

Weaving Abya-Yala: The Decolonial Aesthetics of Indigenous Resistance

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Abstract

From Mexico to the United States and Ecuador, indigenous uprisings inspire fear in the nation, which in turn sees itself forced to redefine its current formation. National projects expire, but peoples' resistance continues, regardless of the form the state takes. Indigenous protest sporadically reaches the national stage and haunts the nation. Throughout Abya-Yala [America], indigenous aesthetic interventions, like dances, story-telling, gardening, and other practices of re-existence, seek to indict bad governance and localize other forms and meanings to ensure local communities outlive liberal and neoliberal national formations. Although indigenous resistance is socially and culturally encoded as eruptive, peoples have resisted the long night of coloniality all along, although indigenous resistance has been considered isolated incidents and not formative moments of the nation-state, peoples have resisted the long night of coloniality all along. Their common struggle for autonomy and self-determination also seeks good living with Nature. By comparing the Zapatista, Lakota, and Amazonian struggles to protect land, water, and life from each settler nation's liberal beginnings into the neoliberal present, I show how these seemingly "isolated incidents" fit into continental patterns of indigenous solidarity. I weave these three examples to explore how indigenous peoples use decolonial aesthetics to defy conceptions of territory, property, and governance.

Keywords: Indigenous resistance, decolonial aesthetics, cultural and political rights, the rights of Nature, Sumak Kawsay, Abya-Yala, history

Introduction

One early morning in September 2016, I heard on the radio that people assembled in resistance at Standing Rock were holding mirrors along the riverbank that separated them from the militarized police. They hoped to protect themselves by deflecting the brutal image, and projecting back its brute-force. I immediately called Marina Kaplan and claimed: "It's 'The Story of the Lion and the Mirror!'" Two years after the Zapatistas took San Cristóbal de las Casas, the Mexican Government and EZLN (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional) reached a peace agreement (San Andrés Accords), which the government never ultimately implemented. Instead, the state's

low-intensity warfare was prolonged and culminated in the paramilitary massacre of Acteal on December twenty-seventh, 1997, where forty-five Tzotzil people were killed. President Zedillo (1994-2000) refused to investigate this attack and continued his counter-insurgency operations, so the EZLN remained silent. They broke their silence on July seventeenth, 1998, releasing their *Fifth Declaration*, in which they reaffirm the Zapatista commitment to peace. Marina and I, along with Zack Zucker and Margaret Cerullo, have been translating Zapatista stories as a *colectivo* since 2011. We had debated for years over the use and meaning of the mirror in this story.

Zapatista stories can sometimes feel like labyrinths where meanings remain elusive and endings, disorienting. Decolonial aesthetics propose other ways to “perceive and sense visual, aural, and textile arts” (Ramos and Daly 2016: xvi). Daily life practices encode a “system for the creation of re-existence and decolonization” (Achinte 2010:20). Story-telling, dancing, weaving, or any everyday aesthetic practice of re-existence challenges Eurocentric conceptions of time and space, designed to control labour legally and economically. Alternative modernities operate “from the margins and beyond the margins of the modern/colonial order” (Mignolo and Vásquez 2013), to incorporate a plurality of worlds and critical interventions, which rename places and localize struggles. Indigenous aesthetics invite us to “sense otherwise [...] in temporal, identitarian, affective, and aesthetic terms” (Ramos 2018:2). The sensing is multiple in Abya-Yala, the name today’s indigenous peoples use to refer to America. This allows for the rejection of the “logic of genocide” that historically marks indigenous peoples as absent and about to disappear (Smith 2005).

When early-modern Renaissance aesthetic models settled over the New World, a new way of sensing reality descended on the peoples inhabiting Abya-Yala’s many worlds (Mignolo and Gómez 2012, Ramos 2018). The multiple in Abya-Yala became one in America, where a multiplicity of peoples were homogenised as ‘Indians.’ To enact Abya-Yala’s epistemic erasure, modern-colonial law and order (and their imperial grammar), encoded indigenous bodies as insignificant, so that each time ‘Indians’ speak, they sound like cacophony to the state. This has political and socioeconomic implications: Indigenous demands amount to an unsettling noise, to a haunting (Pratt 2002). Through each self-conscious rhetorical articulation, the haunting cacophony of indigenous protest erupts into modernity, generating a certain chaos to stage aesthetic interventions loaded with local memory. They indict imperial meaning itself. Abya-Yala’s histories, with their localized construc-

tions of time, space, and memory, live in fragments invisible to a modern citizenry focused on a material present and on the false promise of future utopias. By resisting a modern/colonial organization of time-space, decolonial aesthetics imagine escapes from the trap of modernity as they dismantle the theatricality of power of a violent state, like the mirror does with the lion.

The Zapatista story explains how to kill a “brutal, bloody, and powerful” lion without using a gun; instead, a mirror is used, not to reflect the indigenous image, but to deflect the lion’s force, directing it against itself (Marcos 2008:27). To defeat the lion, the elders choose Antonio, a child, to climb a Ceiba mother-tree, which in the *Popol Vuj* Mayan scriptures connects the youth to the ancestors. The child kills a lamb, fills its heart with nails, and covers it with broken pieces of mirror. As the “night of justice” descends, the lion comes and eats the lamb’s heart: “the more the lion chewed, the more he wounded himself, and the more he bled, the more he chewed” (29). After the lion dies, Antonio brings it to the elders who remind him that the mirror is the prize, not the paws (EZLN 1994: n. p.). The mirror is the essential countervailing force to the brutal war the state unleashes against indigenous peoples; against military forces murdering women and children in places like Acteal, Mexico, and Wounded Knee, the 1890 massacre of three-hundred Lakota. Those dead haunt me, demanding that I tell their story.

