides the setting for much of the novel's action, the absence of the term 'Chicano'

¹⁰⁷ Although Chiapas is now part of Mexico and therefore part of North America in geopolitical terms, its history reflects a tenuous state of belonging that attests to its liminal position. During the colonial period, the region was relatively isolated from the administrative authorities in both Mexico City and in Guatemala. Following the declaration of independence from Spain, a lengthy dispute ensued over whether Chiapas would integrate into Mexico or the United Provinces of Central America (1823-29), or whether it would become its own sovereign nation. The precise border between Mexico and Guatemala was not fully established until some 77 years later, when Guatemala finally recognized Mexico's annexation of the Soconusco region.

in Silko's assorted lists of marginalized populations is striking (although several characters do speak Spanish). She seems more concerned with exploring the possible alliances between Indians and blacks, or between dispossessed Native American tribes and the homeless, than with reconciling indigeneity as a constitutive part of *mestiza* borderland identity.

With the Five Hundred Year Map as its visual referent, *Almanac* presents a narrative theory of the borderlands as a space "literally frayed with multiple, permeable borders" (Muthyala 361). The four boxes that serve as "legends" to the map (and to the novel as a whole) highlight the links between different indigenous populations through colonial experiences. One box labeled "The Indian Connection" claims that "The Indian Wars have never ended in the Americas," while another recalls that "When Europeans arrived, the Maya, Azteca, Inca cultures had already built great cities and vast networks of roads. Ancient prophecies foretold the arrival of Europeans in the Americas. The ancient prophecies also foretell the disappearance of all things European" (front matter). Nothing on the map is to scale; the shape of Mexico is abstracted and approximated, distorting the relative location of different cities and towns.¹⁰⁸ The drawing is clearly more ideographic than strictly representational: more important than the physical distance between these locales are the symbolic and political connections among them. Lists of characters associated with each city fill empty spaces on the page, and dotted lines plot the movement of people and commodities through space and time. Virginia Bell argues that these lines render the sketch "a map of circuits that undo spatial and temporal borders," resulting in "a map anxious about its own pretensions, a map refusing the neutral claims of sciences like cartography and history, and refusing the logic of national history" (18).

¹⁰⁸ For instance, Silko portrays Mexico in a funnel shape pointing directly south, rather than curving to the southeast. As a result, the capital city of Chiapas, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, appears to lie directly south of Yuma, Arizona, rather than Houston, Texas.

As a result, Silko also contests the logic of imperial expansion as “Manifest Destiny” that has shaped the United States as we know it today. In an essay titled “The Border Patrol State,” she contends that “Even in the days of Spanish and Mexican rule, no attempts were made to interfere with the flow of people and goods from south to north and north to south. It is the U.S. government that has continually attempted to sever contact between the tribal people north of the border and those to the south” (*Yellow Woman* 121). The geographic orientation of movement within the novel thus counters the Hegelian notion that, in the words of Henry Kissinger, “The axis of history starts in Moscow, goes to Bonn, crosses over to Washington, and then goes to Tokyo. What happens in the South is of no importance” (qtd. in Krupat 52). Arnold Krupat points out that by insisting that “history happens north to south, south to north,” Silko effectively “shifts the axis of *where* is important, thus shifting the axis of *what* is important” (53). I would add, however, that in doing so, she also opens a space for South-South dialogue and maps a common ground of subalternity that undercuts the geopolitical demarcation between North and South as such. Though the novel portends the eventual eradication of “all things European,” one character clarifies that “Converts were always welcome; Mother Earth embraced the souls of all who loved her” (736). Hence, *Almanac* challenges Eurocentric thinking by troubling the “West vs. the Rest” paradigm that sustains it. More important than such Manichean oppositions, she suggests, is the common ground of oppression and internal colonialism that has affected different populations across both continents.

It follows that *Almanac* should strive to re-establish the kinds of inter-ethnic ties severed by the modern State, not only in the immediate context of the U.S.-Mexico border but also on a hemispheric scale. One of the ways it does so is to illustrate the U.S. government’s complicity in the poverty, exploitation, and genocide of poor people in the Global South. The corrupt and

perverse Judge Arne justifies the national security strategy of the 1980s, arguing that drug trafficking represented a lesser evil than communism:

Cocaine smuggling could be tolerated for the greater good, which was the destruction of communism in Central and South America. The fight against communism was costly. A planeload of cocaine bought a planeload of dynamite, ammunition, and guns for anticommunist fighters and elite death squads in the jungles and cities of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Communism was a far greater threat to the United States than drug addiction was. Addicts did not stir up the people or start riots the way communists did. (648)

Silko thus highlights the connections between the so-called war on drugs and the war on communism, indicating that one directly sustains the other. In this case, the practice of smuggling does not primarily represent a form of subversion from below; instead, the U.S. government's own participation in, or unofficial sanction of, select forms of contraband symbolizes its own fraudulence and corruption. The Colombian character Serlo recalls earlier in the novel that

Enemies of the United States had actually tried to cut off the supply of heroin to the United States near the end of the Vietnam War. During the summer of the disruption of heroin supplies, dozens of U.S. cities had burned night after night. Without cocaine and heroin, the U.S. faced a nightmare as young black and brown people took to the streets to light up white neighborhoods, not crack pipes. (562)

By trafficking drugs across the U.S.-Mexico border, Zeta and Calabazas inadvertently lend support to the very forces their illegal activities are meant to undermine, enabling the government's plot to subdue insurgent activity by fueling drug addiction.

Silko grants, however, that in its natural form, coca is dangerous to (neo)colonial authorities because it gives the Indians “too much power, dangerous power; not just the power money buys, but spiritual power to destroy all but the strong” (503). As a sacred object used in offerings, divinations, and shamanistic rituals, as well as a natural remedy against fatigue, hunger, thirst, and altitude sickness, the coca leaf has long represented a symbol of Andean fortitude and resistance. “Mama Coca had sustained [Indians] all along,” *Almanac* proclaims, “and now Mama Coca was going to help them take back the lands that were theirs” (502). By juxtaposing revolutionary and counterrevolutionary uses of the coca plant, Silko points to the commoditization of psychosomatic substances and their complicity in the fortification of State power, yet she also highlights the possibility of recuperating the spiritual functions of such materials as a powerful tool of resistance. Cocaine and other drugs may serve to keep poor populations drugged and compliant, but intoxication, as we saw in chapter two, may also serve as a means of sustaining local memories, rituals, and alternative rationalities.

Under the guise of an International Holistic Healers Convention, various characters converge on Tucson at the end of the book, not to sell each other their Inca long-life capsules and healing crystals, but rather to organize for the coming *pachakuti*. These tribal internationalists, as Angelita calls them, use new age philosophy as a cover for their revolutionary activities. After attending presentations on various political and spiritual topics, several of the main figures in the novel—representing the Yaqui, Pueblo, Lakota, Eskimo, and Maya—all meet in room 1212 to strategize for the Maya twins’ anticipated march north. In the last chapter, Sterling finally realizes the meaning of the stone snake that had mysteriously appeared outside the Laguna Pueblo Reservation at the beginning of the novel: “The snake was looking south, in the direction from which the twin brothers and the people would come” (763). In many ways, this closing

image encapsulates the novel's hemispheric vision; if American Indians in the U.S. are to have any hope of rising up and retaking their lands, Silko suggests, they must join forces with indigenous groups in countries to the south where native populations are greater and more heavily concentrated than in the U.S. Moreover, they must also gain the support of other subjugated populations and transcend the limiting bounds of ethnic-based protest.

It is remarkably befitting, then, that a mere two and a half years after the novel's publication, the Zapatistas were to publicly launch their "war of words" and initiate their massive, peaceful marches from Chiapas to Mexico City. Like Subcomandante Marcos, Silko articulates a revolutionary poetics rooted in indigenous struggles for land rights and autonomy that simultaneously engages a broader conception of subalternity and resistance. In an interview with Ellen Arnold, Silko recalls that the hairs on her neck stood on end when she learned of the uprising in 1994 ("Listening" 8). She also recounts that she began to "have transmissions" and to spontaneously jot down fragments of *Almanac* in 1980, the same year when Rafael Guillén entered the Lacandón Jungle to become Subcomandante Marcos: "So there's a real parallel there, which works on that plane that extends across the universe, where stuff travels faster than the speed of light" ("Listening" 8). *Almanac* appears to be visionary in ways that even Silko could not anticipate. For Daria Donnelly, "The prophetic tenor of *Almanac* and its handling of contemporary events breeches the boundary between the world of the book and the world in which the reader lives so successfully that the novel becomes a credible means by which to interpret ongoing global events" (248). The dreamworld of the novel fuses with reality, both heralding and enacting a political awakening of international import.

Like *Contrabando sueños* and *Encuentros*, then, *Almanac of the Dead* appeals to dream visions as a subversive space of encounter between disparate worlds. The Maya twin leader

Tacho, inspired by the messages of the spirit macaws, professes faith that “one night the people would all dream the same dream, a dream sent by the spirits of the continent. The dream could not be sent until the people were ready to awaken with new hearts” (712). “The macaws said the battle would be won or lost in the realms of dreams,” he affirms, “not with airplanes or weapons” (475). The Barefoot Hopi, too, “worked only in the realm of dreams [...] Even redneck bikers ate up the Hopi’s stories, but that was because the Hopi had already infiltrated their dreams with the help of the spirit world” (620). Dreams occupy a central place in the novel, not as an imaginary realm removed from reality, but rather as a space for action that exerts a profound impact on the material world. Lest we assume such communal dreams entail an effortless, peaceful transition, however, Silko reminds us that they can also assume the form of nightmares: according to Wilson Weasel Tail, “The spirits are outraged! They demand justice! The spirits are furious! To all those humans who were too weak or too lazy to protect the mother earth [...] The spirits will harangue you, they will taunt you until you are forced to silence the voices with whiskey day after day” (723).¹⁰⁹

In many ways, the angry, indignant tenor of *Almanac of the Dead* more closely resembles Simanca’s narrative of protest than Vito Apūshana’s intimate poetic exchange. Yet like López, Silko perceives shared dreams as the space of a growing political consciousness articulated through poetic language rather than legal or juridical discourse. Weasel Tail, the self-dubbed ‘Poet Lawyer,’ proclaims that “The people didn’t need more lawyers, the lawyers were the disease not the cure. The law served the rich. The people needed poetry; poetry would set the people free; poetry would speak to the dreams and the spirits, and the people would know what

¹⁰⁹ Emphasizing the heterogeneity of insurgent strategies within the novel, Joni Adamson contrasts the patient reserve of male characters such as the Barefoot Hopi and the Maya twins Tacho and El Feo with the more militant posture of women such as Angelita and the Yaqui twins Lecha and Zeta (152). However, consistent with the novel’s resistance to such clear-cut dichotomies, Wilson Weasel Tail’s angry tirades also trouble this easy distinction.

they must do” (713). In the introduction her essay collection *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*, Silko presents a personal narrative strikingly similar to that of Simanca that nonetheless leads her to a different conclusion: she explains that, inspired by the elders’ role in a Laguna land claims lawsuit against the state of New Mexico, she decided to enter law school. Silko had completed three semesters in the American Indian Law School Fellowship Program, she recalls, “before [she] realized that injustice is built into the Anglo-American legal system” (19). As a result, she dropped out and decided that “the only way to seek justice was through the power of the stories” (21). The autobiographical basis for *Almanac*’s poet-lawyer is clear: Weasel Tail, too, “had abandoned law school because the deck was stacked, and the dice were loaded, in the white man’s law” (714). Silko’s personal journey thus represents the inverse of Simanca’s, as she opts for the transformative power of poetry over legal action.

Ultimately, however, both authors perceive literature as a tool for reconfiguring the social landscape and awakening political consciousness. Poetic language and storytelling thus serve as political instruments for consciousness raising and narrative intervention that directly contest the oppressive stories underlying the ideology of the nation-State, settler-colonialism, and modernization projects. Martha Nandorfy points out that “instead of entertaining the ‘settler pack up policy,’ [Silko] prophesies that, over time, settlers will end up belonging to the land” (346). The problem, however, “is that we don’t have much time left, and if settlers keep telling imperial stories, they will forever resist belonging to the land” (346). The novel thus serves as a vehicle through which Silko infiltrates the dreams of her readers with other narratives and cultural geographies, as a reminder that the stories we tell reflect and shape the lives that we live. “By providing readers with stories of injustice and resistance,” writes Channette Romero, “*Almanac* attempts to encourage its readers to ‘rise up’” (631).

3.5 RESURGENCE OF A LIVING ALMANAC

Perhaps even more striking than the inverse parallel between Silko and Simanca, however, is the resonance between *Almanac* and López Hernández's formulation of poetic contraband. In fact, Silko uses a sprawling narrative form to compose an elaborate, multidimensional border theory within the novel, explicitly voicing the kinds of cultural histories that López's poetry leaves unspoken.¹¹⁰ The old Yaqui smuggler Calabazas declares, for instance, that

We don't believe in boundaries. Borders. Nothing like that. We are here
thousands of years before the first whites. We are here before maps or quit claims.
We know where we belong on this earth. We have always moved freely. North-
south. East-west. We pay no attention to what isn't real. Imaginary lines.
Imaginary minutes and hours. Written law. We recognize none of that. *And we*
carry a great many things back and forth. We don't see any border. We have been
here and this has continued thousands of years. We don't stop. No one stops us.
(216, my emphasis)

Calabazas's use of present perfect rather than the past tense in this passage troubles the linear narrative of westward progress and insists on a continued, ongoing presence that will eventually postdate European hegemony in the "New World." By refusing to acknowledge the legitimacy of

¹¹⁰ This multidimensional character offers a provocative alternative to Walter Mignolo's concept of border thinking by challenging the predominance of a single border over indigenous worlds and highlighting various encounters and disencounters between disparate populations, much like Malohe in *Encuentros en los senderos de Abya Yala*. I will return to this point in more detail below.

the border and insisting on the millennial practice of “carrying things back and forth,” he reinforces a conception of contraband as disregard for the law, reducing its ultimate power in restricting indigenous passage through the borderlands. Zeta, his partner in crime, further explains that

The people had been free to go traveling north and south for a thousand years, traveling as they pleased, then suddenly white priests had announced smuggling as a mortal sin because smuggling was stealing from the government. Zeta wondered if the priests who told the people smuggling was stealing had also told them how they were to feed themselves now that all the fertile land along the rivers had been stolen by white men [...] How could one steal if the government itself was the worst thief? (133)

Through the voice of her characters, Silko effectively critiques the logic of legality itself, questioning the legitimacy of the State on the basis of its own criteria of validity; Zeta affirms that “There was not, and there never had been, a legal government by Europeans anywhere in the Americas. Not by any definition, not even by the Europeans’ own definitions and laws. Because no legal government could be established on stolen land. Because stolen land never had clear title” (133).

Contraband thus constitutes an expedient form of resistance for numerous characters throughout the novel, as they exchange divinatory objects, political strategies, and stories of rebellion. In an essay in *Yellow Woman*, Silko points out that even as a generally sedentary society known for its multistory cliff dwellings of stone and adobe, the Pueblo depend on movement for survival; like the Wayuu, they must respond to the demands of a desert landscape where water is sparse and landmarks are few and far between. Within this context, stories help to

map the terrain; each rock or boulder takes on individual characteristics and personal histories as a method for remembering and conveying important routes to water or information about deer migration (*Yellow Woman* 32). Pueblo migration stories embody a kind of interior journey, a perpetual realization that human beings are different from animal and plant life, though all come from the same source (37). Pueblo archaeologist Tessie Naranjo notes that “With migration, movement is the essential element, not where they stopped or which path they took. Movement is one of the big ideological concepts of Pueblo thought because it is necessary for the perpetuation of life” (248).

It is significant, then, that the Barefoot Hopi, as one of the principal “dream traffickers” in the novel, practices a kind of political nomadism consonant with this migratory ethic: “The Hopi had no permanent location but kept moving—one week in Ontario, the next in Guatemala, then to New Mexico to lead the demonstrators protesting police brutality in Albuquerque” (616). His understanding that humanity comprises part of the landscape rather than standing above or outside it¹¹¹ leads him to the conclusion that human agency and the natural world are inextricably entwined: “what the Hopi talks about is the day all the walls will fall down. Ask him if he means earthquakes or riots and the Hopi smiles and says, ‘Both.’” (617). In this regard, he portrays Mother Earth herself as insurgent, ready to lash back in retaliation against her destroyers. Sensing the earth “grinding and groaning from Alaska to the South Pole,” he asserts that “A gigantic earthquake centered in a populous U.S. city might be just the occasion for a national

¹¹¹ Silko writes in “Interior and Exterior Landscapes” that “So long as human consciousness remains *within* the hills, canyons, cliffs, and the plants, clouds, and the sky, the term *landscape*, as it has entered the English language, is misleading. ‘A Portion of territory the eye can comprehend in a single view’ does not correctly describe the relationship between the human being and his or her surroundings. This assumes the viewer is somehow *outside* or *separate from* the territory she or he surveys. Viewers are as much a part of the landscape as the boulders they stand upon” (*Yellow Woman* 27). This perspective resonates with the Maya motif of breath on the mirror and Donna Haraway’s model of situated knowledges in contesting the supposedly disembodied perspective of a commanding gaze from above.

prison uprising” (618). Weasel Tail, too, hails the earth as a leading protagonist in the indigenous fight for the land:

You think there is no hope for indigenous tribal people here to prevail against the violence and greed of the destroyers? But you forget the inestimable power of the earth and all the forces of the universe. You forget the colliding meteors. You forget the earth’s outrage and the trembling will not stop. Overnight the wealth of nations will be reclaimed by the Earth. (723-24)

Silko thus reverses the Cartesian duality that would separate humans from the natural world, suggesting that natural disasters such as earthquakes and hurricanes, alongside a process of migration rooted to the land, will reduce the power of the destroyers¹¹² over the earth. “[A]lready the great shift of human populations on the continents was under way,” the novel declares, “and there was nothing human beings could do to stop it” (735). This message is arguably less apocalyptic than admonitory in nature; above all, it commands the recognition that humanity is part of the natural world, rather than outside of or above it. As a result, Silko’s story of end-time “demands human intervention to turn the world right side up” (Nandorfy 348). The mass movement of people across borders of all kinds thus symbolizes not only a geographic shift but also an epistemological reevaluation of the nature-civilization dichotomy.

