

Introduction

In the introduction to the first volume of this same topic, I claimed that academic debates on decolonization in the Global North had failed for the most part to engage Native American and Indigenous theories and knowledges. In subsequent articles and conference presentations I dwelled further on the critical importance of Indigenous knowledges to analyze their literary production. Peruvian Quechua or *Qhiswa* scholar Pablo Landeo Muñoz had already stated “al aproximarnos al mundo andino nos encontramos con una realidad donde el concepto *pacha* (mundo, cosmos, tiempo, acontecimientos y seres) responde a epistemes divergentes del concepto occidental de ‘mundo’” (*Categorías andinas* 18; when we approach the Andean world we find ourselves with a reality where the concept *pacha* [world, cosmos, time, events and beings] responds to divergent epistemes from the Western concept “world”). This issue became all too clear for me after participating in the *Abriendo Caminos* Conference on History, Society, and Literature in Chiapas that took place at the Universidad Autónoma de Chiapas in Jobel (San Cristóbal de las Casas) the first weekend of April 2017. *Abriendo Caminos* José Antonio Reyes Matamoros is a civil society of Chiapanecan Maya writers and academics. A significant recognition of their open-mindedness is their honoring a non-Maya personality, José Antonio Reyes Matamoros, who directed the first creative writing workshop for Mayas in 1997, as explained in chapter 4 of this volume. Reyes Matamoros’s widow, Maura Fazi Pastorino was honored at the end by a poetry reading where Maya and Mestizo poets read their work in intermixed fashion. Later that same night, informal conversations washed down with *boj* or mescal with some of the key conference participants, such as Antonio Guzmán Gómez, Mikel Ruiz, Ruperta Bautista, Canario de la Cruz, Ary Uriel López, Ulises Gómez Vásquez, Ligia Peláez, and Fabiola Carrillo, comprehensively embraced the critical importance of better understanding Indigenous knowledges to fully analyze their present-day cultural production.

It has been self-evident for at least a good century that we cannot truly separate literary and cultural production as such from the knowledges that inform creative efforts, as these record personal and community experience. The distinctive social imaginaries informing authors are either interpellated by those very narratives or else reconfigured by the fictional or symbolic acts themselves. After all, social imaginaries are “first-person subjectivities that build upon implicit understandings that underlie and make possible common practices” (4), as Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar argued, if in a different sense than my own understanding. When restricting ourselves to literary production we know that, as systems of representation, all forms of writing, regardless of their origin, are always written within a sociopolitical, cultural, historical, and ecological context, informed as well by issues of gender, race, sexualities, and other variants. It is also a given that texts (or any kind of cultural object, for that matter) go through processes of production, circulation, and consumption, procedures that are informed contextually as well and often determine their public impact or lack thereof.

Indigenous knowledges are crucial. As we pursue the various contexts within which their literary production is breaking through both globally and in Abiayala, we immediately must confront the consequences of Western epistemological dominance, and the distinction between disciplinary power and the Foucauldian concept of biopower that accounts for distinct modes of racism.¹ Both issues have become critical factors in Western-centered humanities at least since the late 1980s. In the first case, thanks to the pioneering efforts of Aníbal Quijano, Enrique Dussel, and Walter Dignolo, decolonial thinking has evolved from postcolonial studies and subaltern studies to become the dominant epistemic approach to confront Eurocentric thinking in the twenty-first century, despite critiques such as that of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, analyzed in the introduction to volume 1, or that of Horacio Legrás, mentioned further along in this same introduction.² In the second case, thanks to the scholarship on the concept of biopower—the ability to discipline, regulate, control and manage bodies—of which Kim Su Rasmussen’s “Foucault’s Genealogy of Racism” is but one case in point.³ As we know, since their apparition—and that of other theoretical approaches too long to enumerate here, such as postcolonial studies, subaltern studies, and others—a strong critique of Eurocentrism has unfolded in many fields of social thought. Dignolo stated in his seminal text *The Darker Side of the Renaissance* (1995) how the epistemic effects of colonialism are among the most damaging, far-reaching, and least understood problems impacting Westernization and modernity. Rasmussen understands the origins of racism as emerging at “the intersection of disciplinary technologies