Zapatista, Lakota, and Amazonian communities engage in democracy’s game of mirrors to share their patterns of resistance and defy conceptions of territory, of property, and of governance that benefit a liberal or neoliberal agenda at the expense of the environment and their livelihood. Indigenous politics seek to break up modern temporalities to relocate knowledge and power within local communities. Over two hundred Abya-Yala nations stood in solidarity with the water protectors at Standing Rock in the fall of 2016. Among them, the Amazonian Sarayaku travelled to the camp in September stating, “water is life, oil is death.” In 2012, the Sarayaku

had won their legal battle against Ecuador's government for imposing oil-drilling on their territory without previous consultation and were there to tell their story. The Zapatistas, on their part, expressed their support of a shared "dignified struggle" in October. In November 2016, the mirrors shielded the water protectors from the brutal police, which is the story I heard on the radio. The itinerant nation is periodically reminded that indigenous people have always and will always occupy those spaces with distinct meanings.

In this article, *me tomo la palabra* and I weave in fragments three masked stories of Abya-Yala, not so much to share their meanings as to engage the reader in the decolonial aesthetics of indigenous resistance. While mirrors trick the lion that attempts to eat the heart of Zapatista, Lakota, and Amazonian communities, indigenous resistance defends with dreams, dances, and spears their land, water, and life.

The Zapatista Dream

On January first, 1994, the EZLN took San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, and toppled the eponymously named conquistador's statue, declaring war against the Mexican *mal gobierno*. It was a "rebellion of memory," a fight for an indigenous history and an affirmation of their capacity to live in temporalities other than the neo-liberal present. By summoning the past, or the fragments of it, the Zapatista project exploits the cracks in the walls of modernity, prying them open into windows, and eventually into doors that open onto possible futures (Baschet 2012:207-211). The Zapatista historical memory and its invitation to dream opposes the "geograph[ies] of time and space that cover the earth" as well as heroes' statues, "which hide under their stone their incapacity to prove anything" (EZLN 2010:281). The Zapatista political project undermines the Eurocentric dichotomy between myth and history, and proposes in its place coexisting indigenous, national, continental, and intercontinental temporalities.

In the 1980s, Antonio served as cultural mediator between the EZLN and indigenous commu-

nities. Similarly, in the 1990s Subcomandante Marcos mediated between the EZLN, the media, and those in solidarity with the Zapatista autonomous communities. Antonio was his mentor on indigenous philosophy since 1985, when the guerrilla still hid in the silence of the Lacandon Jungle (Vos 2012:325-326). Antonio died after the 1994 uprising. The source of Marcos's folkloric repertoire is Old Antonio's ghost, which stands at the crux of two winds, where the fragments of myth and history converge. On January twenty-seventh, 1994, Marcos shared the content of Old Antonio's dream about waking from the nightmare of colonial history. Marcos had originally transcribed it in August 1992, prior to the uprising, with the purpose of recruiting members and invigorating Zapatista fighters (EZLN 1994:66). He then revived the dream to conclude a communiqué entitled "Chiapas: The Southwest in Two Winds" in hopes of illustrating the motivations behind the Zapatista revolt: enough of poor vice-regal governments! Old Antonio's dream of justice is the viceroy's nightmare of his own downfall. Will Mexico wake up from its colonial nightmare? When the EZLN enunciate their *Ya Basta!* (Enough!) from co-existing, but fragmented temporalities, they draw windows and open doors for other people to wake up from their own historical nightmares.

The Zapatista revolt triumphed by its use of guerrilla warfare and due to its decolonial aesthetics, which had a political impact on the "global economic order" (Stephen 2002:148). Fax and the internet turned a local rebellion into a global event. Although the Zapatistas waged armed conflict, weapons are ancillary to their multiple strategies of resistance. The EZLN organizes through encounters with various sectors of society, such as teachers, journalists, students, union workers, etc. They form *caracoles* (assemblies of autonomous communities) and initiate referenda on justice and democracy (i.e. the 1995 International *consulta* on Democracy or the Ratification of the Peace Referendum, following the San Andrés Accords). They produce a journal, *La Jornada*, deliver communiqués interspersed

with stories and postscripts (distributed online or as pamphlets and translated throughout the world) and communicate through myriad masked envoys who speak on popular stages where the Mexican national identity is performed (i.e. celebrations of Emiliano Zapata's legacy or Columbus Day at the capital) (Stephen 2002:148-175). One main spokesperson for decades was Comandanta Ramona who organized Zapatista communities prior to the uprising and was the strategist behind the San Cristóbal takeover, the Women's Revolutionary Law, the San Andrés Accords, the 1996 national dialogues, and *La Otra Campaña*, which was underway at the moment of her death in 2006.

This project's decolonial aesthetics intertwine naming with memory and history to oppose a neoliberal present. Emiliano Zapata (d. April 10, 1919), leader of the southern militia in the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), was simultaneously fighting the first Marxist revolution of the twentieth century and an indigenous battle from colonial times. The Tzotzil uprisings of 1528 and 1712 found echoes in the larger 'Indian Movement' (1867-1869) to resist the liberal modernizing project, which expropriated communal indigenous lands, formerly organized as colonial *haciendas* (Le Bot 1997; Stephen 2002). When the liberals expropriated the Church in 1855, rebellious priests transferred titles to the indigenous communities who, through the war against French troops and the Maximilian occupation, never stopped toiling the land (Condearena 1997:30). The liberal project sought to export vanilla, cocoa, and other crops for an industrializing global market. The privatization of land and of agricultural production led Mexico to import rice, beans, and corn, which further impoverished indigenous communities (33). Zapata's image threads a national consciousness from various moments of Mexican history when indigenous peoples defended their land against the state. This territorial protection was upended with Salinas de Gortari's 1992 neoliberal constitutional reforms to privatize education, land, and resources and pave the way for free trade (NAFTA).