Of all the instances of smuggling and relocation throughout the novel, however, the most paradigmatic is the journey of the almanac that lends the book its title. Inspired by the form of textuality encoded in the sacred Maya screenfold books (known in Náhuatl as *amoxtli*), Silko constructs her own fictional almanac within the confines of the novel, imagining that a fifth codex escaped both the infamous library fires of Diego de Landa and the cold confines of

¹¹² This is the term applied by Silko to all oppressive, bloodthirsty people (indigenous and European alike) who thrive on violence.

museums and archives in Europe.¹¹³ Virginia Bell notes that “Just as human bodies migrate, the manuscript has traveled through time and space (originating in ‘Mexico’), a circuit the reader can only trace by splicing together passages from various sections of the novel” (24). Hence, the remnants of this fragmented intertext are themselves an object of contraband. Sewn into the clothing of four Yaqui children fleeing conscripted labor in the Yucatán, this assortment of local histories, cosmologies and prophecies makes its way across the continent, transforming along the way to reflect the passage of time: some pages are lost in transit, while others are gained through the new caretakers’ personal additions.

Rather than an eternally fixed document enclosed in glass and steel, this manuscript painted on horse gut parchment grows and shrinks like a living organism. Silko suggests that less important than the flawless preservation of this text is its ability to sustain and protect those who believe in it; “The people knew that even if part of their almanac survived, they as a people would return someday” (246). When faced with the threat of starvation, one of the four Yaqui children charged with its protection secretly tosses it into a pot of diluted broth made from meager roots and bulbs. Upon making contact with the boiling water,

The thin, brittle page gradually began to change. Brownish ink rose in clouds. Outlines of the letters smeared and the page began to glisten, and brittle, curled edges swelled fat and spread until the top of the stew pot was nearly covered with a section of horse stomach. Well, it was a wonderful stew. They lived on it for days and days [...] (249)

¹¹³ The four Maya codices known to have escape destruction in Diego de Landa’s fires in 1562 are currently housed in Paris, Dresden, Madrid, and Florence, though Silko does not mention the latter. By contrast, quite a few Aztec screenfolds survived the colonial period. However, Silko links the Almanac of the Dead specifically to the Maya codices through the migration of the Yaqui from the Yucatán to Arizona. See p. 136.

This single page of the book thus allows three of the children to escape from the starving old woman who was secretly plotting to kill and eat them. Though the youngest girl is not so lucky, Yoeme explains that “The first night, if the eldest had not sacrificed a page from the book, that crippled woman would have murdered them all right then, while the children were weak from hunger and the longer journey” (253). The story of the Yaqui children thus lends credence and substance to Yoeme’s claim that “the almanac had living power within it, a power that would bring all the tribal people of the Americas together to retake the land” (569).

It is also significant that, despite its Maya origins, this text does not belong to any tribe or nation in particular; even the white ex-cocaine addict Seese interpolates her own personal narrative concerning the search for her abducted son. As an object of contraband, the almanac of the dead circulates in numerous different spaces and thrives in multiple formats and languages—including transcription via word processor in the hands of Lecha and Seese. Moreover, by placing a history of forced relocation at the center of the novel, Silko binds the Yucatán to Tucson through the framework of an indigenous diaspora. The Yaqui’s deportation from Sonora to southern Mexico as forced laborers towards the end of the Porfiriato and their subsequent dispersal across a wide swath of territory from southern Mexico to the southwestern U.S. renders their story ripe material for Silko’s reflection on migration and inter-tribal communication.

Historian Edward Spicer notes that the Yaqui are

the most widely scattered native people of North America, extending, as a result of forced dispersal, from the henequen plantations of lowland Yucatán among the Maya Indians to the barrios of southern California among the urbanite Anglo-Americans of Los Angeles. Not even the Cherokees, whose deportation in 1835

from Georgia to Oklahoma had initiated a scattering over the United States, were so widely dispersed. (158)

By the time of the Mexican Revolution, they had become “a ‘wandering tribe,’ a people in exile, burning eternal candles to a lost ideal of a homeland” (Hu-DeHart 202). As a result of the Maya Caste War as well as the Yaqui’s own tendencies toward rebellion, their dislocation from their homeland became a symbol of the State’s power to control and coerce movement not only across its borders, but also through the deportation of racialized bodies from one periphery to another.

This experience of conscripted labor thus lends a different twist to the Wayuu’s own history of smuggling from the 18th century to the present; in this case, travel across regional and national boundaries serves as a means of restricting indigenous autonomy, rather than sustaining it. As Scott Richard Lyons puts it, “Removal is to migration what rape is to sex” (8). And yet, like the Wayuu, the Yaqui’s adaptability afforded them a distinctive capacity to preserve their sense of self in the face of change and adversity (Hu-DeHart 3-4). The diasporic identity of this group thus renders them a particularly effective vehicle for Silko’s reflection on the possibilities for a borderless homeland. By placing the almanac in the hands of Yaqui refugees, she reinforces a model of textuality based on fluidity and adaptability. After all, this object of contraband, like its smugglers, has survived precisely because of its flexibility. The almanac thus embodies a model of cultural exchange predicated not on the historically “accurate” recuperation of the past but rather on a process of constant transformation in dialogue with indigenous pre-Columbian and colonial roots as well as the present.

These connections between migration, text, and intertext allow Silko to trouble both essentialism and assimilation as the predominant idioms for framing indigenous identity. As a corollary to the Army of Justice and Redistribution’s struggle to reclaim stolen land, for instance,

Angelita “la Escapía” strives to reappropriate indigenous knowledge as part of the process of decolonization. Where some see a form of indoctrination in her “love affair” with Marx, Angelita claims the exact opposite: she was not co-opted by Marxist ideology, it was Marx who pilfered the notion of egalitarian communism from Native American societies.¹¹⁴ Angelita thus questions the directionality of cultural exchange through the colonial enterprise by claiming that communism never belonged to Marx, or to Western thought, to begin with. As much as she feels that he was onto something important—something often forgotten by contemporary natives themselves—, La Escapía also suggests that the West got communism wrong. “Poor Engels and Marx!” she thinks to herself:

They had been so close, but they hadn’t quite got it. They had been on the right track with the readings on Native American communal economies and cultures. For Europeans, they had been far ahead of their time; they had been close, but they still hadn’t got it quite right. They had not understood that the earth was mother to all beings, and they had not understood anything about the spirit beings.

(749)

In other words, Angelita’s obsession with Marx does not signal the incorporation, or even appropriation, of European thought, but rather the recuperation of its Native American roots.

¹¹⁴ “Later when enemies in the villages, people related to her by clan or marriage, accused La Escapía of being a ‘communist,’ she let them have it. Didn’t they know where Karl Marx got his notions of egalitarian communism? ‘From here,’ La Escapía had said, ‘Marx stole his ideas from us, the Native Americans.’” (310-11). The Native American conception of communitarian societies made their way to Karl Marx through Lewis H. Morgan’s *Ancient Society* (1877), in particular his descriptions of the matrilineal structure of Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) society. Although Marx died before he could publish his reflections on the subject, he left behind a series of notebooks that served as the inspiration for Engels’s *Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State* (1884), which juxtaposes early human kinship with the modern familial structure. See Franklin Rosemont, “Karl Marx and the Iroquois” (1992). For more on *Almanac of the Dead*’s appraisal of Marxism, see Tamara Teale, “The Silko Road from Chiapas or Why Native Americans Cannot Be Marxists” (1998).

In this sense, La Escapía's simultaneously pre- and post-Marxist philosophy parallels Silko's gesture of using maps against their mapmakers (Hunt 260), or of using a Western literary form against the lettered city. Drawing on prophetic Mayan codices and hieroglyphic writing, Silko provocatively repurposes and expropriates a Western literary genre by infusing the novel with a different logic of textuality based on the almanac as living text. Yet in doing so, she also troubles Eurocentric genealogies and teleologies of the novelistic form; her insistence on the indigenous origins of Marxism implicitly invites a reflection on the development of the genre of the novel as well. Suggestively, Creek-Cherokee scholar Craig Womack proposes that

For all we know, Indians may have even contributed something to the rise of the novel rather than simply being victims of the novel. Here I am thinking of the fact that *Don Quixote*, usually cited as the first novel, was published a century after the 'discovery' of the 'New' World. It is not impossible that exploration had an effect on the rise of the European novel. (119)

Through her appeal to the Mayan codices, Silko enacts a provocative textual encounter between two distinct forms of textuality that simultaneously troubles the presumed boundaries between them. Joni Adamson observes that "Silko weaves elements of the most ancient 'American' literature—the Mayan almanacs—into her novel, thereby rejecting the notion of a renaissance in American Indian writing and insisting that indigenous peoples have been writing and articulating their cultures and beliefs for hundreds and even thousands of years" (133). At the same time, however, I would argue that Silko's almanac epitomizes the process of cultural revitalization through its creative infusion of ancient traditions and modern innovations. It illustrates the newness of the not-new and the continual reinvention of native cultures, particularly as a response to the threat of extinction through territorial and cultural dispersion.

Silko's insistence on the reinsertion of cosmology into the Marxist equation also plays a part in her efforts to "raise hell with linear time" ("Past" 103) by displacing Marx's teleological dream of progress with a different model capable of reactivating the past in the present. Like Luis de Lión, she uses the fragmented, cyclical nature of the codices as a structuring mechanism. In both cases, the end result of this textual encounter is not a harmonious fusion in the form of narrative transculturation; instead, the prevalence of contraband in *Almanac of the Dead* points to a different conception of cultural encounter predicated on a radical affirmation of presence. In response to the presumption that indigenous peoples' only hope for survival is through transculturation and assimilation—as Ángel Rama famously proclaimed¹¹⁵—, Silko inverts the formula, declaring the imminent extinction of "all things European" in the Americas. Her use of the novelistic form thus represents a kind of disruptive in-surgence or militant take-over that proposes to put European goods and practices at the service of indigenous survivance. However, by performing a similar operation on the Maya codices, she also offers a critical perspective on indigeneity itself, by challenging the essentialist underpinnings of any political project predicated on the demarcation of boundaries and the production of cultural "authenticity."

¹¹⁵ When asked in an interview whether there was room for hope for indigenous culture, Rama responded: "Sin duda, pero no de la cultura indígena sino de la cultura mestiza, porque la cultura india ya no tenía sentido. Lo que él [Arguedas] comprendió es que efectivamente la salida era esa barrosa salida del mestizaje. Ese zigzagueante, y muchas veces sucio camino, como la vida misma, pero que era mucho más rico en posibilidades" (Díaz 32).

3.6 INDIGENEITY BEYOND BORDERS?

The differences in style and form among Simanca, López, and Silko are significant, ranging from a seven-page short story and nine-page collection of short poems (all eighteen lines or less) to a sprawling 763-page novel of epic proportions. Yet like López, Silko conveys a fluid territory shaped not by its borders but by the shared and intersecting paths carved on the face of the earth like veins—or, like hoofprints stamped in the mud, a living writing traced in ritual crossings. Nightmare of the lettered city, these literary bandits traffic dreams between North and South, propagate savage thought, and cultivate aberrant uses of the written word. In turn, their alternative routes through Abya Yala open the space for an alternative literature opposed, external, and prior to the codes of the lettered city.¹¹⁶

This itinerant ethic undoubtedly resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of nomadology; indeed, their preference for uncodified, non-hierarchical modes of thought reflects a decolonizing push towards deconstructing oppressive mechanisms in society. Moreover, Deleuze and Guattari's transposition from the concrete antagonism of war machine and State apparatus to the abstract realm of nomadology and State thought can be useful in highlighting the connections between indigenous struggles for land rights and epistemic decolonization. Yet

¹¹⁶ I refer here to Juan Pablo Dabove's *Nightmares of the Lettered City: Banditry and Literature in Latin America, 1816-1929*, which examines how the lettered city deployed the trope of the bandit in order to assuage its own internal conflicts, anxieties, and desires. In this case, however, the bandit is more than a mere subject of discourse; by laying claim to authorial agency, López, Silko, and other insurgent poets perform acts of resistance through the process of writing itself, challenging the elitist logic of texts like *Facundo* and *Doña Bárbara* by subverting the sociopolitical order that they encode.

Francophone scholar Christopher Miller argues that it is precisely in the space between the practical and metaphorical valences of nomadism that their argument loses traction, particularly in post-colonial contexts where nationalism and identity politics constitute key idioms of struggle.¹¹⁷ For Miller, the almost categorical preference for non-categorical thinking in *A Thousand Plateaus* is ultimately unable to account for anticolonial struggles predicated on the articulation of difference and the defensive insistence on boundaries between native and non-native worlds. After all, as we saw in chapter two, the so-called “Buckskin Curtain” may serve as a useful demarcation of difference, despite its colonialist and racist origins.

What might it mean, then, to frame Amerindian literature primarily in terms of transgression and deterritorialization? Since indigenous conceptions of sovereignty profess a profound connection to place and land, Quechua-American critic Sandy Grande maintains that the framework of postmodernism has primarily served the interests of whitestream America; in spite of its ‘democratic’ promise, “its ludic theories of identity fail to provide indigenous communities the theoretical grounding for asserting their claims as colonized peoples” (112). As a result, she argues that ostensibly liberatory concepts such as circulation, mobility, diversity, and mixture are in fact part of the “fundamental lexicon of Western imperialism” (117). Hardt and Negri, too, note that

Many of the concepts dear to postmodernists and postcolonialism find a perfect correspondence in the current ideology of corporate capital and the world market. [...] Trade brings differences together and the more the merrier! Difference (of commodities, populations, cultures, and so forth) seems to multiply infinitely in

¹¹⁷ See the introduction and chapter six of *Nationalists and Nomads: Essays on Francophone African Literature and Culture* (1998).

the world market, which attacks nothing more violently than fixed boundaries: it overwhelms any binary division with its infinite multiplicities. (150)

Paradoxically, the increasing connections between indigenous social movements are simultaneously facilitated and threatened by globalization: the mechanism by which they unite is also the primary impetus for their shared struggle. The apparently sudden renaissance of indigenous cultures in recent decades is arguably an act of survival in response to the homogenizing force of multinational capitalism, which appears to privilege difference while simultaneously stripping it of any radical potentiality.¹¹⁸ It is therefore important to note that the transnational turn among indigenous movements in recent years, while promising, does not necessarily challenge the logic of late capitalism and global modernity. Undoubtedly, essentialist politics have contradictions and pitfalls of their own; yet Miller maintains that “Neither the identitarian nor the nomadological mode of thought has a monopoly on truth or justice” (7). After all, “rhizomes can colonize just as well as trees” (208).

In short, border making and border breaking can both be used in the service of colonialism, or they can provide the tools for struggle against it. In the face of constant expropriation and forced removal, the struggle for land rights and tribal sovereignty is a crucial counterpart to pan-Indian affiliations and border crossings. As a result of constant violations of treaty agreements, Native American activists in the U.S. have repeatedly invoked the rule of law in order to protect themselves against outside intrusions and further misappropriations. American Indian nations thus depend on federal authorization and enforcement of the reservation system to protect them not only from non-native individuals and corporations but also, paradoxically, from the government itself. In this regard, reservation boundaries serve as a stark reminder of the

¹¹⁸ See Slavoj Žižek, “Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism” (1997).

misappropriation of indigenous homelands, yet they also provide a defensive mechanism for protection against further encroachment. In other words, it matters immensely who is drawing borders or transgressing them, for what purposes, and at what cost. The foil to contraband is the Trail of Tears, and Indian removal counters nomadism as a colonialist form of deterritorialization.

The context of postmodernism and multinational capitalism thus raises pressing questions regarding the viability of a contemporary political project predicated on the aspiration for “a world without borders.” For instance, Silko’s millennial, prophetic vision of a continental uprising may run the risk of obscuring some of the more immediate exigencies of indigenous land claims that rely on the affirmation of reservation boundaries. It may be for this reason that Elizabeth Cook-Lynn launched her famous critique against *Almanac of the Dead*, claiming that it is not sufficiently nationalistic, in the sense of supporting the struggle of specific Native American tribes for political sovereignty based on treaty rights. Cook-Lynn writes that “*Almanac of the Dead* engages in and insists upon the nationalist’s approach to historical events” yet at the same time it “fails in this nationalistic approach, since it does not take into account the specific kind of tribal/nation status of the original occupants of this continent. There is no apparatus that allows the tribally specific treaty-status paradigm to be realized either in Silko’s fiction or in the pan-Indian approach to history” (93). Indeed, as numerous scholars have pointed out, Silko’s pan-Indian and pan-subaltern vision often has the unfortunate effect of homogenizing different populations, as evidenced by her tendency to lump all of Africa together, assuming that the entire continent worships the same set of gods.

At the same time, however, the international scope of the novel also points out the problems with developing conceptions of indigenous sovereignty solely on the basis of treaties

and federal recognition; her depictions of border crossings challenge the logic of federal recognition by questioning the legitimacy of State power. Silko's critique arguably does not deny the existence of borders in contemporary society; on the contrary, she protests their ever more oppressive impact on indigenous communities. John Muthyala argues that, far from simply repeating the common assertion that the neoliberal-era State is in decline, Silko protests the violent effect that States continue to exert over the indigenous communities positioned at their internal and external borders. He indicates that "In mapping an alternative, tribal historiography, the novel avoids this teleological impulse," particularly by calling attention to the histories of dispossession and separatism that continue to define the Yaqui experience even at the end of the 20th century (368).

Perhaps most paradigmatically, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has deteriorated the economic autonomy of small-scale farmers in Mexico and led to the inundation of migrant workers to the United States. In an essay titled "The Border Patrol State," Silko emphasizes that this phenomenon has led to tightening of national boundaries, portending the erection of an American avatar of the Berlin Wall and producing a sharp increase in the smuggling of laborers across the border (*Yellow Woman* 121-22). In this particular case, neoliberal policies do not weaken the State and national boundaries so much as render their presence ever more intrusive in indigenous lives. By contrasting the State's complicity in drug trafficking with subaltern practices of lateral exchange, Silko strives to open a space for an alternative political agenda that might use the structure of multinational capitalism against itself—much like the organizers of the International Healers' Convention—in order to construct a form of globalization from below. In their attempt to bypass the nation-State, indigenous movements thus advocate the implementation of a global institutional and legal framework

predicated upon indigenous epistemological criteria for the reclamation of territorial and cultural rights.