that target the body and biopolitical technologies that target the population” (37). In this logic, Foucault’s notion of biopolitical governmentality would emphasize the political rationality that mobilized and connected population, normality, and race, a phenomenon detectable in Abiyala since the Spanish invasion of the Americas. We have seen here ever since how sovereign power worked to create what Mignolo labeled the colonial difference. This entire logic points in the direction of decoloniality as the only means to oppose the ways in which colonialism still infects the way the world is viewed. Whether speaking truth to power, or engaging in a myriad of other activities, decolonial processes can be implemented only from the perspective of subalternized knowledges, because these are the only repositories from which a transformation of Western-centric ways of being can be challenged, to generate more inclusive understandings of knowledge. Thus, it is important to better comprehend what subalternized knowledges are, and their loci of enunciation for, in Alcoff’s terms, “both imagining multiplicity as well as invigorating critique” (97). For me, submerging myself in subalternized knowledges has meant studying their literary production, which crafts epistemological and ontological social imaginaries from within a full immersion into the colonial difference.

Said differently, Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos made a comparable argument. For him, decolonial issues would have achieved two goals: (1) constituted an anti-hegemonic ecology of knowledges; and (2) generate new democratic models that in turn would break away from Eurocentric modes and begin to crack the latter’s framework. Framed with different goals in mind, De Sousa’s arguments are compatible with the implications of what is understood as decoloniality.

We could include in this argumentation Argentine-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel’s ethics of liberation to consolidate decolonial options. Dussel confronts the hegemony of Eurocentric philosophy in *Ethics of Liberation* (2013). He states that Eurocentric philosophers suffer from an incapacity to imagine non-European counter-discourses, even though Europe first became “modern” because of its encounter with the non-European Other: the residents of Abiyala in 1492. Dussel thus positions his own premises as “a counter-discourse, a critical philosophy born in the periphery (from the perspective of the victims, the excluded), which has the intention of being relevant on a global scale” (47). He challenges the traditional understanding of ethics as beginning in Hellenism prior to structuring Eurocentric philosophy.

For him, Eurocentric philosophers became Hellenocentric—and ignored metaphysical, ontological, and ethical thinking elsewhere in the

planet— only in the wake of the colonial difference. Dussel interrogates this mode of argumentation with a “philosophy of the periphery” that envisages liberation as an ongoing struggle against racialized and subalternized exclusion. In consequence, he elaborates a radical, deconstructive critique of Eurocentric philosophical systems, because, in his understanding, ontologies do not come ahead of “the good,” but follow articulations of what “the good” consists of (343). Within his overall argumentation, Dussel claims that studying myths is a way of doing philosophy, in contrast to formalist philosophers who cannot step outside of logical abstraction. Dussel understands myths as literature: as enunciated stories based on symbols that articulate metaphysical and ontological content. Myths—like literature—give justifications, make arguments, craft positionalities, offer meanings of life, and explain how cultures wrestle with these.

Despite what would seem an open-and-shut case, there have been matters of contention in the relationship between literary production and decoloniality in the academic settings of the Global North. They may simply reflect the slowness with which new, seminal ideas take hold among scholars with strictly defined disciplinary boundaries. When this field of inquiry surfaced, I presumed that Latin American and Latina/o literary scholars would plunge into Indigenous and Afro-descendant discursivities to explore subalternized and racialized viewpoints and knowledges brutally marked by the legacy of Anglo-centric settler colonialism in what Native Americans called Turtle Island, or by Spanish and Portuguese extractive colonialism in Abiyala. Decolonial critical approaches would have assembled new knowledges and understandings to challenge Eurocentric viewpoints, defining and producing them, as well as maneuvering the ways this emerging topic could be meaningfully talked about and deployed. For Latin Americanist cultural studies, decolonial studies seemed a given, a no-miss approach. The Spanish invasion of the Americas is after all the emblematic event and date when the centrality and superiority of European knowledge was first posited, when Western epistemologies easily became sources for ideologies of racial and cultural superiority. Decoloniality would liberate the Global South by explaining the nature of its perpetual subalternization to Europe. It would account for a diversity of knowledges capable of challenging Eurocentric epistemic and political projects. Finally, Indigenous and Afro-descendant knowledges, their cultures, their social relations and everyday behaviors—and their literary production where it exists—could be explored from within their own perspectives, and not looked at from the *hauteur* of the colonial gaze of Eurocentric subjects pretending to speak in their name.