At the dawn of the twentieth-century, Zapata's cry of "Land and Liberty!" summoned millions who took up arms to resist a liberal imperialism and Dictator Porfirio Díaz's scientific rule. The Constitution's Article 27 guaranteed legal rights for the collective property of communal lands (*ejidos*). Other agrarian reforms followed throughout Latin America, but each time, within national politics the *mestizo* leftists sought a popular base, so indigenous populations came to play as 'peasants' in the electoral game. In a larger Cold War context, a Marxist *campesino* discourse erased the indigenous component from national politics. State violence intensified during the 1970s and 1980s coffee crises. Fractured Mayan communities took refuge in the darkness of the Lacandon Jungle, where they formed a clandestine indigenous left, inspired by guerrillas in Central and South America and by African liberation struggles (Le Bot 1997:199-200).

In 1984, during his first encounter with Marcos by a river, Antonio responded to poor synthesis of Zapata's revolution (as recorded in the books of Mexican history), which excluded the "specificity of the indigenous question" (Stephen 2002:159). Antonio tells Marcos the "real history of Zapata," who is just another manifestation of opposite Tzeltal deities, Ik'al and Votán, two who walk as one, "together, but separate and in agreement" (161). Zapata's appearance on the national stage with his Plan de Ayala in 1911 or at the Zapatista uprising in 1994 are different facets of the same long Mayan battle. Thus, Votán-Zapata, "guardian and heart of the people," reappeared on April 10, 1992, when four thousand indigenous people marched to the municipality of Ocosingo, where they danced before his painted image. Votán-Zapata resurfaces in a 1994 EZLN communiqué that celebrates the 75th anniversary of Zapata's assassination, but condemns Article 27's constitutional reform. This historical-mythical fusion provides an atemporal signifier for any Votán-Zapata who defends their land against an illegitimate government (Baschet 2012:215).

Zapata's image taught Antonio to "ask questions and walk" together but separate with those

who are different, an essential component in the formation of a multiethnic EZLN. Antonio gave Marcos his picture of Votán-Zapata so that he could also walk together with others (Stephen 2002:162). In 2001, the 'March for the Colours of the Earth' walked Zapata's path (Baschet 2012:216), rewinding time and space, as Cortés did when walking from Veracruz into Tenochtitlan over the Tolteca-Chichimeca path, the path of Black and Red Tezcatlipoca. In Mesoamerica, walking the path of history resets time to inaugurate new governance. In Mayan versions, two competing histories and their competing winds must learn to walk together in their difference, like Tzetal deities Ik'al and Votán and the twin heroes of the *Popol Vuj*. Similarly, Zapata's winds move between two national stages where historical meaning is constructed: the museum and the street. Decolonial aesthetics are always political. Within this configuration of polyvalent textualities and identities, Zapata himself becomes a hybrid version of a historical-mythical figure: Votán-Zapata. Mexico's different temporalities and historical dimensions coalesce in him.

Old Antonio's stories are themselves embedded within letters and communiqués to civil society, but recounted as if the lessons of good governance from the *Popol Vuj* and of early-modern mirrors for princes had perfectly converged in contemporary Chiapas. Behind their masks, the Zapatistas remain faceless and assume the names of fallen combatants. Subcomandante Marcos (now Galeano, since that combatant died in May 2016) uses ghosts and talking animals to speak to Mexican and international civil societies and weave transnational networks of solidarity. For example, Durito [the little tough one], is Marcos's mentor on political economy and philosophy. This smoking beetle makes his public entrance on the anniversary of Zapata's assassination. Durito first appeared to Marcos on December 25, 1985, in his "asphyxiating solitude" to "alleviate the cold dawns of a combatant" (Marcos 1999:27). Among EZLN documents that reaffirmed Zapata's revolutionary legacy as a fight for the land, Marcos uses Durito's story to

respond to a letter written by Mariana Moguel, a Zapatista child. Durito, Marcos's small friend, comforts him in moments of doubt as he refines his understanding of neoliberalism, the new enemy that threatens memory and the imagination of any other mode of living and being.

This story (and the coloured markers he sends along with it) might also comfort Mariana and help her imagine (and draw) alternative ways out of the Mexican nightmare. In March 1995, Durito reappears during the EZLN retreat from sustained government attacks and shows up again on December 25, 1995 to celebrate his tenth anniversary. In each appearance, he takes on a different intellectual persona, but in each case, he serves as a comfort. Durito assuages the painful memory of Zapata's assassination and illustrates how to implement decolonial aesthetics to rectify indigenous legacies.

In *Story of the Cat-Dog* (2014), whose release coincides with celebrating thirty years of EZLN insurgency against *el mal gobierno*, Marcos ponders the repetition of history and its connection to deterritorialization, nation building, and peoples' subjugation by means of ontological categorizations. For him, fanatics of modernity "pigeonhole the world in closed boxes with exclusive options: 'if you aren't this, then you must be its opposite.' [...] But they ignore the fact that the problem is with the system [...] All categorical options are a trap" (Enlace Zapatista 2013, n. p.). The Zapatistas suggest that ontological possibilities based on race, class, gender, sexuality, and geographical origin are a trap of modernity. The trap is ubiquitous, reified, and repeated through the repetition of history. Yet, the possibility remains that, by performing alternative histories and geographies, marginalized people might confound this logic and escape the trap of modernity.

Alternative, invisible histories can be found hidden beneath coloniality, [P]erhaps on a still *distant calendar in an uncertain geography*, she, the light that both unveils me and keeps me from sleeping, will understand that there were *hidden lines*, drawn for her, that *maybe only then* will be

revealed or recognized in *these words now*, and she will know in that moment that *it didn't matter what path my steps tread*. Because she was, is, and will always be the only *worthwhile destination*. (Emphasis added; *ibid.*)

Ambiguous relations between time, space, and inter-subjective interactions expose veiled alternatives and Marcos goes on to refer to Zapatista history as what is “not perceptible,” conveyed only through hidden images, which cannot be captured with smartphones (objects of progress and civilization), but can only be perceived with the heart: “That which is *not seen* in the daily comings and goings *is the history that we are*” (emphasis added, *ibid.*). Veiled alternatives cannot be seen by the modern Eurocentric eye, blinded by time, space, and ontology at the service of modern history, geography, and labour identities. Indigenous worlds are revealed by following footsteps on local paths in uncertain geographies where the “then, now, and tomorrow” can intertwine to show alternative societal models that are conceived otherwise.