As a result, I would argue that it is absolutely essential to understand contraband not only in terms of appropriation and border crossing but also as an exercise in autonomy that disregards the imposition of foreign law and societal values. Of López's two complementary modes of bartering in *Contrabando sueños* and *Encuentros*, perhaps the more interesting in political terms is the latter, as it challenges the primacy of the *alijuna* world as the Wayuu's primary interlocutor. In other words, just as important as how emergent Amerindian writing relates to and transforms the existing sphere of World Literature is the question of how it interacts with native communities themselves and their own preestablished artistic and intellectual registers. In this regard, the nationalist approach to *Almanac of the Dead* also illustrates an undesirable consequence of identifying the borderlands as a privileged locus of enunciation. In *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, Craig Womack expresses some discomfort with Gloria Anzaldúa's configuration of the borderlands, protesting that even some Indian mixed-bloods may self-identify "as Indians rather than hybrids, socializing with Indian people *and viewing themselves in the center, rather than at the periphery, of Indian worlds*" (136, my emphasis). That is, what if their objective is not to *fronterizar* modern/colonial thinking but rather to *centralizar* their own peripheralized traditions? Womack virulently objects to the assumption that Amerindian intellectuals must dedicate themselves first and foremost to subverting Eurocentric thought:

Did the Creator issue an edict I missed, a worldwide ruling that every Indian critic is born for the express purpose of challenging Eurocentric discourse? What is this if not a line in the sand about the right and wrong way to do Native Criticism? What if someone like me comes along, too dumb to know about the universal law

that all Indian critics must challenge Eurocentric discourse, and I decide I want to do something else like try to get Creek people excited about Creek literature or participate in a discussion about how literature might play some role in community building at home? If I am not speaking about the non-Indian world does that mean I am not saying anything? Can Native scholarship become something other than a defensive presentation geared toward non-Indians? Can one also assume the need to challenge *Indians* and *Indian* discourse, to question commonly held assumptions in the Indian world? (100-1)

By framing indigenous nationalisms as a form of “gathering from within” (Brooks 229) rather than dividing, opposing, and excluding, Weaver, Womack, and Warrior emphasize the use value of literature and literary criticism in communitarian cultural “upbuilding” (6), proposing a productive alternative to the 19th century model of imagined communities as described by Benedict Anderson.

Their critical framework thus serves as a reminder that while contemporary indigenous literature represents a new phenomenon in many ways, it also emerges out of particular cultural, epistemological, and spiritual traditions. Like Western literature, indigenous poetics is heavily codified and structured by complex linguistic and macrosymbolic forms, though of course in very different terms than the dominant strains of literature. Accordingly, critical reflections on the function of indigenous literature must necessarily attend to the ways in which native communities interact with their own artistic traditions and how these factors relate to their struggle for intellectual and political sovereignty.

In this regard, the framework of American Indian literary nationalism poses a challenge to Walter Mignolo’s concept of *border thinking*, as it sidesteps the Western/non-Western (or

Euro-American/indigenous) dichotomy that arguably underpins his conception of the colonial difference. The problem with this concept, as Catherine Walsh has argued, is that it tends to relate all thought back to the West, even if it does so through a sense of opposition or critique (“Introducción” 29). It thus ends up being partly Eurocentric, despite Mignolo’s declared intentions. The examples that he provides of “border thinkers” throughout *Local Histories/Global Designs* seem to privilege a certain kind of subject or discourse that has the effect of contaminating or, at least, “borderizing” dominant Western thought. Mignolo’s reading of the ways in which intellectuals such as Anzaldúa, Marcos, and Du Bois manipulate the conflictive intersection between dominant and subjugated forms of knowledge is productive, yet his framing of the concept as a whole ultimately replicates a logic of Occidentalism that, to borrow a phrase from José Rabasa, “inevitably harnesses the identity of the non-West to the subversion, transculturation, and appropriation of the West” (98). Even if Occidentalism has served as “an enabling mode of resisting Western hegemonies,” Rabasa notes, “there is no reason why we should limit the identities of West and non-West alike to conceptual frames in which each defines itself in opposition to the other” (98). As Walsh suggests, the concept becomes more interesting if we conceive of multiple borders, such that Silko’s juxtaposition of Maya and Pueblo cosmologies in *Almanac of the Dead* or López’s journey to Mapuche, Nahua, and Kogui territories also constitute instances of border thinking, by producing a kind of poetic knowledge at the juncture of two or more indigenous systems of thought.

I propose, therefore, that emphasizing contraband as a modality of insurgency can help to challenge the binary sense of opposition implied in the concept of “resistance” and even in “insurgency” itself. Understanding contraband as a kind of disregard for the law through the continuation of millennial indigenous practices can help to avoid the pitfalls of Occidentalism

understandings of indigenous struggles. Additionally, emphasizing poetics as part of the equation leaves room for the plurality of meanings and the coexistence of complementary, or even contradictory, modes of insurgency. Perhaps it is most productive, therefore, to think of *poeticizing insurgency* as an act of pushing the term to its limits to reveal what kinds of assumptions it contains, to explore the limitations and potentialities of poetic language and the concrete obstacles that social movements face, and to challenge the ways in which we understand resistance and anticolonial struggle. Insurgent poetics would thus comprise a constant push and pull, a complex interplay of positionalities in flux between centrality and periphery.

Resemanticizing this term would not simply constitute an academic ruse to make it do the work that we want it to do, or even a mere gesture for the sake of pluralizing. Instead, I suggest that we might think of pushing the term ‘insurgency’ to its own limits as a means of reflecting upon the challenges that indigenous movements face in the context of diverse iterations of coloniality and facilitating a more polysemic understanding of the term capable of capturing multiple, even conflicting, forms of political action and representation. This critical gesture demands an exploration of the ex-centric and centripetal force of insurgency as an expansive, proliferating gesture that challenges the parameters of existing boundaries and systems of thought and knowledge, as well as movements’ centrifugal turn in towards the community in an act of self-reconstitution and critique. In effect, it requires understanding Amerindian subjects as entities in constant motion that circulate in a global society, inhabit and transgress the boundaries imposed by modern/colonial reason, and appropriate foreign cultural elements without ever ceasing to be indigenous.

CHAPTER FOUR

VISIONS OF THE FUTURE PRESENT: REPROGRAMMING *INDIGENISMO*

Cuando la Historia duerme, habla en sueños: en la frente del pueblo dormido el poema es una constelación de sangre. Cuando la Historia despierta, la imagen se hace acto, acontece el poema: la poesía entra en acción.

—Octavio Paz

4.1 MOVING FORWARD TO THE ANCIENT FUTURE

In the now classic *Time and the Other* (1983), Johannes Fabian advances his argument that Western anthropology—and much of Western philosophy as a whole—is built on the assumption that non-Western peoples are distant not only in space but also in time. For Fabian, the denial of coevalness is intimately linked to the logic of visualism, which he defines as “a cultural, ideological bias toward vision as the ‘noblest sense’ and toward geometry qua graphic-spatial

conceptualization as the most ‘exact’ way of communicating knowledge” (106). The emergence of capitalism, as we well know, went hand in hand with colonialist-imperialist expansion; Western States needed space to occupy and resources to extract (143-44). He adds, however, that “More profoundly and problematically, they required Time to accommodate the schemes of a one-way history: progress, development, modernity (and their negative mirror images: stagnation, underdevelopment, tradition). In short, *geopolitics* has its ideological foundations in *chronopolitics*” (144).

Part of the epistemic violence of coloniality, to be sure, derives from the denial of history to indigenous peoples and the assumption that today’s ‘Indians’ are mere relics from the past destined to extinction. In an essay titled “Indigenous Peoples’ History (by Whom and for Whom?),” Zapotec poet Víctor de la Cruz points out that “Eurocentrism relegated the indigenous peoples’ past to the distant and poetic zone of myth, while the West ascended to the apex of wisdom to show humanity the road that all earthly peoples must follow in order to enter the channel of universal history, where civilized nations march within the rapid and irreversible currents of progress” (29). For Rolando Vásquez, modern/colonial invisibility is closely related to the politics of time: temporal discrimination renders invisible all that does not belong to modern temporality, destroying memories of resistance and consigning non-modern knowledges to oblivion (“Modernity, Coloniality, and Visibility” 2.2). Indigenous protests against imposed invisibility thus go hand in hand with conceptual and territorial remapping and alternative forms of historiography predicated on a non-modern understanding of time. So if the metaphor of contraband offers a spatial conception of indigenous literature, then what might we say are its temporal dimensions? What, in other words, are the chronopolitics of insurgent poetics?

For many indigenous scholars and activists, the simultaneously neoteric and archaic quality of contemporary insurgency is an expression of the cyclicity of space and time; the phenomenon of cultural revitalization thus represents the beginning of a new era in indigenous history marked by the resurgence of the past. From a Nahua perspective, for instance, Natalio Hernández writes that

Para los pueblos indígenas de América, 1992 significó el final de un proceso y el inicio de una nueva era: el surgimiento de un tiempo nuevo. Este fenómeno se desarrolló en los últimos años, fundamentalmente, a través del movimiento continental 500 años de resistencia india. [...] El llanto el dolor y el coraje contenido por siglos explotó y trascendió hacia los diferentes rumbos del continente para empezar a construir una nueva esperanza, un nuevo porvenir. Se inauguró así una nueva etapa del movimiento indígena que, dicho poéticamente, hizo nacer un nuevo sol, un nuevo amanecer. (137)

As we have seen, the Andean counterpart to this interpretation appeals to the concept of *pachakuti*: a world reversal or cosmic transformation. Much like the Maya conception of time based on the *Cholq'ij* or calendar count, the Aymara model is spiral rather than linear in orientation, predicated on the alternation of different *pachas*, or divisions of time and space. One of these *pachas*, known as the age of *awqa* or *pachakuti*, connotes a period of violent conflict and radical change.¹¹⁹ As such, it represents the instance where a *kuti*, or periodic, temporary inversion, gives way to a complete overturning of space and time. Closely related is the concept of *nayrapacha*, which posits that the past lies in front of us, because it is known (*nayra*, or “past,” refers to eyes and sight, as well as something that is “in front”), whereas the future is

¹¹⁹ See Harris and Bouysse-Cassagne pp. 237-48.

unknown so it lies behind us, where we cannot see. Together, both concepts denote an inversion where the past becomes the future and the last come first. “Un pasado capaz de renovar el futuro, de revertir la situación vivida,” writes Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui: “¿No es ésta la aspiración compartida actualmente por muchos movimientos indígenas de todas las latitudes que postulan la vigencia de la cultura de sus ancestros en el mundo contemporáneo? (“Raíz” 44).

The most infamous *pachakuti*, of course, was the Spanish Conquest and the end of the Inca Empire; the death of Atahualpa as the last Sapa Inca entailed a period of radical disintegration of Tahuantinsuyu characterized by war, destruction and the instauration of a new form of society altogether. Yet by its very nature, this upheaval portends another, where the old gods would return and the modern/colonial world order would give way to a different reality. For many Quechua and Aymara, the current turmoil in Bolivia and the spread of indigenous social movements throughout Abya Yala thus indicate that we have entered an era of *pachakuti*. What the new “world order” might look like remains to be seen, yet the potential exists for revolution, in the emancipatory sense of the term.

I have argued thus far that the emergence of indigenous literature itself represents a transformative event that challenges preexisting literary models and displaces the borders of the lettered city. As Miguel Rocha puts it, “El pachakuti se ha realizado, realiza y está realizando al transformar la escritura alfabética fonética de caracteres latinos, la cual irrumpió violentamente desde la llegada de Colón, en una tecnología cultural ‘propia’ al servicio de las comunidades” (118-19). Yet if we are in times of an insurrection of subjugated knowledges, that process should entail not only an in-surgence of indigenous authors into the space of the lettered city but also the irruption of indigenous knowledges into literary texts produced by *q’aras*, or non-natives. So how does the widespread emergence of Amerindian literature affect the form and function of

indigenismo, and how are we to read contemporary texts by mestizo authors that consciously and substantively engage with indigenous philosophies? More precisely, how do these authors conceptualize the current process of epistemic and political transformation from their own respective positions in society?

The objectives of this chapter, then, are twofold: first, to consider the temporal dimensions of insurgent poetics as an act of *visualización*, and second, to examine the potential effects of that insurgence by highlighting points of dialogue between native and non-native authors. In order to do so, I turn to two novels published in Bolivia during the past decade: *Cuando Sara Chura despierte* (2003) by Juan Pablo Piñeiro, which depicts the city of La Paz on the eve of its largest and most important annual festival, and Alison Spedding's *De cuando en cuando Saturnina* (2004), which fuses science fiction, anarcofeminism and Aymara political philosophy in a futuristic setting of radical decolonization. I argue that both of these texts problematize the historical construction of indigeneity in a productive way; more decolonial than *indigenista* in orientation, they provocatively destabilize fixed, stagnant categories and engage indigenous ways of inhabiting the world in new and unexpected ways. No longer concerned with acts of ventriloquism, or even with representing indigenous experiences to the outside world, they strive instead to privilege local forms of knowledge over modern/colonial 'rational' thought and official history. Through the realm of literature, moreover, both authors elaborate poetic theories of insurgency that defy the conventional methods of sociological inquiry and posit fiction as a crucial space for envisioning change.

Before turning to the novels at hand, however, a few clarifications on indigenous temporalities are in order. As Scott Richard Lyons has pointed out, it is commonplace at this point—and somewhat simplistic—to say that Indian time is intrinsically circular, in opposition to

the Western model. Both Western and non-Western societies have linear and non-linear understandings of history, he argues; the primary difference lies in the particular meanings and values invested in each (9).¹²⁰ That said, it is also true that these two models correspond to strikingly different civilizational frameworks and conceptions of political change. Most notably, Amerindian movements' ways of envisioning the future diverge from the modern dream of progress; instead, they profess an active engagement with the past as an active force that intervenes in and acts upon the present and future.¹²¹ Jeff Conant notes that

Rather than an affinity for 'progress,' the linear, evolutionary concept that is one of the predominant mythic underpinnings of Western industrial society, the Mayan people of Chiapas have a sense of history that celebrates the past, that welcomes the emergence of eternity into time's fabric, and that understands that the past and the future are like two ends of a woven strand in a *huipil*: if you tug on either end, you feel the pull. (98)

Illustrative of this difference in perspective is Angelita's appraisal of Marx in *Almanac of the Dead*. As we saw in chapter three, Angelita maintains that the material demands of indigenous movements resonate with Marx's own call to political action, yet they also introduce significant differences. For one thing, she notes, "Marxists don't want to give Indian land back" (519); conceived of as a proletarian revolution, Marxism finds itself at odds with the territorial demands

¹²⁰ Lyons's primary objection is that shape is a characteristic of space, not time. Indeed, the insistence upon finding an accurate visual metaphor for different conceptions of time may constitute yet another example of the visualism that Fabian critiques: we cannot properly grasp the concept unless we can somehow "see" it. However, in some indigenous worldviews, this connection may not be entirely off the mark; the Andean concept of *pacha*, for instance, has spacial as well as temporal dimensions, as space and time are closely interrelated.

¹²¹ For instance, the Andean principle of *suma qamaña* (Aymara) or *suma causay* (Quechua) proposes an alternative developmental model predicated on this opposition to the notion of progress. According to this framework, Amerindian movements respond not to the need to *live better* but rather to *live well*. *Suma qamaña* thus problematizes not only the linear conception of progress but also the mindset of capitalist development.

of Amerindian communities faced with the ongoing effects of colonization and dispossession.¹²² Another fundamental difference, however, lies in the domain of temporality: “Marx had understood stories are alive with the energy words generate” but he did not understand that “the power of the stories belonged to the spirits of the dead” (520, 521). By emphasizing the continuing presence of ancestral spirits as an oversight in Marx’s works, Angelita subtly questions his vision of the future. After all, Marx’s conception of revolution was through-and-through a *sueño moderno*, projecting a logical progression from feudalism through capitalism and on to communism as the end goal. As such, it perceived peasants’ relation to the past as conservative and as an obstacle in the path toward revolution.

In many ways, Don Quixote might appear to represent a counterexample to this mentality. In fact, he constitutes a key reference point—even a political role model—for Subcomandante Marcos, who maintains that “*Don Quixote* is the best book out there on political theory” (“Marcos Speaks” 189). Does not his *locura*, after all, and therefore his very identity as Don Quixote (and not Alonso Quijano), derive from the memory of an idyllic past and an attempt to revive it through his own actions and battles throughout the Spanish countryside? Does he not represent a certain *sueño antimoderno* in resistance to the notion of progress? Yet the crux of the *Quixote* arguably lies in its intended satirical function, such that the novel itself projects a kind of *sueño moderno*, while Don Quixote’s insanity represents a *contrasueño*¹²³ to Cervantes’s own position. In the last chapter, Don Quixote “wakes up” and returns to his former, rational self as Alonso Quijano, rooted in the present and distanced from the anachronisms of chivalry and knight errancy. In this sense, the novel’s closing image implicitly suggests the need

¹²² This, of course, was Mariátegui’s main critique of Western Marxism in his *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (1928).

¹²³ I borrow this term from a poetry collection by Elicura Chihuailaf, titled *De sueños azules y contrasueños* (2000).

to leave that very past behind—to abandon memories of a lost “utopia” prior and external to modernity—and to embrace the present and, with it, the values of modernity itself.¹²⁴

In contrast, indigenous chronopolitics open the possibility of reactivating the past in the present as a viable response to the demands of modern society. As I argued in chapter two, this would entail not only forging new spaces to include previously silenced voices and obscured faces but also, more importantly, disrupting the Eurocentric logic and exercise of power that produced that invisibility to begin with. In effect, insurgency must visualize and materialize other possible realities. Yet that process of visualization, as part of a larger project of revitalization, also implies an active engagement with the past, both as a source of non-modern rationalities and as a reminder of the lasting effects of colonialism in contemporary society. In *Recado confidencial a los chilenos*, Elicura Chihuailaf explains that

El futuro, para nosotros es parte inseparable de la totalidad del espíritu de la Tierra y, por lo tanto, del ser humano. Y se completa de manera dinámica con el pasado, pero desde un esencial estar (continuar) en el presente, del que depende lo que podamos desear y de lo que nos sea posible hacer en este mundo. (64)

While the indigenous model may retain certain utopic elements, then, it also implies perceiving its anchorage in the past not as a form of *locura* but rather as another kind of logic that modernity/coloniality is incapable of perceiving as such. In this sense, we might read the tragedy that Subcomandante Marcos identifies in Don Quixote’s “return to reality” as a sign of the violence of the modern/colonial imposition of a single Reason over others: “La derrota de la

¹²⁴ That said, however, the fact that this paradox is present in the very text considered as the foundation of modernity in novel form suggests a line of flight already present within modernity itself. In other words, if modernity has constituted itself through the negation of the non-modern—a phenomenon that underlies the inextricable link between modernity and coloniality—then the non-modern is in fact present in modernity through its negation and exclusion.

locura, la imposición de la sensatez y la prudencia, es lo más doloroso de este libro. Esto siempre lo quisimos evitar: decir que estuvimos locos, que entrábamos al aro otra vez y que nos íbamos a poner cuerdos. Teníamos que mantenernos en esta locura hasta el último momento” (*Yo, Marcos* 21-22). It is in that spirit of *locura* that we now turn to *Cuando Sara Chura despierte*.

4.2 ENTRADA OF THE MULTIPLE-REAL

It is the evening of June 13, 2003, and La Paz teems with activity as its inhabitants prepare for the Entrada del Gran Poder, set to take place the following day:

[...] en el aire ya se percibía un ligero tufo de cerveza que anunciaba la fiesta del día siguiente y la resaca incandescente de toda la semana. Miles de bailarines ultimaban los detalles de su vestimenta junto a los bordadores que habían trabajado sin parar desde el mes de mayo. (15)

In his most recent role as *pajpacu*—an Aymara street vendor and illusionist particular to La Paz—César Amato has decided to become a cold case detective, specializing in unsolved mysteries. Sara Chura, a semi-divine figure more than three meters in height, adorned with twelve *pollera* skirts for the festival’s dances, commends him with a special mission: to find the Breathing Cadaver and make him disappear so that she can awaken. This search leads César to encounters with various characters throughout the city, from the quixotic creator of useless inventions, Don Falsoafán, and his secretary Puntocom, to a professional stand-in for funeral

cadavers (*cadáver postizo*) and a presidential candidate whose platform consists of the elimination of alcohol through its widespread consumption.