Throughout the dictatorships of the 1980s, Latin American guerrilla movements and peasant struggles (from Shining Path to the Sandinistas) failed one by one, as governments became increasingly dependent on foreign capital, which brought corporate and state militarization to assert control over indigenous lands. The Zapatistas are among many movements of resistance to extractive mining and crop exports led to variously figured armed struggles (Maoist, Guevarist, Evangelist, Theology of Liberation, and the Emiliano Zapata’s National Independent Peasant Alliance, ANCLIEZ). The Zapatistas stood out from other movements because they did not simply expose the neoliberal crisis, but showed that repression and racism are central to modernity.

Today, Zapatistas are playing the ultimate national game of mirrors with an envoy, Marichuy, as their spokeswoman and candidate for the 2018 Mexican presidency. These EZLN spokesmen under the General Command of the CCRI (*Comité Clandestino Revolucionario Indígena*) continue to walk “unnamable and faceless”

the geographies of a haunted Mexico (Stephen 2002:168). In their autonomous communities, they walk separate and in agreement, and govern by listening to those who join their historical path or stage their own decolonial aesthetic intervention. The masked Zapatista communities invoke Votán-Zapata, paint murals, build *caracoles*, and live autonomously so that others can dream with Old Antonio and join with the Zapatista dignified struggle against *el mal gobierno* and in defence of the land.

The Lakota Dance

While the Zapatistas share their dreams over *caracoles*, Lakota people do it through dancing ceremonies whereby images and meanings materialize in a collective celebration of life. Lakota cosmovisions involve elements from all four quarters of the Universe: western black/blue thunder/rain; northern white wind/dreams; eastern red morning star/wisdom; and southern yellow growth/life. The story goes that when Wise Woman came from the East, she burned the foolish boy who desired her body, turning him into a carcass. But as she turned into a buffalo, she gave songs and the sacred pipe to his friend who understood her sacredness. The Lakota walk their path of history in her “sacred manner” (Black Elk, 3). A continental United States became possible after the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo (1848) and the end of the Civil War (1861). The Black Hills battle was among the last ones fought for a Manifest Destiny to expand an “American” border across the Missouri River and into the Pacific Ocean. The 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty between the Lakota Nation and the *Wasichus* [the U.S. Government] closed the Bozeman Trail to the Black Hills and purportedly guaranteed Lakota’s right to hold ancestral lands west of the Missouri River, “as long as grass should grow and water flow” (14). Grass and water underlie an indigenous governance in the Buffalo Nation. But the *Wasichus* act like the foolish boy who failed to recognize what is sacred.

Black Elk met with anthropologist John Neihardt at Pine Ridge Reservation in the 1930s to

share the “things of the other world” that came to him as visions for those who “have lived and shall live that story, to be grass upon the hills” (1979:1). He recalled life before the 1890 Wounded Knee massacre, where “a people’s dream died in bloody snow” (ibid.). But this dream did not die; Black Elk’s visions belonged to a common Lakota repertoire rehearsed through repeated performances of their forbidden dances. The Buffalo Nation dances and sings as practices of re-existence and to build the archives of their oral history, that the American nation muffles behind an archive of its own, like the faces of four presidents on the Black Hills.

When Black Elk was nine, he understood the hills’ meaning through a dream. First came two men with thunder-spears who gave him bows and arrows. Then, horses from the clouds rode over the hills and he walked into a rainbow tipi where six elders, “old like hills, like stars” (20), revealed their knowledge one by one to him: 1) water gives life; 2) bows destroy life; 3) dreams are medicine; 4) the sacred pipe helps them “walk with a people’s heart”; 5) understanding guides the Lakota on the Black Road, on the Red Road (22). The eldest, old like the Earth, warned him, “your nation on the earth will have great troubles!” (23). He sees warriors riding horses, screaming “*Hoka Hey!*” as their bows transform into spears, themselves into turtles, and a village into the sacred hoop. Life moves around the sacred tree, which, like the Ceiba tree in Chiapas, connects the past to the future. As the Lakota continued walking, Black Elk sees starvation and people without a tree. All the universe falls silent when he hears a song: “They will dance!” (32). Then, the Black Hills turn the colours of Heaven.

Pahuska [Gen. Custer]’s geological expedition to the Black Hills preceded their sale to the *Wasichus* in an imposed Treaty, signed in October 1876. He sought gold (70), which was “not good for anything” (60). Unlike water, it does not produce life, but forces people into the Black Road/war, into square houses and towns, and away from circular tipis, from the sacred hoop. Black Elk recounts how during a blizzard on March 16,

1876, U.S. soldiers killed Lakota men, women, and children, and set their tipis on fire (69). Then, on June 17, 1876, Gen. Crook fought Lakota soldiers at the Rosebud Battle, while dancers offered their skins to the cottonwood tree at their Sundance on the Greasy Grass. *Wasichus* came like rivers. They selected Spotted Tail as the new Lakota leader (140), took away people’s guns and horses, built the Pine Ridge Agency (1881), and forbid the “barbaric” Sundance, which was henceforth secretly performed at the Little White River (253). Meanwhile, in an attempt to save his people confined to Pine Ridge, Black Elk made pictures of his vision and performed his Horse Dance. In June 1882, the *heyoka* fools performed the Dog Vision of Lamentation to provide some laughter for the despairing Lakota at Pine Ridge. Yet, in 1883, the Lakota again performed their Sundance, “for nothing can live well, except in a manner suited to the way the Power of the Earth lives and moves to do its work” (163). Lakota resistance through circular dance, like the Zapatista rebellion of memory, conceives a local governance that begins with decolonial aesthetics.

Black Elk left Pine Ridge and travelled Europe with the Buffalo Bill Show. Later, while living with *Wasichu* friends in Paris and working for the Mexican Joe Show, he suddenly felt dead inside. Across the Atlantic, his people were starving because the food promised in the 1876 treaty was underprovisioned while measles and whooping cough abounded. When Black Elk returned in 1889, he heard of a new vision from Nevada, which prophesized an indigenous world without *Wasichus*. Ghost Dances performed this vision and spread like fire across the cultural corridor connecting Lakota land to the Midwest and to Mexico, the *peyotl* route. They reached Wounded Knee in 1890 and provoked hysteria among U.S. soldiers, who killed Sitting Bull, arrested Big Foot, and surrounded the Lakota camp. On December 29, Big Foot’s guard shot a soldier, so 300 Lakota were massacred during morning coffee, “all frozen in ghostly attitudes, thrown into a ditch like dogs” (Crow-Dog 1990:7).

When recalling this traumatic event, Black Elk's and Mary Crow-Dog's narratives of resistance evoke a common image of a baby sucking on her dead mother's breast.

Following Wounded Knee where "a people's dream died in bloody snow" (Neihardt 1979:1), rape, forced sterilizations, and constant assaults on indigenous peoples are hardly ever prosecuted. To solve "the Indian problem," Generals Sherman and Sheridan proposed boarding-schools to create "farmhands, laborers, and chambermaids" (Crow-Dog 1990:30). After the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, the Reservation, "a place without hope" (15), became the privileged site where military attacks, Tribal Councils, BIA bureaucracy, and missionary schools, "kill the Indian to save the man" (23). Lakota trauma led to high levels of alcoholism and suicide, which they attribute to *maza skan-skan*, the "whiteman's time as opposed to Indian time" (29). Mount Rushmore (1927-1941) is a reminder that a new time was imposed on an old place.

He-Dog, a flute maker, held Ghost Dances in caves and kept alive "the little sparkle under the snow" (Crow-Dog 1990:10). The first Crow-Dog got his name when coyotes healed him after being wounded while protecting the hills before the 1868 Treaty. The Lakota "fight for our land is at the core of our existence" (11). Names encode their history and territories, while people's visions, performed as dances, renew Lakota life. The Ghost Dance was revived in 1974, when AIM's "new wind" brought the eagle's message, rekindled behind the "Buckskin Curtain" (74). Peyote's visions "renew the substance of things long forgotten" (96). When FBI, BIA, and paramilitary forces suspended their 1973 Calico's dance, the Lakota walked right through them in silence and reached Wounded Knee to join their ancestors. They were surrounded for 71 days. The birth of Mary Crow-Dog's son, Pedro, and repeated dances brought life and peace to *Canke Opi*, their ancestors' mass-grave.

During the 1973 siege, the protesters declared these bleeding hills, "sovereign territory of the independent Oglala [Lakota] Nation" (140). Those

present at Wounded Knee were later imprisoned, tortured, mutilated, murdered, or disappeared. Leonard Crow-Dog was charged with conspiracy for saying, "Don't sell your grandmother earth, don't sell your water!" (216). Leonard Peltier serves two life sentences accused of murdering two FBI agents during the 99th celebration of Gen. Custer's 1876 illegal seizure of the hills. In November 1975, Micmac Annie Mae was found dead. Her hands were cut off; she had been raped. She was Peltier's dear friend. But Huichol Mayans and Oaxaca Nahuatls attended the Ghost Dance of 1975 at the Crow-Dogs, and life continued. The Lakota defend water and life and pay the prize with their lives and livelihood, yet through decolonial aesthetics they transform the haunting into dignified living.

While deterritorialization breaks the sacred hoop, dancing around the cottonwood tree allows the Lakota to feel "Indian again" (83). In the 1876 Sundance at Standing Rock, Sitting Bull gave skin offerings for the regeneration of life, and in 2016, thousands joined the Lakota there to peacefully protest the \$3.7 billion Keystone XL Pipeline project to transfer oil from Canada to the Gulf Coast across the Missouri River passing by their sacred sites (and not by the settlers' town, Bismarck). Hundreds of indigenous nations, US military vets, farmers, and activists stood in solidarity above the pipeline's path. In September 2016, a Sarayaku delegation travelled to Standing Rock to deliver a sacred message to unite the Southern Condor to the Northern Eagle and together protect life and the earth from oil companies that are blind, unable to understand the language of nature. The Zapatistas, on their part, declared that "their dignified struggle is also our own" and sent an offering from Chiapas to the Sacred Stone Camp (Enlace Zapatista 2016 n.p.). A month later, buffalos came running down the hills and the Lakota received them with a tremolo and raised fists. The Buffalo Nation lives on; the sacred hoop is not broken.

Militarized police responded against water protectors with dogs, gas, rubber bullets, massive arrests, and water cannons at below freez-

ing temperature on Thanksgiving 2016, risking freezing people to death and contributing to a longer repertoire of Lakota memory. The lion had arrived with its brute-force. By November, the protest's solidarity reached 20,000 at Standing Rock. To defend land and water, the Lakota wielded thirty-six mirrors made by students of artist Cannupa Hanska Luger at the Institute of American Indian Art (IAIA) and 2,000 veterans joined them to deflect military violence with mirrors that reflected the soldiers' (in)humanity back at them. By December, President Obama and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers momentarily halted the construction. President Trump's 2017 executive action reversed the engineers' decision; but Trump's reversal has already been declared illegal due to lack of previous consultation and to possible environmental threats. Like Pedro at Wounded Knee in 1973, a Lakota baby named *Mni wiconi* [Water is life!] was born in October 2016 at Standing Rock to renew Lakota life once again. The Lakota danced. The camp was finally razed and tipis burned during a February blizzard in 2017. But their resistance lives on. Indigenous nations walk together in their difference to defend water and life.