In the context of the Entrada, this peculiar cast of *paceños* conveys an ambiguous, heterogeneous city composed of discordant practices and cultural logics. From within a Catholic festival originally dedicated to a sacred image of the three “faces” of the trinity¹²⁵ emerges a drunken celebration of Aymara-Quechua cultural and religious practices: “Bailar, para los devotos, era adorar al Señor del Gran Poder; para los impíos, era ejercer una profunda libertad que brotaba de la misma fiesta” (15). The festival thus illustrates the coexistence of conflicting meanings and contradictory interpretations of a shared cultural practice. As Sara Chura herself explains, “siempre existen varias versiones de cada cosa en este mundo” (129). Playing off the multiple faces of the Señor del Gran Poder and the adornment of elaborate costumes for the festival dances, Piñeiro’s novel embodies a logic anchored in indetermination and multiple states of being.

Perhaps most illustrative of this outlook is the debate between a drunken Aymara and a talking plate of *charquekán*, who casts himself as Western and insists that Juan Chusa call him Jerky. The humoristic tone of this scene is clear: the elevated and arrogant voice of Western reason is incarnated in the form of a plate of dried meat, which its interlocutor consumes in the end with an anthropophagic flourish. In the debate, Juan Chusa illustrates the capacity of Quechua-Aymara religion to incorporate the Christian God into its own pantheon, putting Catholicism to the service of Andean thought. Juan Chusa never rejects the beliefs of his friend

¹²⁵ The Entrada del Gran Poder first emerged as a religious celebration of the painting of the Holy Trinity as a single body with three faces. The representation of Christ in this fashion caused some scandal in the Church, and in the 1920s the original painting was altered to eliminate two of the faces from the image. Today the Entrada is celebrated by a procession of dances, such as the *morenada*, the *diablada*, the *kullawada*, and the *tinku*, and is typically accompanied by the massive consumption of alcohol by participants and spectators alike.

as inherently wrong, nor does he attempt to “convert” Jerky to his own perspective. Instead, he prefers to take pleasure in mystery and ambiguity as essential elements of reality, claiming that “La razón sirve mucho pero no sirve de nada cuando se la considera la única cosa y se nombra todo lo demás—lo oculto, lo que presentimos—como una oposición y no como un complemento” (98). When Jerky insists that science allows him to see the world as it really is, Juan reacts angrily and strikes the table with his fist:

¡Carajo!, yo no te estoy hablando de misticismos. Y si tú vieras el mundo tal como es, entonces no sería posible que yo hubiera nacido en otro mundo, tan distinto al tuyo. A mi manera de ver, tu dios ordena el mundo en jerarquías y no en proporciones. Y al jerarquizar nuestro ser se dio paso a contradicciones lamentables. En cambio cuando se ordena el mundo en proporciones, entonces se puede elaborar los tejidos que nos deberían unir. (98)

Juan Chusa thus enacts a confrontation with monist thought, appropriately undertaken in a state of intoxication, that diminishes the presumed superiority of modern, Western reason. Significantly, the philosophical dispute in this scene differs from the Socratic method, where a teacher poses a series of questions to his student in order to reveal a singular, often predetermined, truth. Instead, Piñero supplants the tutorial relationship of the Maieutic with an Andean dialectic based on complementary opposites and a productive tension between opposing perspectives.¹²⁶ The end goal, in this case, is not the acquisition of The Truth but rather the

¹²⁶ This conception of dialectics is fundamental to Quechua-Aymara epistemology. An illustrative example is the practice and conceptualization of the *tinku*, or ritual combat between two opposing entities. Rather than emphasizing the victory of one group over the other or the elimination of difference through defeat, such a battle serves to reinforce a sense of equilibrium and reciprocity between opposing forces. The practice of *tinku* thus embodies a logic of complementary opposites in which “cada una de las dos personas o entidades opuestas involucradas carece algo que la otra puede ofrecerle, a la vez que posee lo que la otra necesita (Montes Ruiz 133). This form of reciprocity represents the formal model that structures all major aspects of Andean reality, including principals of ethical behavior and sociopolitical organization.

revelation of multiple, even contradictory, truths. By reducing the debate over Eurocentrism to a drunken brawl between a *cadáver postizo* and his dinner plate, Piñeiro pokes fun at the solemn affect of academic discourse while simultaneously advancing a compelling philosophical paradigm.

Piñeiro approaches the literary canon with a similar irreverence, paying homage to authors such as Cervantes, Melville, Dante, and Shakespeare while simultaneously reinterpreting them from an Andean perspective. Intertextuality thus provides a vehicle through which the author undermines inherited cultural narratives by destabilizing their assumptions and repurposing their structural components. Illustrative of this practice are Don Falsoafán's philosophical reflections; unable to find any blank paper in the workshop, his secretary takes to scrawling in the empty pages of the numerous books at hand, as the inventor spouts off assorted thoughts inspired by the title of each text. Corollary to Juan Chusa's anthropophagic coup, Falsoafán's palimpsestic approach thus reinterprets and rewrites the books in his library. Like Juan Chusa, Falsoafán laments the dominance of reason over other ways of knowing; he suggests that over the centuries man has disregarded his own connection to the natural cycles that run, subterranean and silent, beneath the windowless house that we innocently call "reality" (45).

The evocation of the *Quixote* in this scene thus questions the implicit espousal of modern reason that Alonso Quijano's return to *cordura* represents.¹²⁷ At first glance, Falsoafán seems to epitomize the literary archetype of the absent-minded genius who lives in his own world, divorced from reality. Yet Don Falsoafán also is and behaves as a *paceño*, as one character more in a novelistic Andean setting that constantly destabilizes the Western conception of normality.

¹²⁷ The reference to the *Quixote* here is explicit; Rosario Rodríguez notes that "En la dupla [d]el escritor y su secretario se establece una repetición doblemente humorística [...] con la novela de Cervantes, pues de Don Falsoafán el inventor, se dice que ha prometido a su secretario el Puntocom hacerlo 'jilaqata de Warisata'" (381).

Where Don Quixote's insanity derives from his book-hoarding tendencies, Falsoafán's own mania for collecting useless objects (for his equally useless inventions) reflects a mentality that defies the logic of utilitarianism and capitalist accumulation:

El pacheño es en esencia cachivachero [...] Acumular cachivaches es la manera que tiene el pacheño de escribir un diario, una bitácora existencial. Estamos compuestos de restos, cosas que perduran más allá de nuestra duración en el mundo, testimonios empolvados que esconden en su historia nuestras ilusiones, nuestras obsesiones y nuestros miedos. Es por esto que cuando el pacheño se encuentra un cachivache que a simple vista no sirve para nada, lo recoge pensando que algún día le podrá dar uso, aunque generalmente ese día nunca llega. (51)

In contrast with the model of the absent-minded dreamer immersed in his books in solitary contemplation, Don Falsoafán's eccentricity thus conveys a strange yet lucid collective consciousness. As Sara Chura indicates in the last section of the novel, "Ningún sueño es personal [...] Cada sueño es soñado a la vez por varias personas de diferentes lugares y distintos tiempos" (125). Rather than an individual dreamer trapped in the past through a romantic illusion Don Falsoafán embodies the logic of an entire community that valorizes the past as a source of other rationalities that modernity/coloniality is not capable of perceiving as such. The implication is that hegemonic structures of thought have obviated other, potentially more productive, ways of understanding the world:

El ser humano ha olvidado que la razón solamente es una opción para enfrentarse al misterio del mundo; ha dejado de lado diversos caminos entrelazados como un tejido infinito que tiene la edad de los astros. La vanidad del hombre ha sido el

único derrotero para idear la quimera que nos gobierna y nos deja sin vida: la verdad. (45)

For Don Falsoafán, the Enlightenment has burdened contemporary society with a blind preference for reason over all other ways of thinking. The answer thus lies in recuperating the past and awakening humanity to other worldviews that respect the power of mystery.

Through a subtle metafictional turn, Piñeiro suggests that literature can play a key role in that process, as it provides a powerful instrument for constructing and intervening in multiple realities. If reality itself is a narrative construct, then fiction constitutes not an escape from it but rather a means of acting upon the world. Juan Chusa explains:

Los aportes [de las culturas desarrolladas] no describen la realidad, la inventan. Y como te he dicho, todos tenemos la capacidad de transformar la realidad y ante ella solamente podemos inventarnos o no existimos. Lo que no hay que perder de vista es que las ficciones en que vivimos actúan sobre el mundo, cuya esencia es la metamorfosis, porque en él fluye la vida. Sin embargo, estas ficciones pueden reinventarse. Ojalá el ser humano algún día se ponga de acuerdo e invente una realidad distinta para asegurar la permanencia de la vida en este planeta. (101)

In some ways, this principle resembles the underlying premise of “*Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius*,” in which Borges imagines ontologies and epistemologies of another world. Yet, once again, Piñeiro’s exploration of alternative life-worlds diverges from that model in his appeal to actually existing worldviews rooted in the Andes. To put it another way, the idea that “another world is possible”—the primary slogan of the World Social Forum—derives less from an abstract, imagined utopia than from the conviction that the seeds of other possible realities already exist, particularly in societies where colonization was never absolute. Piñeiro thus provocatively

transforms Borges's ludic *mise en abyme* and Don Quixote's utopian madness into a decolonial imperative for the reinvention and recognition of other worlds.

Not surprisingly, then, the framework of magical realism also falls short of capturing the spirit of the novel. Though *Sara Chura* does present a series of strange occurrences (e.g. Juan Chusa's debate with Jerky and César's search for the breathing cadaver) and mythical-realist figures (e.g. Sara Chura and the vampire-like *karisiri*), the difference here lies in the precise relationship between fiction and reality. A more appropriate denomination, perhaps, would be that of *multiple realism*. Juan Duchesne Winter suggests that, rather than juxtaposing zones or elements belonging to reality with others derived from an imaginary or supernatural dimension, this literary form privileges a mode of expression struck through with multiple zones of experience, in which everything is equally real:

Cohabitan dimensiones de una realidad múltiple en la que cabe la vigilia sobria, la ebriedad, el sueño, el ensueño, el delirio, la alucinación, el vuelo imaginario, la imagen, los mundos alternos y las así llamadas fantasías. Cada instancia es tan real, concreta e impactante como cualquier otra. No hay realismo ni fantasía, ni espacio real o espacio mágico, sino realismo múltiple. Esta literatura le da la bienvenida a lo real-múltiple; le pasa de lado al supuesto realismo mágico.

("Noticias" 36-37)

Unlike Carpentier or Asturias, Piñeiro does not incorporate indigenous cosmology as a sign of national or regional identity or as a surrealist mechanism. Instead, he proposes the mutual contamination between fiction and reality as a necessary condition for the proliferation of multiple knowledges beyond the realm of literature. In effect, by proposing that fiction acts upon

the world, Piñeiro provokes the possibility to consider literature as a space and even a source of real change.

4.3 AWAKENING OF A *GRAN PODER*

The question that follows, then, is how the novel conceptualizes that incipient or imminent transformation. I would argue that the answer to this question also lies in the realm of intertextuality: Piñeiro not only appropriates and rewrites European and Euro-American literary traditions, but he also offers a creative reelaboration of Aymara political philosophy. Particularly evident are the ideas of Fausto Reinaga, who envisions a massive awakening of dormant ancestral thought through an Indian revolution. Equally illustrative, however, are the less explicit (most likely even unintentional) connections with other theorists of fiesta and rebellion, from Mikhail Bakhtin and Ranajit Guha to the Bolivian sociologist Fernando Montes Ruiz. In this case, then, my interest lies less in highlighting a direct form of referentiality and textual dialogue than in drawing out the ways in which the novel puts forth its own poetic theory of ontological and epistemological transformation.

Fausto Reinaga (1906-1994) is undeniably the most important Aymara political philosopher of the 20th century. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Piñeiro should pay him homage while also reinterpreting his arguments from the perspective of a 21st century mestizo *paceño*. By appealing to the figure of the *amawt'a* (the primary bearer of power/knowledge in Inca society) Reinaga invokes a rich intellectual tradition that predates the Spanish conquest,

engaging an alternative system of philosophical and scientific knowledge that he sees as antithetical to Socratic thought. The problem, he contends, is that the violence of colonialism cut down and buried amautic wisdom, resulting in the alienation of contemporary Indians from their own philosophical legacy. In turn, this epistemic violence has incurred significant limitations in the effects of anticolonial struggle; for one thing, the myriad indigenous rebellions that have transpired since the Spanish invasion represent little more than ethnic outbursts or “estallidos de conglomerados esclavos”:

Es el esclavo que rompe su cadena, y con su cadena coléricamente cruza el rostro, golpea o mata a su amo... Y ahí queda el acontecimiento, ahí termina el suceso, ahí se apaga el incendio; ahí se extingue la colérica reacción; luego el esclavo vuelve a sus cadenas, y se entrega con pasiva resignación a la vindicta de la justicia blanca de su amo... (76-77)

For Reinaga, the transformation from *kuti* into *pachakuti* will only be possible if insurgents construct and articulate the uprising on their own terms, rather than merely inverting and contesting the power structures already in place. If the Indian wants to claim a decisive defeat over colonial oppression, he must arm not only his body but also his mind. “El pensamiento amáutico de ayer y de hoy,” he writes in *Indianidad* (1978), “es un pensamiento amáutico petrificado, pétreamente dormido. Cuando este pensamiento despierta, se despetrifica el espíritu de la comunidad y se pone a andar” (31).

Piñeiro’s own exploration of a collective awakening through the *Entrada del Gran Poder* gives a provocative twist to this concept of colonial alienation, while simultaneously affirming the need for epistemic decolonization. Where Reinaga resentfully proclaims that the Indian represents love, peace, and bread, while Europe signifies hate, murder, and war (72), Piñeiro

suggests there is nothing wrong with Western reason in and of itself; the problem is when it casts itself as the only viable option and subordinates all other forms of thought. In contrast with the Manichean language of Reinaga's political manifesto, the poetic dimensions of *Cuando Sara Chura despierte* open creative possibilities that make strides towards decolonization from other angles and in other spaces. As Rosario Rodríguez has indicated, the novel appeals to the space of the Entrada in order to “denuncia[r] la alienación cultural y social que ofusca la mirada no permitiendo al país ver a los originarios, al indio y su cultura, sino como un mero cuerpo: el ‘cadáver que respira’” (305). Imagining the imminent awakening of an entire city of “muertos-vivos” during the Entrada, Piñeiro highlights a latent potential in the fiesta that promises to unleash hidden forces and liberate the city's inhabitants, *qulla* and *q'ara* alike.

In this regard, *Cuando Sara Chura despierte* posits the fiesta as a transformative space of becoming that undermines the assumption of unmitigated oppression and complete alienation. As such, the novel resonates strongly with Fernando Montes Ruiz's metaphoric interpretation of Aymara fiesta and rebellion. In the context of the former, he argues that

[...] la careta festiva de estuco o de tela que llevan los bailarines cubre su máscara psicológica de sumisión, indiferencia y autocensura, permitiéndoles manifestar libremente su verdadero rostro escondido en la sombra. En virtud de este paradójico recurso de cubrir para descubrir, todos los deseos inconfesados se desbordan en un torrente de color, movimiento y melodía; soberbio despertar de una cultura aletargada. (315)

In *La máscara y la piedra: simbolismo y personalidad aymaras en la historia*, Montes Ruiz identifies a key symbolic opposition in Aymara ontology: the mask, which represents the public dimension of identity, and the shadow, or the clandestine side of thought, emotion, and

knowledge. These two poles, in accordance with the Andean dialectic of complementary opposites, must remain always in equilibrium, mediated by a third term: the self. While pre-Columbian in origins, this model later became a viable survival mechanism after the Spanish invasion, as the mask served to protect the self from the destructive force of colonialism. Much like Du Bois's Veil, however, the mask eventually became a prison, exacting constant concessions that produce "la negación del ser, de la identidad y de la intencionalidad propios" (309). Since the mask comes to reflect the values and objectives of the oppressor rather than a self-constructed persona, it is ultimately insufficient for the transformation of the subject in terms of his or her own values, objectives, needs, and desires (309). In order to compensate for the subordination and daily restrictions to the inner shadow, then, the Aymara create spaces of temporary liberation that restore the equilibrium between shadow and mask:

Ello supone satisfacer libremente las ansias ocultas, realizar los esenciales valores clandestinos, afirmar la vida y la identidad propias negadas por la opresión: el *kuti* o vuelco de la personalidad, que libere la interioridad aprisionada, desbordándola incontenible sobre el mundo. Esto es justamente lo que ocurre durante la fiesta y la rebelión andinas. (312)

Montes Ruiz thus advances his own metaphorical explanation of a series of questions that have concerned numerous theoreticians, from Reinaga to Bakhtin and Guha. Where Bakhtin frames his analysis in terms of the carnivalesque¹²⁸ and Guha speaks of prescriptive inversion, Montes remits to Aymara concept of the *kuti*.

¹²⁸ The contrast between Piñeiro and Bakhtin has already drawn critical attention by other scholars, so I will not go into detail here. See Rodríguez pp. 353-56 for an insightful reading of the relationship between the carnivalesque and the festive space of the Entrada in *Sara Chura*. The basic difference between the two can be summed up as follows: "Si en la teoría bajtiniana se pone el énfasis en la transgresión, en la fiesta o entrada de Piñeiro se pone el énfasis en la apertura hacia la esperanza y la posibilidad. Si bien la real instauración, el despertar de Sara supone también una inversión del mundo, un *pachakuti* en nuestros términos, éste más que apuntar a una cara alegre, al

In all of these cases, fiesta and rebellion constitute a sort of escape valve through which oppressed sectors of society periodically release their rage and desire, only to permit a subsequent return to the status quo. However, Montes Ruiz's approach differs from the other three in his conception of insurgent consciousness. For Guha, the identity of the rebel is equal to the sum of his subalternity: "he learnt to recognize himself not by the properties and attributes of his own social being but by a diminution, if not negation, of those of his superiors" (18). In this regard, Guha problematically reduces the insurgent to his mask of submission and neglects the importance of what Montes Ruiz calls the inner shadow. In spite of Guha's declared intention to revalorize indigenous religiosity as a legitimate source of political agency, as we saw in chapter one, he also retains traces of Marx's hostility towards religion by defining religious consciousness as a mass demonstration of self-alienation (Ortner 181). For Montes Ruiz, however, fiesta and rebellion represent the exact opposite: a rupture with the condition of self-alienation through the temporal return of suppressed identities and modes of being.