The Spears of the Living Forest

Imágenes de Identidad (Ortiz 2005) features 140 watercolours of daily moments from nineteenth-century Quito, Ecuador, from a book found in Spain's National Library in 1997. One of the watercolours depicts a masked dancer ready for carnival, covered with mirrors that refract a colonial theatricality of power (FONSAL 2005:70). With masks and mirrors, indigenous peoples deflect an epistemic and corporeal violence, awaiting the right conditions for overt resistance. The "Napó Indian" watercolour features an Amazonian carrying on his back a woven basket covered with plantain leaves (26). He hikes from the Amazon through treacherous mountains and holds a long spear in each hand, both to support his movement and to protect himself against threats. The state has always sponsored the visual construction of the savage Indian, but it also has

disseminated the image of an indomitable landscape. Since *La escuela quiteña's* founding in 1588, Andean churches and state buildings were dressed in images that encoded the new modern state's social norms by erasing the "Indian." During the Enlightenment, Alexander Von Humboldt travelled to Ecuador on a scientific expedition and built on this colonial gaze for the world to look at indigenous people as surrounded by a savage landscape, supposedly empty and readily available for colonial settlers. This scientific gaze found echoes in colonial North American images that stage a Manifest Destiny to expand the nation's Western border into the Pacific Ocean at the expense of indigenous lives and livelihoods.

Peoples from the *Kawsak Sacha* [Living Forest] have climbed the Andes for trade since pre-Columbian times. During colonial times, Spain consumed Napó's cinnamon, so Kichwa people who migrated as servants for the mestizo settlers came to be known as *Canelos*, 'cinnamon people' (Carcelen-Estrada 2010:66). They worked as indebted servants for the new *haciendas*, whose settlements encroached on Waorani and Záparo territories in the hinterlands of the Curaray and Napó Rivers and on the Shuar's and Ashuar's territories to the South. After Ecuador's liberal revolution (1895-1912) and Rockefeller's Brazilian adventures, the United States began consuming Amazonian rubber and oil. The promises of an Amazonian development contrasted with a Kichwa displacement from struggling Andean agricultural and mining economies. Upon moving to the Amazon and with their vision and language, Kichwa settlers encoded for the state the Waorani and Shuar people as barbarians with spears, 'Aucas' and 'Jíbaros,' respectively. The Kichwa were mediators between the Andean and Amazonian worlds.

After Ecuador's independence from Spain in the nineteenth-century, liberal elites collected folklore to encode a national identity, mimicking social practices among early industrial societies, such as France, Germany, and Great Britain, that confined citizens to their value as workers for imperial markets. Similarly, indigenous cultural

practices were reduced to Ecuadorian folklore – visual decorations for the nation-state, devoid of indigenous meaning. To engineer a working class and a modern citizenry, the liberal elites “civilized” Ecuador through universal education and the development of a national culture, forcing migration and acculturation among indigenous populations. Juan León Mera explicitly opposed “enlightened people” to Indians, and thought of them as separate spheres of the state (Carcelén-Estrada 2012:12). At the turn of the century, President Luis Cordero Dávila, “motivated by the rise of folkloristic studies and anthropology in Europe, compiled dictionaries and attempted Kichwa literacy programs” (ibid.). Like their colonial antecedents, postcolonial elites appropriated indigenous culture, yet assumed that “savages” were not citizens until they adopted labour-based identities, such as “peasants” or “workers.” But when President Plaza gave the protectorate of Ecuador’s “savages” to North American missionaries, the latter were fighting a battle for the Amazon in a Cold War context. The missionary presence sought to put an end to spears and open the jungle for oil exploitation. A Waorani and Shuar forced deterritorialization ensued, solidifying a Kichwa presence in the region.

When the first American missionaries entered Shuar territory at the dawn of oil exploration in the Ecuadorian Amazon, Bible translators attempted to translate into the local languages “the righteousness of God;” the Shuar proposed their model of a “well-cleared garden,” of “manioc free of weed,” metaphors also guiding a Kichwa conception of a proper way of speaking [*alli rimana*] (Nuckolls and Swanson 2014: 49). In an Amazonian cosmovision, speaking mimics proper gardening. A Kichwa way of sensing transmuted into an Amazonian regional cosmovision, which binds nations together, despite their linguistic difference. Another thing they share: their fight against oil companies and for an ancestral, cultural, territorial, and economic integrity that begins with the recognition of peoples’ dignities and of the sustenance of the *Kawsak Sacha*.

While the Zapatista dream incorporates decolonial aesthetics that fuse multiple temporalities to remap national space and Lakota dances weave visions of a prophetic future, in the Amazon, Waoranis, Shuars, and Kichwas conflate space and being as they “evoke concrete memories for interactions that, in their turn, give rise to memories of key experiences” and sense the world through “the sounds and movements of the Forest” (ibid.). Zapatistas move as they listen to other people’s walking, but Amazonians merge with the *Kawsak Sacha* to renew life through the sound and movement of the Forest itself. The embodied experience of speech displaces thought and referent as the sources of meaning to centre daily practices of re-existence as the enunciating sites where language and action together produce meaning from concrete, skilful analogies from nature. To live with and within nature, Ecuador’s Amazonian social order emerges from the “earthy concreteness of native experience with rivers, plants, birds, and garden patches” (ibid.). There is no division between nature and people. Like Votán-Zapata, Amazon’s beings are not single, but always exist in relationship to one another, not by weaving mythical with historical times as much as by casting a net of all life within the *Kawsak Sacha* itself. Amazonian enunciation belongs not to a people, but to the voice of the strong gardening mother [*sinchi chakramama*], whose “sounds and movements” reproduce in human speech the forest’s message with its same rich aesthetic complexity. Life [*Kawsay*] takes plural meanings in nature’s archives of history.