In other words, this *kuti* represents not only the rejection and inversion of the dominant order—what Guha refers to as negation—but also the resurgence of "algunos elementos ideológicos y psicológicos con características del modo de producción precolombino" (Montes Ruiz 353). As Montes Ruiz demonstrates, the Indian—whether South Asian or American—is much more than the sum of his subalternity (i.e. his mask of submission): rather, he is the product of a complex dialectic comprised of a long cultural memory and a deep well of vernacular knowledge and thought. The looming question that Guha ultimately leaves unanswered—that of how to transform negative consciousness into a truly revolutionary

humor y a la risa festiva, tiende en la novela que aquí nos ocupa a la restauración de un otro orden cultural y social donde el mundo andino no quede relegado" (354).

mindset—arguably remits to this blind spot in his argument. The problem, in effect, lies elsewhere: in how to achieve a space in which the mask of submission and the self-alienation it incurs would no longer be necessary. In short: how to transform the *kuti* of the fiesta or rebellion into a *pachakuti*.

This, I contend, is precisely the question that *Sara Chura* sets out to answer. Through the figure of the breathing cadaver and Sara Chura's awakening, Piñeiro advances a politico-philosophical reflection on the awakening of dormant Andean knowledges and the possibilities for a definitive rupture with colonial alienation. Interestingly enough, the end product is an ethical proposition not unlike the Zapatistas' own dialectics of seeing. Piñeiro ultimately suggests that alienation is first and foremost the result of an objectifying gaze; decoloniality thus calls for a different way of seeing. Incidentally, César Amato's search for the breathing cadaver leads him to an encounter with his own inner self in La Alpaca Caprichosa, the very site where his search began. Juan Chusa, who makes a living as a *cadáver postizo*, sheds light on the enigma of Juan Chusa's quest:

Está más cerca de lo que crees. [...] Como *pajpacu* debes saber de memoria que las palabras nos ayudan a inventarnos una identidad. Al crear ilusiones puedes transformarte y convertirte en el que quieres. Supongo que por eso eres un detective ahora mismo. Sin embargo, no olvides que la manera como miramos al otro también es una invención de las palabras. El cadáver que respira no es una persona, es una terrible invención para mirar al otro. Si te miras ahora mismo vas a darte cuenta de que el cadáver que respira también eres tú. (115)

Startled by the implications of his friend's revelation, César turns his detective gaze upon himself, discovering that he, too, is a breathing cadaver: "Temblando, se reflejó en su espejo

portátil y la única imagen que vio fue la de un cadaver que lo miraba con los ojos cerrados” (116).

Meanwhile, this scene evokes an image from the second page of the novel: a memory from César’s childhood and the very source of his vocation as *pajpacu*. As a boy, he recalls, he saw his image in the glacial lakes of his hometown and understood the fluid, multifarious nature of his future identity: “Como Narciso, no se identificó con el reflejo. Presentía que esa forma difusa tenía vida propia, una vida distinta a la suya. Era él, disfrazado en el hielo, el que imitaba sus movimientos y gestos; era César, con la piel mudada, el que se convertía en otro” (14). This image effectively destabilizes the individualism of the European tradition incarnated in the myth of Narcissus. While the reflection that Narcissus falls in love with leads to the loss of his own body through death, the power of César’s image to acquire a life of its own signifies, as Rodríguez puts it, “la oportunidad de ganar un cuerpo, una piel (más precisamente, de convocar varias pieles a través del nombre propio con el que se las bautiza), de representar lo irrepresentable” (384).

This allusion to the Greek myth furthers Piñeiro’s reflection on the question of self-alienation; Narcissus after all, was incapable of recognizing himself in his own reflection. In similar terms, César looks in the mirror in *La Alpaca Caprichosa* and sees a cadaver with its eyes closed that does not return the gaze. Nonetheless, this condition gives way throughout the novel to a dialectic encounter with the other as the basis of a restitution of the self. César eventually comes to recognize himself not in his own mirror image but rather in the face of Don Falsoafán, who he perceives as his alter ego. In this way he recuperates his own self in communion with the other, his complementary opposite:

Ahora entiendo todo, pensaba el *pajpacu*, he creado tantas versiones de mí solamente para no enfrentarme a lo que debo ser, al pesado centro de gravedad que convoca todas mis máscaras. Soy un signo vacío, un ser que camina con los ojos hacia adentro y adormece su angustia con el espectáculo que mi interior monta y me tiene a mí como único protagonista. No tengo rastro, no tengo camino, sólo quedarán de mí unas huellas en círculo, como las que se marcan alrededor de una fogata cuando llega la mañana. *Ahí estaban las dos entidades en el centro de la catarata, mirándose como a través de un espejo; cada uno se reconocía en lo que no tenía del otro. Al encontrarse los opuestos, se habían encontrado ellos también.* (54, my emphasis)

In this case, self-alienation results, almost paradoxically, from the solipsism cultivated by the modern, liberal value of individualism. César's multiple masks have distanced him from his own self by isolating him from his inner shadow; in order to find himself he must first gain the ability to clearly see the other.

This subjective reciprocity, as Juan Chusa suggests, opens the possibility to transform reality by altering language and human perspective: "Juan Chusa Pankataya no veía cadáveres, sino bebedores eufóricos que recordaban otros tiempos y evocaban los nombres ocultos de las montañas y las *wakas achachilas* [...] Donde César Amato veía cuerpos rígidos y podridos, Juan Chusa Pankataya veía seres humanos" (115). In effect, the *pajpacu* in search of a breathing cadaver perceives only death, while the *cadáver postizo*, who observes the world through the eyes of the dead, sees life instead. Upon a closer look, as the last section of the novel suggests, even the breathing cadaver is alive; he has merely been automatized through manual labor and robbed of his five senses by the vampirism of the *karisiri*, a malignant being who hypnotizes his

victims to extract their fat—the essence of life—and sell it to medicinal factories abroad. His living death, in the end, is the product of capitalist exploitation and, above all, of a colonial gaze that conflates perception with reality.

This provocative turn suggests that the problem in Bolivian society is not false consciousness but rather false alienation; a collective awakening would entail giving lie to an imposed condition of self-alienation, realizing that amautic thought is not as “pétreamente dormido” as it might at first seem. Piñeiro proposes conceiving of the Entrada as a productive space for the dialectical construction of subjectivity and a source of collective and radical consciousness. It is no coincidence, then, that the novel ends with a shared dream, where various characters reunite with Sara in a cave and see themselves as a single entity, “porque habían aprendido por temor al mundo, que dependían del otro, que serían una comunidad” (126). The fiesta, in other words, is not an expression of the self-alienation that impedes revolutionary transformation, but rather an instance of rupture with that condition through the reemergence of masked and subjugated knowledges. Rather than a temporary break from oppression that reaffirms the status quo, the imminent awakening of Sara Chura and disappearance of the breathing cadaver signal the latent potentiality of the fiesta, where the *kuti* threatens to become a *pachakuti*, where multiple insurgent knowledges portend a decisive break with the coloniality of power and an inauguration of other realities both imminent and already in existence.

Paradox thus appears as the key figure within the novel for understanding the possibility for change; Rosario Rodríguez notes that “Sara, que es presencia corpórea en la novela, se torna, paradójicamente, presencia in-actual, constante-no-ya, permanente-no-ahora, pura potencia o posibilidad, perturbador devenir que paradójicamente se hace total presencia en el capítulo central de la obra: ‘El bolero triunfal de Sara’” (375). This bolero foretells that during the

Entrada, when this demigoddess awakens, the infinite sleeping heads of La Paz will once again come to life:

Después, con violencia, caerá del cielo el fante, el inanimado, el autómat, el farolero, el maniquí, el títere, el esperpento, el cadáver que respira, y su vientre se abrirá con la caída derramando en el suelo una infinidad de cabecitas, los restos de otros muertos que atravesando el tiempo caminan: [...] los miles de hijos, con miles de hermanos, que *nacieron en un país que los ha confundido con el cadáver que respira*. Y abierto su vientre, saldrán las cabezas, *porque no es el cadáver que ha perdido los cinco sentidos, es el que mira al cadáver que lo convierte en un muerto que deambula por la calle como si fuera un cuerpo y nada más*. Nunca más serás un cadáver, dirá Sara Chura imponente [...] (88-89, my emphasis)

In this sense, the novel simultaneously prolongs and performs the definitive awakening of a dormant consciousness through the absent presence of Sara Chura in the text. *Cuando Sara Chura despierte* presents an interminable protraction of the moment of awakening, the eternal dawning of a new world always at the point of emergence. In many ways, this model resonates with Walter Benjamin's notion of *Jetztzeit*, or the time of the now, "which is shot through with chips of Messianic time" (*Illuminations* 263): a heterogeneous future in which "every second was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter" (264).¹²⁹ The effect is the suspension

¹²⁹ Benjamin is a good example of a "Western" thinker whose conception of history resonates with indigenous worldviews through his critique of the logic of progress. Particularly relevant is his image of the *Angelus Novus*, whose face is turned to the past: "Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned; while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress" (*Illuminations* 257-58). Silvia Cusicanqui has indicated that "esta visión de la historia, que escondida pervive en los resquicios del mundo occidental, podría también iluminar la comprensión del *pacha*, y cruzar así la brecha de lenguajes que

of time, the creation of an eternal revolutionary present; if dormant amautic thought awakens in lucid intoxication on days of fiesta, the key is to extend that *entrada*, to not allow the return to oppression, and to give free reign to the *gran poder* within that would unleash a lasting inversion of modern/colonial hierarchy.

4.4 AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE FUTURE

In many ways this state of imminence characterizes Bolivia today, as it stands at a crossroads, at the gates of another world whose shape is yet to be determined. With a new constitution based on Andean ethical-social principles such as *suma qamaña*; an Aymara, former union leader as president; and the official declaration of a plurinational State as an alternative to the neocolonial model, Bolivia heralds the opening of new paths towards alternative forms of sociopolitical organization. The Water and Gas Wars of 2000 and 2003, which prepared the way for Morales's election, seem to indicate a new political consciousness that threatens to awaken the sleeping giant, mobilizing the masses in the struggle against neoliberalism and globalization from above. Nonetheless, in the midst of controversies like the proposed highway through the Isiboro Sécuré National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS) and significant protest by indigenous sectors against the Morales government, it is becoming less and less clear that Evo and the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) represent a substantive break with the colonality of power. Will Bolivia maintain the basic structure of the modern, Western, and neoliberal-style nation-State, or will it

continúa entrabando la acción histórica, pero también la interpretación de la rebeldía indígena, pasada o contemporánea" ("Raíz" 44).

establish a radically distinct form of governance based on Andean structures such as the *ayllu*? And if the *pachakuti* does materialize in this form, what challenges will it face from within the Quechua-Aymara community, both for its internal constitution and for negotiating the challenges of navigating the globalized world of the 21st century?

The novel *De cuando en cuando Saturnina*, published in 2004 by Alison Spedding, a British anthropologist and long-time resident of Bolivia, appeals to the imaginary and hypothetical space of science fiction to explore these questions and others. Although this novel predates Morales's presidential election and responds instead to the mass mobilization in 2000 led by Felipe Quispe "El Mallku" (commonly referred to as "el septiembre indígena"), the questions it poses regarding the possibilities for political change in the Andes are increasingly relevant in the context of the Morales administration and the plurinational State. Where Piñeiro focalizes the imminent future and the now-time of an eternal present, Spedding turns instead to the distant future as a lens to the Bolivia of today. Set in the mid 2080s, this "oral history of the future" presents the reader with a series of reflections, retrospections, dialogues, and conversations with the dead, that as a whole tell the story of half a century of decolonization after the expulsion of *q'aras* from the territory. Since the year 2022, ex-Bolivia, now known as Qullasuyu Marka, is a society without a State: in lieu of a president, legislators, police force, and army, the so-called "Liberated Zone" runs according to a sort of common law based on the structure of the *ayllus*, which is administered on the local and regional level by a council of unions and rotating authorities. In the aftermath of a brutal civil war and the eventual triumph of the Indianist Revolution, the newly formed Qullasuyu Marka has decided to close off its borders and isolate itself from the rest of the world for a process of internal reconstruction and cultural revitalization. As a result of its ostensibly racist and expansionist policies, the region suffers the

effects of a trade embargo imposed by the *Estados Jodidos*. The only citizens free to leave and enter the Zone at will are the members of the Syndicate, an organization of professional engineers of spatial navigation recognized worldwide for their technological prowess (v). One such pilot is the protagonist of the novel, Saturnina Mamani (also known as Satuka), a hacktivist, lesbian, and member of the anarco-feminist group Comando Flora Tristán in Lower Peru.¹³⁰ Exploiting her privileges as a member of the Syndicate, Saturnina not only commits acts of anticolonial terrorism outside the Zone (e.g. bombing the Ku Klux Klan territory on Fobos, a moon orbiting Mars), but she also defies the patriarchal authority of the *amawt'as* in Qullasuyu, leading to her incarceration in the Zone's only prison.

By displacing her reflection on Bolivian politics onto a futuristic setting in the mid 2080s but with reference to a mass uprising in 2022, Spedding constructs a complex and fragmented narrative that moves constantly back and forth through time. Where Satuka's renown in the Syndicate derives from her expert programming and navigation skills, Spedding deftly pilots the narration of her book throughout the space-time of sixty years of liberation in Qullasuyu, jumping constantly between various instances of past and future that merge together in an intricate temporal web. The "user's manual" in the opening pages of the novel makes this structure explicit:

El texto que sigue consiste [...] de una serie de relatos y/o conversaciones, más que entrevistas propiamente dichas, conformando en total treinta y cuatro capítulos de extensión variable. Fueron realizadas con diferentes personas en diferentes ocasiones. Por tanto, no conforman un sólo relato lineal, y es posible

¹³⁰ According to the novel, Upper Peru corresponds to the region around Puno, which separated from the rest of Peru in 2025 to become a part of Qullasuyu Marka.

leerlos en diferentes órdenes, aparte del orden narrativo general escogido por los recopiladores. (vii)

Spedding openly acknowledges the arbitrary order of the selected memories, elucidating a narrative structure based on the logic of memory and orality as well as an Aymara conception of time. The user's manual provides the reader with a map of various possible readings: she might choose to follow the sequence of the main events in the novel (designated with the letter **T** and a number), the order of events in the "past" (**P**), or even the order in which memories were recounted to the "editor" or "compiler" (**Q**), the latter of which undermines both narrative and temporal order (viii). Accordingly, the author signals various possible routes through the text, while leaving the ultimate itinerary up to her reader.

Saturnina thus presents various layers of temporalities and interspersed levels of retrospection that intentionally eschew any historicist chronicity, combining futuristic imagination with narrative retrospection in a technique that Anabel Gutiérrez León calls "retro-futuristic." The novel "begins," so to speak, in a distant moment of the future and moves backward in time through the memories of its protagonists, without ever touching upon our own present. In this sense, the Liberation appears as a possible event pertaining to a near future, while for the protagonists it is more than half a century old. Within the format of the novel, Spedding activates the Quechua-Aymara notion of *nayrapacha*, constructing a narrative exploration of the Andean propensity to "vivir mirando desde el pasado hacia el futuro" (Spedding 87) coterminous with a critical strategy of depicting the future as a transfigured reflection of the present. In a review of the novel, Raquel Alfaro observes that by appealing to the futuristic setting of science fiction, the author manages to "desordenar la historia futura de modo tal que permita el ejercicio de una crítica oblicua a la situación plurinacional contemporánea" (347).

Significantly, the reader gains access to this view not through the national, official history of Qullasuyu Marka but through the collection of a series of oral testimonies that impart the exclusively feminine perspective of a lesbian subversive, her partner, and her deceased grandmother (who was an insurgent herself during the Liberation). “[Y]o meyo admirado de cómo se confecciona la historia—observes Saturnina—. Ahora dicen que la historia que enseñaban antes era puras mentiras de *q’aras* pero ahora sería mentiras de *amawt’as*, diría yo” (55). It is no coincidence, then, that this unraveling of temporal history resembles what Ranajit Guha, in an essay titled “The Small Voice of History,” imagines as a possible non-statist form of historiography. By identifying traditional historiography as a statist production, he attempts to reveal an underlying linear logic inescapably tied to the formation of the State. What subaltern history should do, he says, is to “push the logic of its revision to a point where the very idea of instrumentality, the last refuge of elitism, will be interrogated and re-assessed” (12). This reflection leads Guha to a narratological conclusion: that the only historiography capable of subverting statism must also fracture its storyline, laying waste to its argumentative structure. And what form might this narrative disorder assume, he asks?

Perhaps it will force the narrative to stutter in its articulation instead of delivering in an even flow of words; perhaps the linearity of its progress will dissolve in loops and tangles; perhaps chronology itself, the sacred cow of historiography, will be sacrificed at the altar of a capricious, quasi-Puranic time which is not ashamed of its cyclicity. (“Small Voice” 12)

These observations indicate that Spedding’s narrative model, based on the leaps and gaps of memory as the most human way of experiencing time, has significant implications for a reflection on the relationship between historiography, statism, modernity, and progress. *De*

cuando en cuando Saturnina is much more than a Cortazarian game of hopscotch or a ludic subversion of modern historicity. By constructing a framework of past-futurity, Spedding communicates an alternative way of inhabiting the world and of working towards political change with objectives but without a strict teleology. The temporal structure of the novel thus emphasizes a constant necessity for change that destabilizes any sense of having “arrived” upon the dissolution of the State. If time is circular or spiral rather than linear, as the Aymara conception of *pachas* would propose, then the postrevolutionary era after the *q’ara timpu* signals both the instauration of new forms of power and the perpetuation of old ones.¹³¹

Anarchism thus constitutes not only a central theme of the novel but also one of its key structuring principles. Spedding’s imagination of a “society without a State” weaves together a complex series of observations on the existing forms of social exclusion and subjugation propagated by—yet not limited to—the neocolonial nation-State. If indeed *De cuando en cuando Saturnina* constitutes a fictional exploration of alternative forms of governance and sociability, this hypothetical reality is not based on an arbitrary, theoretical, or literary invention on the part of the author, but rather on the actual system of the *ayllu*, a complex form of societal organization based on extended family groups and rotating leaders that dates back to pre-Columbian times and continues to thrive well into the 21st century.¹³² Spedding thus appropriates the form of science fiction—a genre, as Alfaro indicates, that is usually structured by the logic of Western postmodernity and late capitalism—as a strategy for engaging with various

¹³¹ See Gutiérrez León for a more detailed analysis of the different *pachas* as they relate to *De cuando en cuando Saturnina*.

¹³² For a detailed analysis of the structure of the *ayllu* in contrast with the form of liberal democracy, see “Liberal Democracy and *Ayllu* Democracy in Bolivia: The Case of Northern Potosí” by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui. The author of this piece posits that the *ayllu*, as a sociopolitical system predicated on maintaining an equilibrium between communal consensus and a compulsory rotation of authorities, is fundamentally different than a liberal model of democracy based on the individual as citizen, as well as a socialist model that relies on the centralization of a monolithic party.

contemporary debates concerning the process of decolonization and the possibility to construct a stateless society in the Andes.

In effect, Spedding envisions a future Bolivian (or rather, Qullasuyan) society liberated from neocolonialism and neoliberalism and articulated on the basis of a reinstated exercise of autonomy. In *Dispersar el poder*, Raúl Zibechi reads recent indigenous movements (particularly the EZLN in Chiapas, the Movimiento Pachakutik in Ecuador, and various mobilizations in Bolivia) in terms of a shared objective of anti-statist autonomy. For Zibechi, this struggle might operate at the margins of the State—as is the case with the Zapatistas or the Mapuche—or through a direct assumption of State power—as with Pachakutik and MAS—but the central impetus in either case is resistance to a centralized conception of the modern, neoliberal State in which representatives make decisions and legislate on behalf of their electors (either for or against the interests and consensus of that group). For Félix Patzi, such a model enters in direct contrast with a communitarian system based on the Zapatista call to “mandar obedeciendo” or govern by obeying, wherein the delegate only expresses and executes the decisions of his or her community (Zibechi 158).¹³³ If we are to understand the State as a political structure that exerts power *over* society, Zibechi argues that Aymara cultural logic does not conceive of a State as such. It does, however, pose the framework of the *suyu* as a large assembly of *ayllus* in which, as Pablo Mamani puts it, “El estado es la sociedad y la sociedad es el estado” (qtd. in Zibechi 159).

This brief overview of some of the key political theories on the *ayllu* model of participatory democracy suggests the complex tapestry of questions and discussions in which *De cuando en cuando Saturnina* intervenes. In short, the novel speculates on the possibility for decolonization and the formation of an autonomous society based on a distinctly Andean

¹³³ The quotes from Félix Patzi included here, as with those of Pablo Mamani (see below), derive from personal interviews conducted by Raúl Zibechi, which he references at length in *Dispersar el poder*.

political model. As a result of the *amawt'as'* recuperation of ancestral knowledges, the *pachakuti* in Qullasuyu Marka has derived in what some outsiders (sympathizers and admirers of the Liberation) refer to as an *utopía arcaizante*. Upon explaining the success of Aymara artisanal labor in relation to the international market, Satuka affirms that “Hay los que buscan los tejidos tradicionales, fibra natural y tintes vegetales, porque en eso sí hemos progresao, o recuperado si quieres, después de la Liberación” (257-58). Rather than rejecting a capitalist export economy, in this sense, Qullasuyans have effectively used the market and technology for their own purposes—for instance, by developing a kind of shepherd robot to help them in the fields—through a form of progress that moves backwards as well as forwards.

That said, however, I would argue that the antiteleological insistence of the text should warn us against reading it as a utopian vision of Aymara society after the *q'ara timpu*. If indeed this oral history serves to open up the “Iron Curtain of the Andes” for the very first time and provide insight into a mysterious and legendary people (vi), its purpose is not to simply confirm the preconceived perceptions of outsiders, whether idealistic or disparaging. After all, the real Qullasuyu Marka bears little resemblance to the *utopía pachamámica* portrayed on the websites of certain soi-disant sympathizers: “todos trabajando colectivamente, abolida la propiedad privada, agricultura cien por ciento orgánica, armonía ecologista...” (126). A conversation between Satuka and Feliciano, a Lower Peruvian of the Comando Flora Tristán, makes this contrast between insider and outsider perspectives strikingly clear:

— [...] [V]os sabes que lo que se admira desde fuera es la liberación del racismo colonial, la autosuficiencia alimentaria, la recuperación de los saberes ancestrales, la tecnología apropiada... [...] Ya también sabíamos que habían botado a los curas, los evangélicos, todo, y vos misma me has dicho el porqué de la

prohibición de realizar actos rituales fuera de la Zona. Y además, es

Tahuantinsuyu recuperado pero sin el Inka Rey...

—... el paraíso verde combinado con la utopía anarquista, yaa. La utopía
arcaizante.

—Será ps que yo era ilusa, pero la verdad es que no imaginaba una teocracia
clandestina, con sesiones de *ch'amakani* en vez de juicios de asesinato, y cárceles
dirigidas por *yatiris*.

—En combinación incómoda pero aparentemente estable con el neoliberalismo
online y una economía de remesas, ¿no? (275)

At the end of the day, the reality of this “society without a State” is much more elusive than it might at first appear. Although for a short time “realmente era verdad eso de ningún gobierno” (57), the growing power of the *amawt'as* and *yatiris* has increasingly complicated the possibility to speak of a state of anarchy; rather, that state represents the horizon of continuous possibility that structures the *ayllu*, incarnated in the novel through the anti-imperialist and antipatriarchal struggle of Saturnina and the Comando Flora Tristán.

More than anarchy, per se, Spedding depicts a sort of Andean theocracy, in which the *amawt'as* utilize the platform of spirituality as a vehicle for intervening in all aspects of Qullasuyan society:

El gremio *Amawt'a* supuestamente es sólo un gremio más, se ocupa del culto y del bienestar espiritual y también manejan la educación. Pero todos sabemos que el culto y la educación para ellos es bastante amplio. Se metían en todo, en un principio con un afán de extirpar el cristianismo en todas sus formas y luego decidían que la guerra era también una forma de culto, era con eso que lograron

desbaratar a los Felipe Quispes y demás organizaciones armadas. Aparte del cristianismo hay libertad de culto, dicen, pero es prohibido ser *layqa*, hacer brujerías. (108)

At various moments throughout the text, the *amawt'as* take on the characteristics of a socialist or communist Party, “reeducating” retrograde Christians and, in extreme cases, leaving them on a snowy mountain peak to die, sacrificed by the cold. Even in Qullasuyu Marka, education continues to be a disciplinary tool¹³⁴ and religion a vehicle for ideological homogenization. In this case, both institutions are put to the service of decolonization, yet they also continue to propagate and strengthen power, even if it takes on distinct forms and manifestations. The novel draws attention to the moment of institutionalization of insurgency, where power converts into counter-power and anarchy installs itself once again as a horizon of possibility, rather than an immediate reality.

This constant destabilization of power arguably represents the necessary condition for the prolongation of the *ayllu* system and its effective operation: the constant rotation of local authorities serves to impede any single individual or group from becoming hegemonic or gaining dominance over the others. The tendency towards envy and aspiration for power, after all, are not exclusive to Western society,¹³⁵ yet it is precisely for that reason that the *ayllu* depends on a destabilizing anarchic impulse in order to sustain itself. In this regard, Zibechi observes that

[...] la ambigüedad india, que forma parte de la radical ambigüedad del ser humano—no será resuelta eliminando uno de sus momentos extremos (objetivo jacobino de la Ilustración), sino surcando las procelosas aguas de la vida

¹³⁴ Satuka affirms that “la escuela es una institución disciplinaria en donde sea, bilingüe, monolingüe, el problema no radical allí. Hasta en la Zona es disciplinaria, no creas que no” (41).

¹³⁵ In the words of Saturnina, “hay mucha envidia. Eso no se lo llevaron los *q'aras* al irse” (267).

inclinando el timón hacia la orilla de la emancipación, o sea hacia el no estado, sabiendo que la inercia propia de la vida-navegación nos impulsa—quizá también de modo inevitable—hacia la reconstrucción de lo instituido, el estado, la opresión... (191).

As with Sara Chura's perpetually imminent awakening, Spedding also contemplates the infinite prolongation of the revolutionary instance that Benjamin so lucidly invites in his theses on history: a now-time that evades any understanding of revolution as an end goal or telos. In this case, the effect is to present anarchy not as a state of nature—that misguided understanding of anarchy that Hobbes in regards to cultures “without history”¹³⁶—but rather as a condition always on the cusp of institutionalization, always teetering on the border between power and counter-power.

4.5 DOUBLE THE NIGHTMARE, DOUBLE THE AWAKENING

Meanwhile, these questions not only reflect the challenges for sustaining the existence of a State that is not a State; they also point to certain obstacles to the process of decolonization and the complex obstacles to restoring non-modern forms of governance. In the case of Spedding's ex-Bolivia, it has been relatively easy to eject *q'aras* from the territory and much more difficult, in the words of Fausto Reinaga, to “sacar a Cristo y a Marx de la cabeza de los hombres” (82). Eager to “reeducate” Qullasuyans in the epistemology and spirituality proper to the Andean

¹³⁶ See Ticona Alejo pp.139-40 for a detailed discussion of this perspective in Hobbes and Rabasa pp. 13-16 for an explanation of the double meaning of the phrase “without history.”

tradition, the union of *amawt'as* attempts to eradicate “crypto-Christian” tendencies within the Zone, essentially through a practice of brainwashing. Although this endeavor purportedly serves the greater purpose of epistemological decolonization, it is also strikingly similar to the ideological homogenization of Soviet communism, Italian fascism, or even the Maoism of the Shining Path.

It is curious, then, that the head priest of Qullasuyu Marka dies at the hands of Tata Santiago, or Saint James, who pursues and torments the *Willkaqamani* until eventually arriving to claim his life. Following Satuka’s advice, the Aymara priest makes the sign of the cross over his chest, only to be taken away by the saint on his white horse and to die in the process: “Se persignó, y con eso anunció que era dellos, y le llevaron” (274). If indeed Saint James came to be identified with Illapa after the conquest, merging with this god of thunder,¹³⁷ the figure that torments the *Willkaqamani* in this case is the saint, rather than the Andean deity. Thus, as Saturnina explains to Feliciano, nothing happens when he attempts to appeal to Illapa:

—¿Pero Santiago es Illapa, ¿no?

—O al *Illapa* le han convertido en Santiago. Pero esto no era de *Illapa*, pues, era de Tata Santiago.

—No te entiendo cuando te pones a hablar de teología.

—Son misterios de la fe. El se había dao cuenta, pero, que no estaba resultando, que tenía que buscar a Tata Santiago siempre. (271)

Saint James thus plays the role of a subjugated spirit (in this case, subject to the anti-Christianism of the *amawt'as*) who returns as a guerrilla warrior to destabilize the authority of

¹³⁷ Teresa Gisbert explains that “Santiago quedó identificado con Illapa en: ‘*el milagro del Sunturhuasi*’ (hoy Catedral), cuando en Cuzco, al grito de ‘Santiago’ y bajo una tormenta, los españoles vencieron a las tropas de Manco II (1536) desde Sacsahuaman” (76).

the *Willkaqamani*: “Tata Santiago ha estado ya tiempo en la clandestinidad, sabe cómo hacer las cosas sin que le rastrear. Se revela solo cuando ya no hay remedio” (264). It is an ironic turn of events that the patron saint of Spanish conquistadores, whose name they invoked as they entered battle, should now kill an indigenous priest, if this death serves to limit the growing spiritual and political power of the hegemonic *amaw’tas*. Interestingly enough, this attenuation takes place through the insurgence of a syncretic Christianity now subjugated to the institutionalized pre-Columbian spirituality of the *amaw’tas* and *yatiris*.

It is not so easy, it would seem, to bury the colonialist sector underground or eject it from the territory, as Fanon would have it.¹³⁸ In this case, how are we to distinguish between Aymara and Western beliefs, given that these two civilizations have lived in contact for more than half a millennium? Not unlike Piñeiro’s own representation of the Entrada del Gran Poder, Spedding’s response seems to be that Christianity is—or, at least, *can* be—indigenous, that evangelization resulted not only in the violent subjugation of native spirituality to a monist form of religion, but also, perhaps unexpectedly, in the creation of new spirits and energies that augment the complex range of Andean deities. At any rate, it is popular religion that continues to revolt against and destabilize the dogma of the dominant spiritual code. Rather than completely eliminating the traces of European culture within the Liberated Zone, the *ayllus*—in their more anarchic moments—manage to instrumentalize it for their own purposes. Instead of weakening the autonomy of the *ayllus* as a whole, the internal opposition of these elements in relation to Aymara power reinforces the system of social organization through its constant destabilization. Esteban Ticona has observed that the Andean conception of power is not assimilable to a

¹³⁸ “To dislocate the colonial world does not mean that once the border has been eliminated there will be a right of way between the two sectors. To destroy the colonial world means nothing less than demolishing the colonist’s sector, burying it deep within the earth or banishing it from the territory” (6).

universalist (i.e. Eurocentric) theory—even one as comprehensive Foucault's, which emphasizes the circulation of power outside the traditional political domain of government, parties, and the State:

¿Por qué pensar que el concepto de poder de Foucault es universal? En muchas sociedades y en especial en las andinas indígenas y campesinas, no existe el concepto de poder en el sentido foucaultiano. No es que estas sociedades hayan superado las formas de dominación interna, sino que el poder no está conectado a la dominación absoluta y a la eliminación total del adversario. (147)

If Spedding's point is that power exists in all spaces, then our conclusion should not be that a more just and egalitarian society is not possible, but rather, quite the contrary, that there are multiple ways of organizing and instrumentalizing power within society—as well as envy, ambition, and social antagonism—in such a way that it does not sustain destructive forces like the coloniality of power/knowledge.

However, such a perspective should also warn us against idealized perspectives of non-Western societies. Indeed, Spedding's anti-utopian vision of Qullasuyu Marka emphasizes the need for continuous, critical reappraisals of Aymara society itself, particularly in terms of its own social and ethical principles. As we have seen, the *ayllu* is structured by the logic of reciprocity and the need to impede the disproportionate dominance of any one element over all others. This ideal, however, as a horizon of anarchic possibility, finds its limits within the *ayllu* itself, where internal inconsistencies impede the proper functioning of the sociopolitical code. In this context, the other central axis of the Comando Flora Tristán appears ever more important: that is, its struggle against patriarchy, not only in the paternalistic assumption that political change in the Global South is only possible through the tutelage of intellectuals from the North, but also in the

lack of equilibrium within the community between its masculine and feminine elements. For Saturnina and her *compañeras*, patriarchalism and imperialism constitute two interpenetrating gestures of a single subalternizing force. The motto of Flora Tristán is one of double separatism, as Saturnina informs us: “fuera *q’aras* y fuera hombres” (101).

Their point, however, is not that gender inequality reveals a fundamental fallacy in the design of the *ayllu*, but rather that the ideal of *chachawarmi* (reciprocity between male and female, masculine and feminine), is often limited to the level of discourse, without exerting a concrete presence within the community. “Nos cagamos en esas babeadas de *chachawarmi*,” protests Saturnina; “qué hay de complementariedad si al fin los hombres siguen copando los puestos directivos” (101). The Comando Flora Tristán forms in response to these issues, arguing that the occasional appointment of a female representatives and ministers does nothing to attack the foundations of a patriarchal system. “Buscamos otro modelo,” they say: “no el Nuevo Poder sino el contra-poder” (101). Even in Qullasuyu Marka, positions of authority continue to be occupied by men, almost without exception:

¿Cuántas mujeres hay en el Consejo de *Amawt’as*? ¿Cuántas mujeres
ch’amakanis hay, *amawt’as* de provincia siquiera? Te dicen que te ha sido dado
para *qulliri*, *qaquri*, recetar yerbas, masajear a las embarazadas y chau. Y después
aunque te acepten para niveles superiores, tienes que practicar según lo que dicen
ellos. Dicen que no tienen nada que ver con la Iglesia de los curas pero más bien
se han puesto sus zapatos desos. (187)

Satuka thus demonstrates the need to de-hierarchize not only the relationship between the Global North and the South on a grand, geopolitical scale, but also to unravel certain inequalities within the *ayllu* and to force the community to confront the implications of its own cultural ideology.

Just as Julieta Paredes and the Comunidad Mujeres Creando Comunidad propose in Bolivia today, Saturnina and the Comando Flora Tristán deconstruct the notion of *chachawarmi* in the Andean highlands of 2086, revealing its falsity and signaling its affinity with the repressive and paternalistic practices of Catholicism and the neocolonial State. Following a line of reasoning identical to that of Satuka, Paredes explains that “Nuestra propuesta es la reconceptualización del par complementario, despojarlo de su machismo, de su racismo y su clasismo, replantearlo en mujer-hombre, warmi-chacha que recupera el par complementario horizontal, sin jerarquías, armónico y recíproco, par de presencia, existencia, representación y decision” (30).

For Zibechi, this process of consciousness-raising regarding the marginalization of women goes hand in hand with the broader political struggles of indigenous peoples:

La autonomía busca resolver la cuestión del poder, que es la causa de la exclusión y la marginalidad de los pueblos indios. [...] Sin embargo, como lo demuestra la experiencia zapatista en Chiapas, la autonomía comunal, municipal y regional no sólo busca cambios en las relaciones de poder hacia fuera, sino también en el interior de los pueblos indios. Así, las mujeres zapatistas no separan la cuestión de la autonomía de la cuestión de género, ya que conciben la autonomía como una nueva relación, integral, que abarca todos los aspectos de la vida, tanto los externos como los internos. (175-76)

The connection with Zapatismo here is apropos; in a brief section of a communiqué from September 1994, titled “Las mujeres: doble sueño, doble pesadilla, doble despertar,” Marcos highlights the additional challenge that female insurgents face in tackling gender hierarchies within Maya communities. “Mujeres de abajo y de más abajo,” he writes, “despiertan peleando contra el presente y contra un pasado que las amenaza como probable futuro” (EZLN II: 59).

That is, the double nightmare of female insurgents commands a different relationship with the past than their male counterparts, as they must be even more creative in reviving *usos y costumbres* that maintain the cultural health of the community while putting an end to those that merely perpetuate forms of subordination.

Moreover, the concern with women's rights within the EZLN indicates yet another way in which Zapatismo has drawn attention to issues that transcend the immediate confines of indigenous rights. Maylei Blackwell notes that

The visibility of women's demands and the central role of women in the EZLN empowered other women to create new forms of gender consciousness, articulate their own gendered demands, and develop a new political language for expressing their agency and sense of cultural belonging. In this sense, the mask of [Comandanta] Ramona has reflected indigenous women's political subjectivity back to local organizers and made grassroots women's leadership visible to the broader indigenous movement and to Mexican society in general. (119-20)

In the case of Saturnina and the Flora Tristán, the long-term ramifications of the Liberation have ultimately laid bare the persistence of inequalities in Qullausuyu that cannot be reduced to a product of racism. It would seem that each process of cultural transformation, each *pachakuti*, continues to reveal new layers of power that elicit responses of counter-power in a never-ending chimera. The implication, however, is not the futility of struggle but quite the opposite: it is the oscillation of history through consecutive and divergent *pachas* that allows us to understand that everything, in time, will pass. This perspective thus signals the possibility for another *pachakuti* that would invert and disrupt not only neocolonial domination but also the patriarcalism that

precedes and underlies it. In the words of Anabel Gutiérrez León, “Otro *Pachakuti*, en el que las mujeres quedan arriba, podría ser posible.”