An Amazonian “immanent alterity and the dialogical constructedness of reality” produces ‘fractal’ meaning from the forest as well as from performing bodies “in an aesthetic dialogue with their environment” (Uzendoski 2014:29). For example, when missionary François Pierre asked for the Záparo meaning of the verb ‘to load’ [*astana*], his interlocutor responded with skilful analogies to nature that encoded a historical consciousness. The action starts with a canoe which leaves their ancestral place [*ñukanchik*

tampokamak], Piwi Pond, to pursue a dream of sustenance [*aswa puñuna*] (Nuckolls and Swanson 2014:49). After cutting down corn and plantains, a combination of Andean [corn-*sara*] and lowland [plantain-*palanta*] agricultural epistemologies, the Záparo 'load' these bundles on baskets like those in the old watercolour, and load the bundles on the canoe along wood split thinly like snakes [*tsalinchik*] (ibid.). 'Astana' simultaneously signifies from various dimensions: an original migration; the merging of agricultural models [corn/plantain]; overlapping ontologies [snakes/trees, people/baskets]; and a Záparo fluvial movement. People move through history even in the simple act of loading. Understanding action without understanding decolonial meanings, amounts to reducing words to their value in a global market, turning an epistemic language into useless speech [*yanka rimana*] (Carcelen-Estrada 2012; Uzendoski 2014). The Záparo ancestral language died and they speak Kichwa today, but their orality shares the cultural archives from Napo to Paraguay.

Amazonian decolonial aesthetics include walking the forest in silence and speaking from the forest. For example, onomatopoeic sounds are central to Amazonian speech. The Kichwa phrase for "here they come lost through the jungle, *taras, taras, taras*" [*taras, taras, taras pantasha, witata shamushkakuna*], includes cultural norms in the use of the 'taras' ideophone, which mimics the sounds of machetes chopping down the *Kawsak Sacha* as opposed to the people who, inhabited by it, can walk through it in silence. Amazonian Kichwa, Huao Terero, and Shuar, coalesce into a single Amazonian cosmology.

The Sarayaku [corn/water] tell as their foundational myth the story of a pregnant mother who, lost in the jungle, *taras, taras, taras*, stumbles into the jaguars' house. This common Amazonian story describes how jaguars eat the woman, but Jaguar-Grandmother saves the twins inside her, loads them into a basket, and raises them as her own. Once grown, Cuillur and Dociru find out about their mother's murder and transform all jaguars into stones, except one pregnant jaguar

who escapes to repopulate the earth. On Judgment Day [*ishuk pucha*], the jaguars will come from beneath the stones to "devour humanity" (Uzendoski 2014:30-34). Today, the Twins' decedents are defending the *Kawsak Sacha* to prevent this prophetic human destruction. While Waorani meanings hide in isolation and silence, Záparo and Sarayaku stories validate migration and trade for the regeneration of life, but, in all cases, nature's sounds and movements reproduce their fractal meanings. Signification occurs at various dimensions that are activated through daily actions. They begin at dawn, drinking *wayusa* tea while sharing dreams to collectively make sense of experiences and keep the community united and well-informed. In 2012, the International Court of Human Rights in Costa Rica condemned the Ecuadorian government for oil exploration in Block 23 and recognized the Sarayaku's right to defend their ancestral territories from international corporations. So, they travelled to Standing Rock to help the Lakota fight a common struggle.

Ideophones encode historical moments; in the Záparo case, *taras* marks an intruder to the Amazon. In 2006, I went to the Amazon looking for the Bible that Summer Institute of Linguistic (SIL) missionaries translated into Huao Terero with the support of Texaco and the Ecuadorian state, but instead I found silence in a cave, protected by a roaring waterfall. I was staying at the elders Gaba's and Karoe's *maloca*, when Mengatowe, Karoe's father, invited me to follow him through the jungle. Without knowing our destination, I trailed him for miles in complete silence. The 'taras' of my boots contrasted with his silent footsteps. He never spoke a word. Mengatowe helped me down the last cliff, which dropped 30 feet into a waterfall. I washed my face, we had some water, and he broke his silence. When American rubber hunters came at the turn of the twentieth century, the Waorani hid from *cowudi* [cannibal] invaders in silence for decades inside the cave behind that waterfall. While I was concerned about the "first contact" linguistic and cultural consequences, Mengatowe reminded

me that the Forest remembers a longer resistance that remains invisible and silent to intruders. Like Mayans, Amazonians walk along older paths to find in the forest archival sources for a collective memory. They demand autonomy and a sustainable future free of silence and invisibility. The Living Forest, *Kawsak Sacha*, encodes historical memory in a very concrete way. We trekked back to the *maloca* house in time for dinner. The family sat to eat to the sound of Gaba's songs about the forest. She tells me, "when the Forest is razed, the songs are forgotten."

After SIL completed its work in the 1970s, the Waorani were divided. Some joined the *cowudi*'s journey and settled in oil towns, among Kichwas, or on riverbanks, like Karoe and Gaba in Chiripuno. The Taromenane, however, chose the depths of the Living Forest, an "intangible" area in the Yasuní, a euphemism for an autonomous indigenous territory beyond the grasp of the state. China funds today's expanding resource extractivism in the Amazon. To prepare for its coming, a Taromenane genocide had to take place. It was so quiet, almost imperceptible, narrated as a strife among tribal people, irrational and inherently violent. The state denied it ever happened. In 2013, the Tagaeri and Taromenane walked back the path taken in the 1970s to escape from SIL towns and demanded tools from the Waorani elders who still lived there. The elders Ompure and Buganey, from the closest *maloca* to Tagaeri territory, tried in vain to explain how *cowudi* companies no longer provided them with food or tools; they had lost all leverage to get them anything. The Tagaeri did not believe the elders because they knew oil companies were back, venturing into their territory, and assumed that the Cold War paternalistic model for corporate development was still operational, even if wearing a different mask.