In this way, Spedding utilizes the form of the “oral history of the future” and the futuristic setting of the novel to push her reflection beyond the immediate context of political decolonization and imagine a kind of Benjaminian revolutionary violence incarnated in the anarco-feminist struggle of Saturnina and the Comando Flora Tristán. “Somos la revolución permanente,” declares Satuka (82); and the dissolution of the State, more than a point of arrival or revolutionary telos, would serve as a point of departure for other possible transformations. The anti-utopian perspective of the novel is fundamentally critical and constructive: rather than propagating “fantasías pachamámicas” or idealizing a non-Western culture through the stereotype of the noble savage in a stateless society, Spedding demonstrates that Aymara culture has its own manifestations and degrees of power; it is just that they function according to a different logic than that of Western civilization. She does not simply praise the “State that is not a State” as the end objective; instead, perhaps more interestingly, she asks what other challenges would remain should we achieve such a feat.

The novel has the effect, therefore, of returning our gaze to the present, to our own future past, in order to illustrate the persistence of power structures immanent to the State yet also prior—and possibly posterior—to it. Spedding suggests that we should concern ourselves not only with decolonizing society on a political and ideological level, or with revitalizing pre-Columbian social practices, but also with reconsidering Aymara culture itself through the lens of women’s sovereignty. As Julieta Paredes insists, this process indicates the need to recognize that unjust relations between men and women predate the Conquest, both in Europe and in Abya Yala; as a result, they cannot be understood only as a colonial legacy (24). Decolonizing gender,

she maintains, would require us to recuperate the struggles of our great-grandmothers against a patriarchy that was in place well before the Spanish invasion (24). What *De cuando en cuando Saturnina* demonstrates, in the end, is that the process of decolonization goes beyond State politics or the domination of one culture by another; it also entails rethinking structures of domination within each community. The liberation of ex-Bolivia from European influence and the statist legacy of coloniality is just one part of the equation: no es poco... pero tampoco es todo.

4.6 PROLONGING THE *PACHAKUTI*

Each in its own way, *Cuando Sara Chura despierte* and *De cuando en cuando Saturnina* shift the focus of *indigenismo* and ethnic protest alike, suggesting the need to expand the discussion of decolonization into other realms. Much like Marcos and Chihuailaf, Piñeiro suggests that the Indian is not the only alienated subject; also affected is the *q'ara* who ignores or denies the Quechua-Aymara constituents of his own identity and of the cultural practices that shape La Paz, the Andes, and Latin America as a whole. If indeed Jerky casts himself as Western, Juan Chusa reminds him that he is also a *paceño* and that he inhabits a marginalized space in the modern world-system:

Tú también vives en el tercer mundo pedazo de charquekán [...]. El tercer mundo, es lo que demuestra nuestro fracaso como especie porque el primer mundo ha creado una realidad excluyente, un mito que no tiene nada que ver con las cosas.

La realidad no es lo que habitamos. Es nuestro espejo. Y hace mucho tiempo es el espejo de nuestra vanidad. (100)

Piñeiro thus invites a reflection on the impact of coloniality not only on the indigenous subject but also on the white or mestizo non-native who both propagates Eurocentric thought and suffers its effects. In the end, the novel presents an implicit but urgent appeal to its reader: *date cuenta que el cadáver que respira también eres tú*.

In this way, *Cuando Sara Chura despierte* imparts an ethical call to interculturality that diverges from, yet dialogues with, the *indigenista* tradition that precedes it. Rather than attempting to apprehend indigeneity, propose solutions to “the Indian problem,” or reflect on the indigenous ingredients of mestizaje, Piñeiro opens space for a reciprocal sociopolitical interaction where differences between *lo indígena* and *lo q’ara* might complement one another in a proportional, decolonized fashion. The objective would not be to collapse the indigenous and the non-indigenous through the production of a mutual and dialectic self-identification, but rather to allow those differences, in the mode of the *tinku*,¹³⁹ to exist in productive tension. Yet he also displaces the focus of *indigenismo* by casting a critical light on the role of *q’ara* and *qulla* alike in reinforcing and perpetuating forms of oppression that weigh heavy on the Bolivian population as a whole. We might venture to say that, as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro proposes for the field of anthropology, Piñeiro convokes an anti-narcissistic *indigenismo* that is ready to accept its new mission: the theory-in-practice of the permanent decolonization of thought (14). Piñeiro, like Viveiros, proposes a new interpretative praxis engaged in learning from and thinking with subjugated knowledges. The result would be a collective yet heterogeneous form of consciousness marked by proliferation of difference and multiple positionalities.

¹³⁹ See note 126.

In turn, Alison Spedding advances an anti-essentialist paradigm that is nonetheless inflected by the linguistic and cognitive structures of Aymara and permeated by Andean political philosophy. The “indio” here is light years (so to speak) from the victim-hero of the *indigenista* novel; Saturnina, her grandmother, and the Comando Flora Tristán embody a radical lineage of *insurgentas* that challenge authority on multiple levels. According to the back cover, this is “the first novel of indigenous science fiction written in Andean Spanish, Aymara, and Spanglish.” Indeed—and the only one, to date. This linguistic mixing, however, does not represent a form of narrative transculturation (Rama) or even bilanguaging (Mignolo) but instead something more like *trilanguaging*, the effect of which is to demonstrate the Aymara’s ability to negotiate a modern, postmodern, or even post-postmodern world while still maintaining their cultural particularity.

Spedding’s appeal to science fiction thus challenges the notion that Indians are mere relics from the past destined to assimilation or extinction. As such, Diane Nelson’s metaphor of the Maya hacker is perhaps even more relevant here than in its original Guatemalan context. Spedding’s own version of a kind of *futurismo arcaizante* transgresses the boundary between the “pre-modern” and the postmodern through the story of an Aymara aeronaut who shuttles back and forth between multiple worlds. Saturnina is quite literally a hacker, using her computing skills to undermine the patriarchal power of the *amawt’as*. Likewise, Spedding herself subverts and reprograms the literary genres that she inherits, from science fiction and the dystopian novel to testimonio and *indigenismo*. Although the novel depicts a radical rejection of *q’aras* from the territory—reminiscent, perhaps, of Silko’s prophesy of the demise of “all things European”—the ultimate effect of this gesture is to trouble clear divisions between Aymara and *q’ara* that obscure forms of oppression and subjugation within the *ayllu*. Her point is not that Andean and

European expressions of patriarchy are ultimately the same; on the contrary, the futuristic focus of science fiction allows her to explore the particularities of the *ayllu* and the complexities of decolonization in the 21st century. By turning a critical eye to Aymara society, however, she also effectively troubles Manichean divisions—like those espoused by Reinaga at certain points in his career—that tend to idealize the Indian and demonize the *q'ara*. Like Piñeiro, she questions the assumption that the Aymara are mere victims of coloniality and suggests that a transformative political project requires a critical reevaluation of *q'ara* and *qulla* cultures alike.

It is worth asking, however, whether these novels truly manage to break with the structures of power inherent to the old indigenist model. Might it not be the case that interculturality here is, at heart, no more than a pluri- or multicultural discourse that celebrates cultural and even philosophical diversity without challenging the bases of power that underlie the capitalist world-system? Walter Mignolo has observed that the meaning of this term varies depending upon who uses it:

[...] cuando la palabra interculturalidad la emplea el Estado en el discurso oficial, el sentido es equivalente a multiculturalidad. El Estado quiere ser *inclusivo*, reformador, para mantener la ideología neoliberal y la primacía del mercado [...]
En cambio, el proyecto intercultural en el discurso de los movimientos indígenas está diciendo otra cosa, está proponiendo una *transformación*. (“Geopolíticas” 26)

What might it mean, then, to speak of interculturality in the context of a novel published by a non-native writer like Juan Pablo Piñeiro who associates more closely with an urban, intellectual elite than with social movements per se? Does *Cuando Sara Chura despierte*'s perspective more

closely resemble the functional intercultural model of the State and of dominant institutions, or the critical model proposed through subaltern political praxis?¹⁴⁰

The ambiguity that marks this question signals certain problems proper to *indigenismo* that the decolonial disposition of Piñeiro's text does not altogether dispel. Nonetheless, I want to suggest that a possible response to this dilemma lies in the paradoxical *permanente-no-ahora* of Sara Chura's awakening. If indeed "la interculturalidad entendida críticamente aún no existe, es algo por construir" (Walsh, "Interculturalidad crítica" 78), we might also say that it already exists in potential: in the tradition of decolonial thinking that was born alongside modernity/coloniality, in the multiple and contradictory truths already in conflict in Bolivian and Latin American society, and in the days of fiesta, when a cultural logic suppressed by colonial oppression depetrifies and regains vitality. For both the project of critical interculturality and for Sara Chura's awakening, a definitive epistemic break has yet to take place. At the same time, however, that imminent state appears as a privileged moment from which to imagine—and produce—a possible transformation. In this way Piñeiro foregrounds the unexploited but auspicious potential of the eve the fiesta when, as César Amato proclaims, the world awaits the arrival of a new state of existence: "es como si todo fuera a cambiar mañana de una manera radical" (15).

Meanwhile, by shifting her own focus to a more distant future, Alison Spedding questions the foundations of indigeneity and the discourse of interculturality from a different angle, entering the debate from a much more explicit political stance and exploring the process of decolonization from a feminist perspective. Where Piñeiro runs the risk of perpetuating a kind of *pachamamismo*—an excessive emphasis on indigenous philosophy and "new age" affect over

¹⁴⁰ See Walsh, "Interculturalidad crítica y educación intercultural" for a detailed consideration of these two distinct valences of the term "interculturality."

political concerns—Spedding is confrontational and jarringly political. Insurgency is present in *De Cuando en Cuando Saturnina* not only in a poetic or theoretical sense; in this case, it constitutes the central driving force that both sets the stage for the narrative and propels it forward. Yet in many ways, Spedding, too, privileges a revolutionary now-time as a critical space for contemplating future changes in society, embodied in the “revolución permanente” of the Comando Flora Tristán. By positing the hypothetical scenario of a post-national Bolivia in the 2080s, Spedding displaces the *q'ara-qulla* binary in favor of a much more complex vision of the internal conflicts and hierarchies within Aymara society. From the perspective of a British anthropologist who has lived in Bolivia for more than twenty years—and who dresses like a *chola*,¹⁴¹ speaks Aymara, and chews coca—Spedding offers a challenging glimpse into the future of decolonization in Bolivia, in order to destabilize the ways in which we tend to think about the present. In this case, then, the question is not whether *De cuando en cuando Saturnina* replicates a culturalist paradigm divested from the economic reality of global capitalism, but instead what kinds of challenges it envisions for the future of decolonization in the Andes.

Not surprisingly, the Bolivia of 2013 resembles the ex-Bolivia of 2086 in many ways. In the years following the Water and Gas Wars and Evo's election to the presidency, the country has undergone significant changes in some regards yet remained remarkably the same in others. Bolivia, too, finds itself on the cusp of the institutionalization of insurgency; it remains to be seen whether the *pachakuti* is still underway or whether it has “settled”—in more than one sense of the term—on the election of Morales and the declaration of a plurinational State. If indeed it was a radical push towards decolonization that put Evo in power, the State now paradoxically assumes the responsibility of furthering that mission, in ways that often conflict with the ongoing

¹⁴¹ In Bolivia, this term refers to urban indigenous women, whose distinctive dress includes full-bodied skirts and bolero hats.

presence of social movements within the country's borders. His administration has taken on the task, for example, of "decolonizing the juridical system," reformulating it to suit the needs of a plurinational State where modern and premodern temporalities and forms of governance continue to exist side by side.

In June of 2011, I attended a discussion at the Café Carcajada in La Paz, hosted by Julieta Paredes and the Asamblea Feminista, on the precisely this phenomenon. The question up for debate was whether it is possible to decolonize Bolivia from the position of the State. Most of the participants, Paredes included, problematized MAS's appropriation of the discourse of decolonization, protesting that "No es el gobierno que va a descolonizar, somos nosotros." A somewhat different question, however, seems to be whether it is possible to decolonize the State itself—in other words, to posit the State not as the subject of change but rather its object. To put it another way, is it possible to conceive of a State unbound by the colonality of power? Does the State represent a viable site for insurgent intervention, or does the true power of social movements lie in their potential to continually destabilize its footing and prevent the institutionalization of rebellion? As José Rabasa puts it, the Morales/García Linera government "clearly [...] faces the task of undoing the privileges and the protection private sectors enjoyed under the neoliberal state, but the question remains: What is to be done, given that these forces and interests will not disappear overnight?" (272).

For Rabasa, the fact that the Morales administration has been incapable of resolving these issues is a sign of the fundamental, irreconcilable breach between the *ayllu* system and the modern State formation, even in its plurinational form:

It hardly makes a difference if the state in question is conceived as including a plurality of nations, if one ends up with a plurality of forms of preserving the

regime of law and system of property. If the state is an inevitable reality one faces today, revolutionary violence would seek to dismantle the state—not to reform the state—to construct a new world in which the state would disappear. (257)

In many ways, this conclusion is a logical outcome of his preference for the Zapatista political model, which aims to construct spaces of autonomy outside the State rather than attempting to transform it from within. At the same time, however, his definition of insurgency in terms of exteriority and his tendency to privilege that which remains *without history* appear to be at odds with his repeated affirmation that it is possible to inhabit two or more possible worlds without incurring contradiction. Rabasa's argument for simultaneity and the productive encounter between conflicting meanings is lost here in favor of a subaltern-State dichotomy that erases the possibility for intervention from within. If indeed Ranajit Guha ultimately "betrays a developmental model of what a politically sophisticated insurgency would look like," José Rabasa, in his own way, also "circumscribes the peasant insurgency from within a frame that privileges certain criteria" (Rabasa 131). As Rabasa himself maintains, critical approaches to indigenous movements should "seek to conceptualize multiple possibilities of creative political action rather than defining a more 'mature' political type of formation" (44).

As John Beverley has suggested, then, it may be more interesting to treat these issues as open questions and the plurinational State as an unfinished experiment, rather than assuming that the limitations of the present prove its ultimate failure.¹⁴² Like Rabasa, Spedding places her bets on the withering of the State; yet as a critical strategy for shifting our focus past that event as a revolutionary telos, she simultaneously undermines the assumption that the *suyu* truly circumvents the power dynamics and disciplinary mechanisms that define the nation-State as a

¹⁴² See "The Subaltern and the State," pp. 110-26 of *Latinamericanism after 9/11*.

modern formation. Whether articulated from a position of *within* or *without*, she suggests, the challenge of insurgency lies in prolonging the spirit of revolutionary violence and in not reducing the effects and manifestations of the *pachakuti* to a single individual or the State—in a sense, not allowing the road to revolution end at Evo Morales. Conceived of as in-surgence *as well as* exteriority, social movements express the potential to intervene in multiple spheres of society, both in and beyond the State.

As Julieta Paredes indicated at the forum at Café Carcajada, we face the challenge of tackling not just one form of coloniality but many—including, but not limited to, the coloniality of gender. By questioning the tendency to privilege the State as the primary site of insurgent activity, Spedding and the Comunidad Mujeres Creando Comunidad invite us to contemplate additional horizons of struggle beyond the binary opposition to a dominant colonial other. Similarly, Piñeiro questions critical approaches to fiesta and rebellion that interpret them only in terms of a negation and inversion of modern/colonial power differentials. In both cases, decolonization would require the critical intervention of native and non-native, Western and non-Western, and dominant and subaltern actors alike in precipitating and prolonging the *pachakuti*. Much like the Zapatistas, Spedding and Piñeiro invite us to envision—and *produce*—a different future, to awaken through dreams to a new reality.

CONCLUSION
AGAINST COUNTER-CONTRABAND

Interpretation can be a kind of respectful listening, or it can be a kind of appropriation, and we have to raise the issue that what we hope has been the first may in fact have been yet another example of power disguising itself as benevolence.

—Margery Fee

From the rearguard poetics of the Maya Movement and the EZLN to Wayuu contraband in the Guajira and decolonial *indigenismo* in Bolivia, the texts examined here illustrate an incipient shift in the function and composition of literature, particularly in the interaction between indigenous and non-indigenous sectors of society. As the framework of revitalization shows, contemporary Amerindian literature manifests an attempt not only to contest and subvert the dominant narratives of progress, assimilation, and modernization but also to reduce their force of impact by recuperating and disseminating (hi)stories from below. By emphasizing the inextricable and mutually constructive relationship between poetics and politics, the framework of insurgent poetics illustrates the ways in which authors from diverse cultural backgrounds and

aesthetic traditions engage in a common struggle for survival. They do so, in particular, by counterposing neoliberal-style globalization with an inter-tribal and inter-American mobilization simultaneously linked to particular territories, cosmologies, and lived experiences. Even in the case of poetic articulations that are not explicitly confrontational or defiant, such as Maya cultural activism or Miguel Ángel López's intimate bartering of dreams, an analysis of the function of literature in relation to contemporary Amerindian movements bears out the political dimensions of any project predicated on expressing indigenous knowledges and subjectivities historically suppressed through the violence of coloniality.

The texts at hand demonstrate that insurgency often goes beyond simply inverting colonialist hierarchies and represents, instead, a sort of leveling out in order to create new political and socioeconomic structures based on the principles of reciprocity, autonomy, and plurality. Indigenous literature thus constitutes an expression of self-determination and an exercise in intellectual sovereignty that defies the Occidentalist leanings of concepts like "resistance," "anticolonial," and even "border thinking." This "one no and many yesses" thus demonstrates the paucity of a theoretical model predicated on dichotomies and irreconcilable disparities, even as it highlights the fundamental difference between "those who look to impose" and "those who look to listen." In their own particular ways, all the authors I have considered here question Western, colonial, and hegemonic ways of dividing up the world. On some level, of course, insurgency always involves a rejection of dominant values and civilizational models, yet if we consider the conflicts and discrepancies within and among different movements, it becomes clear that this refutation is considerably more complex than a simple inversion of racial hierarchies. It has much more to do with disavowing Western hegemony and affirming

alternatives than opposing the West (or Western epistemologies) per se. As such, it is often more fluid than a *carte blanche* rejection or a Manichean binary.

I have argued, therefore, that by emphasizing the plurality of insurgent poetics and supplementing “insurgency” with additional meanings, we might reach a more nuanced understanding of the terrain of political action that contemporary authors and activists must negotiate in combating culture and language loss in the throes of globalization. Since poetry, more than any other kind of language, functions at a polysemic, metaphorical level, I submit that it constitutes a particularly useful vehicle for reframing meaning and thinking differently. Central to this entire framework, then, is a conception of indigenous writing not as a category completely isolated from Western literature and philosophy nor as a kind of essentialistic, folkloric textuality in direct opposition to the former, but rather as a concrete, complex episteme in dialogue with other forms of thought and constantly in movement. An approach centered on polysemy and conflicting meanings thus opens the way for a theory of insurgency capable of accounting for multiple forms of political action and a fluid conception of indigeneity that both acknowledges and reduces the need for strategic essentialism.

This post-subalternist perspective derives in part from my focus on insurgent poetics rather than the prose of counterinsurgency, as this context commands an interpretative methodology attentive to silences and tensions within the text yet not restricted to deconstructing the discourse of power. Authors such as Luis de Li3n, Javier Castellanos Mart3nez, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Alison Spedding not only narrate histories of rebellion—as is the case in so many indigenist novels, from *Raza de bronce* and *El mundo es ancho y ajeno* to *Todas las sangres* and *Oficio de tinieblas*—but they also *perform* acts of resistance through texts that are themselves insurgent, positing literature as a viable space for political action. Articulated from

the position of the not-entirely-vanquished, these narratives convey an attempt to reconstruct lost histories of resistance and self re-discovery. Deconstructivist methods—predicated, for instance, on reading against the grain of the prose of counterinsurgency, or tracing the foreclosure of the native informant in Western philosophy—thus appear insufficient in the face of texts articulated from a position of subjugated knowledges that regard poetic writing as an exercise in intellectual sovereignty. In effect, new ways of writing command new ways of reading, and the act of interpretation carries significant epistemological, methodological, and ethical implications.

Yet this last observation raises a key question concerning the reception of indigenous literature: how can we be sure that it will not be reappropriated and reincorporated into the lettered city and its circuits of power, that this counter-spell will not simply strengthen the immunity of the *letrado*? To put it another way, how can we avoid commercializing and commoditizing this poetic exchange, converting it into a motive for capitalist commerce rather than a reciprocal bartering of political dreams? I have argued that insurgent poetics represents not incorporation or integration but rather a disruptive act that puts into crisis the existing conceptual models and even the ideology of the literary institution itself, largely through the affirmation of other aesthetic and textual traditions. Considering that crisis and dissidence are key structuring mechanisms of the capitalist system, however, this in-surgence might have (at least) two possible outcomes:

- 1) The restitution and reinforcement of the dominant narratives through the subsumption of difference and the advocacy of “minority” and “multicultural literatures” without any substantive challenge to the parameters of inclusion; or

- 2) The dislocation of the existing model and its articulation in other terms consonant with indigenous movements' decolonial objectives.

Which of these two outcomes will actually result remains to be seen, but I am tempted to think that it depends in part on our own critical ways of reading and writing about indigenous poetics from the academic institution of literature itself, even as a practice that is contingent upon (and secondary to) the active interventions of social movements beyond the realm of discourse and critique.

After all, the capacity to incorporate and neutralize difference has subsisted from the palimpsestic methods of colonial evangelization to the totalizing force of neoliberalism. Let us not forget the long history of appropriation of indigenous artifacts, bodies, and ideas, even by well-intentioned *alijunas*, for myriad political agendas from mestizo nationalism to revolutionary Marxism. While Amerindian contraband originates in pre-Columbian travel circuits and inter-ethnic trade practices, it also evokes a memory of forced relocation, conscripted labor, and slave trafficking. Likewise, indigenous cultural artifacts are repeatedly displaced from the context of their production and put to other uses, as static displays of cultural authenticity in museum exhibits, as marketable commodities, or in folkloric adaptations for national celebrations. The contemporary practice of smuggling amongst communities like the Wayuu, and especially the Yaqui, thus conveys a response to having been objects of contraband themselves, in either a literal or a figurative sense.

The question, then, is as follows: how can non-native scholars in solidarity with indigenous social movements and emergent oral literatures be sure not repeat the age-old transgressions of appropriation and disenfranchisement? Likewise, how can Amerindian poets guarantee that their own forms of contraband, like Zeta and Calabazas's practices of drug

trafficking in *Almanac of the Dead*, do not inadvertently reinforce the system they set out to undermine? For David Treuer, this is precisely the challenge that many indigenous novelists face in the U.S., given the broad circulation of their works in the literary market and their occasional, intentional or unintentional, capitulation to publishing norms and readerly preferences (60). Like Castellanos Martínez, Treuer worries that these works will simply exoticize and fetishize indigenous traditions, playing the role of “literary informants” rather than strengthening the deeper foundations of Amerindian thought.¹⁴³ Michael Wilson suggests that the problem lies in a tendency among some authors to simply incorporate “signs of Indianness” and traces of the oral tradition as a show of authenticity that often works against the purposes of native communities (xiii). Yet where are we to draw the line between superficial “signs of Indianness” and more sincere attempts to “think from” indigenous knowledges on the part of authors and critics alike? And to what extent do *alijuna* or *q’ara* scholars essentially engender a process of recolonization in the attempt to categorize, apprehend, and explicate emergent Amerindian textual productions, as the norms of knowledge production in academia would command? How can we avoid codifying and circumscribing a series of enunciations produced at the margin of law, often destined in their origin to circulate outside controlled systems of thought and knowledge? And finally, who exerts ultimate terminological privilege in defining or transgressing the boundaries of indigenous literature as such?

These questions are much larger than I can hope to answer here. In fact, they represent some of the key theoretical and practical issues concerning the reception and function of indigenous literature as a whole; they remain open not only to further academic interrogation but also to the political interventions of indigenous communities and artists as they strive to work

¹⁴³ See Michael Wilson, *Writing Home: Indigenous Narratives of Resistance* (2008), p. 44.

through the entrenched problem of internal colonialism and the contradictions inherent to the ongoing process of decolonization. In a sense, these questions point to tensions we would do well to sustain rather than attempt to resolve through a convenient theoretical formula: as problematic yet productive ambiguities, they serve as a constant reminder of the thin line between collaboration and cooptation, particularly within the realm of academia.

As a result, it is ever more crucial to keep the question of power differentials and representation at the forefront of our discussions (or at the very least in the back of our minds) as we engage with these texts. As we have seen, insurgent poetics connotes not only the explicit attempt to reveal hidden faces and silenced voices; it also quite often entails deliberate, partial, and indirect acts of concealment as a means of resistance to a colonizing, panoptic gaze. Yet that commanding gaze need not only pertain to the colonial conquistador or government institution; it may also apply to the reader herself as yet another nodule in the complex network of power that comprises literature and literary criticism today. Non-native critics, in particular, run the risk of becoming yet another avatar of the *animal preguntón* in our attempts to explicate the texts at hand, though indigenous scholars should also remain attentive to power dynamics and internal hierarchies, particularly in regards to the circulation and uses of academic knowledge.

In a sense, however, the texts examined here put forth their own political hermeneutic that challenges dominant ways of reading and writing. They demand a nomadic way of reading that would nonetheless remain rooted to our own respective positions in society—a situated, poetic (non)knowledge that emphasizes the productive limits to our own perspectives, whose particularities, in turn, might contribute to a collective, collaborative portrait of reality. As José Rabasa puts it, we cannot “continue to produce a Cartesian epistemology in which the subject refines his cognitive apparatuses to gain a more objective perspective” (45). “It is only by

inventing alternatives to Reason,” he argues, “that subaltern studies will devise a counterhegemony that will not generate subalternity in return” (46). Such an approach would entail not only thinking from the knowledge practices of indigenous movements but also cultivating *partial* perspectives, both implicated and incomplete.

In my own case, this means avoiding the imposition of a single, overarching definition of indigeneity from an outside perspective. My use of the term “insurgency” thus highlights the intersection and interaction between two distinct civilizational matrices, with the understanding that they often overlap and intertwine and that each “side” is heterogeneous and not necessarily internally coherent. Let me be clear here: I am not echoing the problematic dictum that “We are all hybrid” and that as a result claims to indigenous identity stand on faulty ground. Rather, I echo Jace Weaver’s warning against imposing categories onto Amerindian texts from a non-native perspective. For this critic, celebrations of native “authenticity” and declarations of indigenous hybridity are often woven of the same cloth and ultimately entail an imposition of racial classification onto the realm of literature and culture (“Splitting the Earth” 68). His point is not that native claims to authenticity or strategic uses of essentialism should not be taken seriously but rather that non-natives should be careful not to prescribe conditions and prerequisites for what constitutes indigenous literature or what makes an author indigenous. To insist that Amerindian writing must avoid Western genres altogether in order to be “authentic,” for example, would be to reinforce notions of indigenous purity that effectively maintain the compartmentalization of society wherein Indians must properly play out their pre-ordained role as Other.

Within the context of increasing flows of information, migrant labor, and transnational affiliations, however, it is also increasingly important to recognize the use value of borders in

maintaining indigenous sovereignty—in a physical, territorial sense, as well as in the figurative terrain of what Weaver refers to as literary separatism. We must be careful, that is, not to simply include indigenous literature within the already existing framework of American, Latin American, or even World Literature; instead, Weaver suggests we treat it as an autonomous tradition with its own genealogy, characteristics, and parameters of interpretation that challenge the hegemonic parameters of literary analysis.¹⁴⁴ In effect, it is essential to remain cognizant of cultural, epistemological, and ethical boundaries so that we can avoid overstepping them and encroaching upon Native American intellectual sovereignty. In the words of Christopher Miller,

We must heighten rather than diminish our capacity to understand divisions of world space, even as those divisions shift, dissolve, and reform. We must enable ourselves to think through borders without simply pretending that they don't exist: when faced with a forest, we should not simply declare that we don't "believe in trees." (209)

Critical studies of indigenous literature thus face the ongoing challenge of elaborating sufficiently complex theoretical and ethical approaches to indigenous literature that both respect the affirmation of difference and resist static definitions of indigeneity that cast Indians as "flies in amber, beautiful, pristine, and ultimately cold, dead, and sterile" (Weaver, "Splitting the Earth" 4).

We can begin by finding points of dialogue between epistemologies of transmotion and nationalistic, tribal approaches predicated on territorial sovereignty and treaty rights. The future of hemispheric indigenous studies arguably depends on its ability to account for the ongoing transformations, internal conflicts, and sociohistorical particularities proper to individual

¹⁴⁴ See "Splitting the Earth: First Utterances and Pluralist Separatism" in *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (2006).

communities while also articulating a collective struggle for decoloniality, autonomy, and sovereignty. It is ever more pressing to find ways of accounting for multiple forms of political action that respond to vastly heterogeneous sociopolitical contexts, cosmologies, and local histories tied to disparate territories throughout the hemisphere. Moreover, as Castellanos Martínez, Spedding, and Paredes suggest, it is just as important to consider the challenges that indigenous social movements face in combating forms of internal colonialism, alienation, and cultural demise within their own communities as it is to understand the ways in which they subvert dominant narratives and colonial hierarchies.

In this regard, thinking through borders without pretending they don't exist would not entail obviating the dichotomies that characterize (neo)colonial situations; on the contrary, it requires taking them into account in an active and critical way. It also cautions us against confusing the tactics of insurgency with its ultimate objectives. If, indeed, insurgents appeal to strategic essentialism as a political method for transforming an imposed colonial category into an instrument of resistance, the end goal is not simply to invert the colonial hierarchy, thus perpetuating the existing system by merely replacing those in power. Instead, this strategy illustrates an attempt to construct a different societal structure altogether. Moreover, as Alison Spedding keenly illustrates, decolonization depends not only on the large-scale geopolitical objective of provincializing the West, but also on the disarticulation of multiple forms of coloniality and inequality within indigenous communities themselves. This observation highlights the utility of critical studies attentive to the intersections between race, ethnicity, class, and gender and the need to develop viable methodologies capable of capturing multiple spheres of decolonial struggle.

In my own future work, I also hope to further explore the conditions for and implications of pan-Indian politics within the context of globalization. A possible future book project, for instance, would consider the connections between the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the United States and pan-Mayanism in Guatemala and Chiapas in an attempt to answer the question of how these kinds of political alliances emerge in response to State violence, globalization, and experiences of exile and migration. Focusing in particular on the autobiographies of key figures such as Russell Means, Leonard Peltier, and Dennis Banks, I would first trace the emergence of AIM within the context of the Civil Rights Movement and the activism of the 1960s. This analysis would set the stage for an inquiry into pan-Maya movements in Guatemala and Chiapas in the context of civil war and globalization, drawing on fictional and non-fictional works by Rigoberta Menchú, Gaspar Pedro González, Víctor Montejo, and the Zapatistas. The next task—and perhaps the most interesting space for critical intervention—would be to find texts that address the encounters and disencounters between these two traditions within the context of Maya exile and immigration to the United States and Canada in recent years. This approach would allow me to explore the inter-American dimensions and implications of pan-Indianism and migration by drawing a parallel between the processes of migration and coalition-building within each movement and the increasing connections between North and South on a broader scale. Working primarily with testimonial texts would also allow me to focus my inquiry on a particular form of textual production that is strongly linked to political protest and to provide a different point of entry than the poetic orientation of my dissertation. Although this rough sketch represents just one possible project, it also indicates the kind of inter-American work that remains to be done in connecting the fields of Amerindian and U.S. Latino/a studies.

In the more immediate future, as I revise this dissertation for publication as a book, I plan to address a few significant gaps in the selected corpus, primarily by incorporating a new chapter on Mapuche poetics. In this case, my analysis will draw out different and opposing strategies within the framework of insurgent poetics by highlighting the heterogeneity of voices within the Mapuche community and striving to understand the implications of poetic writing in the particular case of the Mapuche struggle against the Chilean and Argentine states. I will turn first to the poetry collection *De sueños azules y contrasueños* and the epistolary essay *Recado confidencial a los chilenos* by Elicura Chihuailaf, who took on the role as unofficial poet of the *Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia* and represented, as such, a generally conciliatory posture articulated through poetic language. Reading the particular discursive strategies evident in these two texts, in particular Chihuailaf's pacifist approach in contrast with the polemic and contestatory style typically associated with the Mapuches (as evident, for example, in their declarations of war against the Chilean government), I hope to examine the drawbacks of poetic language in this context by considering the ways in which Chihuailaf's folkloric presentation of Mapuche culture and poetics runs the risk of appropriation by the State for the purposes of a self-congratulatory neoliberal multiculturalism, rather than providing the basis for a radically different kind of pluriculturality. The challenge, then, will be to read against the grain of this conciliatory tone in Chihuailaf to uncover the insurgence beneath his discursive strategy. This approach will allow me to consider both the dangers and potentialities of this particular intersection between indigenous poetics and social movements.

The next stage would be to place Chihuailaf in dialogue with other poets—namely, Leonel Lienlaf, Paulo Huirimilla, and David Aníñir Guiltraro—through the central motif of the dream as it relates to Mapuche understandings of political struggle. By drawing on the varying

forms of insurgent poetics that these writers employ, I intend to partially decenter the figure of Chihuailaf, not for the purpose of rejecting his own poetic strategies, but rather as a means of resisting the canonization of a single figure as the prototypical Mapuche poet that his particular style has incurred. My objective is to explore the community itself as a complex web of *sueños* and *contrasueños*, highlighting both the challenges facing indigenous movements due to internal differences and the strength of the model of interculturality when projected inward toward indigenous communities themselves. Meanwhile, a broader historical contextualization of the Mapuche insurgency will allow me to contrast it with other indigenous movements in Abya Yala, problematizing the notion of the plurinational state within this context, where the goal is separatism, not integration, and underscoring the diversity of insurgent strategies.

As the objectives for this addition to the dissertation suggest, the project as it stands leaves significant room for further elaboration and critical intervention. However, as my discussion of situated knowledges above suggests, the limitations of the study may indirectly reflect its strengths. That is, beyond the exclusion of substantial regions such as Brazil and Canada or important literary movements like that of the Mapuche, the incomplete nature of this project is also a necessary product of the limits to my own perspective. As a non-native scholar, my ability to fully comprehend the texts at hand is restricted not only by my lack of proficiency in indigenous languages but also by my position as an outsider to these cultures and movements. Rather than striving for a panoramic vision of indigenous literatures across Abya Yala, then, I have taken a multifaceted approach predicated upon numerous encounters and misencounters, junctures and disjunctures, with the understanding that my own contribution lies, above all, in expanding the possibilities for North/South dialogue. I trust, therefore, that this dissertation constitutes a valuable first step in proposing viable comparative methodologies for the field of

hemispheric indigenous studies, in addition to “re-opening old hemispheric geopolitical paths” (Brígido Corachán 285).

By elaborating upon the concept of Abya Yala as a productive framework for rethinking comparative inter-American work through the lens of indigenous studies, I have demonstrated the ways in which contemporary Amerindian literature both transcends regional, national, and linguistic boundaries and reaffirms the value of local perspectives on the world tied to specific territories. This dual perspective thus challenges the assumption that native peoples are either all essentially the same (noble savages, brave warriors, belligerent drunks, or repositories of ancient wisdom) or irrevocably different (disparate communities insulated by their own vernacular cosmologies and “dialects”). What all these movements share is a common appreciation for divergent and convergent perspectives that, together, put forth a powerful alternative to hegemonic narratives of progress and individual well-being. Rather than restricting the proliferation of diversity in the global era to a sense of cultural relativity and recognition, contemporary Amerindian movements strive for a much deeper transformation of the ideology that underlies capitalism and Western modernity. The ultimate goal is to attack the very roots of coloniality, rather than merely treating its symptoms, in order to create a more equal exchange between different ways of seeing and being. The framework of interculturality thus helps to elucidate indigenous authors’ attempts to engage with existing Western literary traditions while simultaneously displacing them and infusing canonical forms with new meanings. This textual dialogue, in turn, opens the way to new affiliations between disparate cultures, not only between North and South or *q’ara* and *qulla*, but also among indigenous groups themselves. Above all, as the practice of contraband suggests, it highlights the (re)emergence of *other* markets, *other* cultural geographies, *and* other ways of circulating goods and information that challenge both the

modern State formation and laissez-faire neoliberal economics. In their effort to occupy the lettered city, insurgent poets refuse to acquiesce to its Eurocentric assumptions and threaten to transform its structure from within, redistributing its territory and reclaiming a space for the commons.

The ongoing challenge for scholars within academia is to find ways of contributing to the recuperation of subjugated knowledges without appropriating, objectifying, and decontextualizing them for our own purposes. As Subcomandante Marcos suggests, we must remain cognizant of our own role in perpetuating the age-old hierarchies that determine access to (and utilization of) cultural capital and economic resources. At the same time, however, even self-reflexivity can engender a form of vanity, where the study of indigenous literature allows us to confirm a liberal, inclusive self-image without challenging or transforming the structures of power/knowledge that undermine our own intellectual privilege. It is thus crucial to find ways not only of describing and analyzing ongoing processes of social change but also of envisioning and producing it from our own positions in society. However, such a process need not only focus on the broad-scale attempt to provincialize the West; it might also entail contesting power structures and forms of subalternity within our own academic communities and looking to the classroom as a viable space for collaborative knowledge production. It might, after all, mean positing literary criticism, like literature itself, as a viable space for epistemological and intercultural transformation.

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