Throughout their prolonged historical relationship with other ethnic groups – Inca, Habsburg, Bourbon, those caught up by Ecuador's settler programs, and US imperial policies, the Waorani chose voluntary isolation to avoid foreigners and defend the *Kawsak Sacha* from the *cowudi* who venture into the Amazon looking to transform

"natural resources" into "value." The *cowudi* seek mythical warriors, magical fountains, cinnamon, gold, rubber, petroleum, wood, palm-oil, land, water, oxygen, or whatever fancies of progress drive them to raze the Amazon and destroy the concept of life itself, as per a Waorani cosmology. "Waorani meaning is protected in the depths of silence, waiting for the right time to emerge with an overt resistance" (Carcelen-Estrada 2010:85), and today this overt resistance is local as well as transnational.

Amazonian decolonial aesthetics move away from indigenous and collective rights to place nature itself as intervening for her political rights. In the 1990s, the Waorani won their case against Texaco for an oil spill one and a half times bigger than Exxon-Valdez's in Alaska, but the cleaning of the forest never took place (75). In 2012, the Sarayaku won their human rights case at International Courts and defended the rights of nature. Amazonians as one with nature, bring nature to the courts to demand her constitutional rights. Indeed, the 2008 Constitution guarantees the rights of nature and of people to live in harmony and sustain a good life, *Sumak Kawsay* (Art. 14) and to decide over the destiny of their *Sumak Kawsay* (Art. 275). But even if written in a constitution, indigenous meanings remain elusive to a state built on the premise that their lives and livelihoods are dispensable and their lands, readily available for appropriation. Since the 1990s, indigenous marches have repeatedly paralyzed the capital, taking over the political stage, causing regime change, and forcing constitutional reform. President Correa already gutted the *Sumak Kawsay* Constitution through his authoritarian reforms, and the Waoranis, Shuar, Kichwas, Záparos and many others continue to march together in the defence of life, as they have always done. Indigenous resistance outlives the nation-state regardless of the constitution that shapes it.

Since its first liberal constitution (1830), Ecuadorian democracy reinvented itself twenty times until the 2013 Tagaeri massacre. The time had come for overt resistance against corpo-

rate encroachment on their *Kawsak Sacha*. The Tagaeri broke their silence with spears. When the deadline came and the Waorani elders failed to deliver, approximately twenty Tagaeri pierced them through the chest with long spears. Ompure was pierced twelve times and Buganey, six. The elders' slow death was recorded on a phone and disseminated online, an image that found echoes in that of the five missionaries pierced in the late 1950s, the event that opened the door to Texaco's oil production. This image reinforces the stereotype of the Amazonian savage with spears, ignoring its meanings within the forest. To avenge their death, Araba and other Waorani relatives entered Tagaeri territory, *taras*, *taras*, kidnapped two young girls, and killed 30 people, right there, at the centre of the universe, where once their mythical serpent, *tente*, had fallen from the sky and split into humans and cannibals, the latter driven to run after fancies in the four directions of the earth, while the former stay to protect the *Kawsak Sacha* from any incoming *cowudi*.

The Tagaeri massacre cleared Ecuador's Yasuní Forest for oil extraction. The government dropped its ecological promise to keep oil underground in exchange for 3.6 billion dollars in international donations. President Correa ignored the demands of organized urban 'citizens,' the *Yasunidos*, who first protested the abandonment of the Yasuní project, but later came against his venture for indefinite re-election and amendments to laws on inheritance. Like in 1998, the year that marked Bahía's first earthquake, Plan Colombia, Ecuador's dollarization, and the beginning of the uprisings that put Correa in power to implement the *Sumak Kawsay* Constitution, the *mestizo* citizens joined indigenous movements to force a *Pachakutik*, a turning of the world upside-down. By 1995, a national indigenous mobilization that had begun as cacophony to the state in their march to the capital in January 1990, had become the main political force, *Pachakutik*, which led the way to Correa's rise to power (Becker 2010). Ironically, their revolutionary power was precisely their demise. The

revolutionary state violently repressed protesters, ignored claims of river pollution, increased its economic dependence on China, closed the indigenous university *Amautay Wasi*, and evicted indigenous leaders from their CONAIE headquarters in Quito. The state mocked mestizo solidarity as Pachamamismo and indigenous protesters as poncho losers, imprisoning many, including 26 Saraguro political prisoners. Yet, mestizo protesters also mocked in social media Salvador Quishpe, Governor from the Amazon province of Zamora-Chinchipe, calling him "stupid monkey," "dumb Indian," "trash" and some even suggesting Indians kill themselves.

While different peoples may walk together, the *Sumak Kawsay* and democracy may not coexist on the same stage. The Indian's mask inevitably muffles indigenous meanings, Kichwa, Shuar, Waorani, or any other. Yet, it is still easier to conceive an autonomous community than an autonomous environment. Yasuní will now begin to die, but the stones are moving. Another earthquake hit Bahía in 2016, reminding the national government that, like in 1998, time has come today for another *Pachakutik*. Will the jaguars return to eat humans? Are mirrors enough to protect us or do we need spears? When will it be too late to understand the political demands of the *Kawsak Sacha*?

Conclusions

The Zapatista rebellion of memory, Lakota dances, and Amazonian fractal signification draw from their own haunting archives, but together resist the theatricality of power behind today's neoliberal present. Decolonial aesthetics politically resist bad governments and their national organizations of territory and property, while unveiling their theatricality of power in their liberal, industrial, and post-industrial or neoliberal formations. While indigenous meanings remain evasive behind Indian masks and mirrors that deflect state violence, reflect on a shared humanity, and refract dreams into political action in each act of re-existence – whether by hiding in silence, speaking, telling stories,

gardening, dancing, painting murals, or building *caracoles* – indigenous communities reproduce life with its aesthetic complexities, as they connect to the land, and the land to the law. States come and go, expand, shrink, rise, and fall, but peoples' dreams of freedom and their ancestral memory remain. Dreams awake forests and hills alike to provide life and water to Abya-Yala. Their materialization into dance or narrative suture fragmented memories from heterogeneous archives into a continental pattern that reveals a global solidarity, to hold the state accountable for guaranteeing individual human rights, collective ancestral rights, and the rights of Nature.

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