This has not yet happened. A new generation of scholars, of which some are already beginning to burst forth, will undoubtedly expand this disciplinary horizon, raise seminal questions, and debate the imperative of decolonization. Anthropologists have moved further in this direction, as perhaps may be natural in a field concerned with native or Indoamerican discourses. Many have become actively engaged in *Otros Saberes*, as will be explained later. Possibly lacking for the most part field studies on the cultural production of subalternized and racialized ontological and epistemological configurations, the number of U.S.-centered decolonial theorists working on Latina/Latin American cultural studies who have embraced decoloniality remains small to this date. Still, we do have already some notable publications. We can cite *Comparative Indigenities of the Americas: Toward a Hemispheric Approach* (2012), edited by M. Bianet Castellanos, Lourdes Gutiérrez Nájera, and Arturo J. Aldama; Paul Worley's *Telling and Being Told: Storytelling and Cultural Control in Contemporary Mexican and Yucatek Maya Literatures* (2013); Roberto Cintli Rodríguez's *Our Sacred Maíz Is Our Mother: Indigeneity and Belonging in the Americas* (2014); Kelly McDonough's *The Learned Ones: Nahuatl Intellectuals in Post-conquest Mexico* (2014); *Language and Ethnicity Among the K'ichee' Maya* (2015) by Sergio Romero; *Decolonial Approaches to Latin American Literatures and Cultures* (2016), edited by Juan G. Ramos and Tara Daly; and Thomas Ward's *Decolonizing Indigeneity: New Approaches to Latin American Literature* (2017), among a few others.⁴ There is also new interest on the part of university presses on the subject, from traditional bastions of Indigenous publications such as the University of Texas Press, the University of Oklahoma Press, and the University of Arizona Press, which may have taken the lead in this topic, to new collections in the State University of New York Press, or Lexington Books, a not insignificant factor in times of difficulty for university presses.⁵ Regrettably, many other scholars have limited themselves to exploring decoloniality's theoretical constructs to debate non-decolonial Western theorists. This may be because it is hard to explore Indigenous ontologies. The task presupposes learning new languages, enduring a long process of field work to come to terms with new understandings of nature and culture—work occasionally antithetical to scholars not trained to perform field work or live for periods of time in less than comfortable circumstances in some of the most unforgiving and dangerous geographies of the continent—and familiarizing oneself with an entirely new body of literary texts to pursue connections between cultural production and social histories or the natural sciences. This task implies polyglot scholars as well, with views of language that differ profoundly

from the scholarly orthodox understanding of Western modern languages and their taxonomic imperatives. After all, each of the nearly five hundred Indigenous languages in the Western Hemisphere spoken by approximately forty million people represents a distinct group or culture on which much depends to wrestle with their textual production, where it exists. Ultimately, we could still repeat what Mignolo said some decades ago in relation to Gayatri Spivak's seminal question on whether subalterns could speak. Mignolo's response was that "the influential question . . . could be answered by saying that the subaltern have always spoken, although scholars and social scientists were not always willing to listen" (130).

In this same logic, Argentinian critic Horacio Legrás pointed out in his article on the *Decolonial Approaches to Latin American Literatures and Cultures* volume that literature can bring to the coloniality/decoloniality problematic "a theory of the subject of decolonization that is by and large lacking in decolonial authors" (29). Indeed, Legrás notes that decolonial theorists, including Mignolo, seldom engage with literature, labeling this the "decolonialists' referential ingratitude" (20). Legrás presupposes that this stance is the result of the existing difficulty in configuring the subalternized and racialized subject, given that for Western literary critics, the latter represent "the experience of the untranslatable" (30). In other words, there is reluctance to abandon Westernness to embrace those cultures the West colonized, when not trying to obliterate them. In this sense, it is important to uphold Tuck and Yang's recommendation that decolonization "is not accountable to settlers, or settler futurity. Decolonization is accountable to Indigenous sovereignty and futurity" (35).⁶

In the introduction to their volume, Ramos and Daly stated that to think decolonially is not to impose theoretical premises, but to amplify "the forms of decolonial thinking that emerge from subjective experiences and textualities" (xv). To this, they add the inclusion of nonacademic interventions, primarily Indigenous subjects (xvi). This is crucial, as "it is precisely from what remains outside of codification and translatability that decolonial modes of resistance and resignification can emerge" (xvi) and offer responses to their oppression, silencing, or invisibility.

In Sandra Gonzales's article "Colonial Borders, Native Fences" in *Comparative Indigenities of the Américas*, she claims that ". . . the metanarrative of the precontact, precolonial history of this continent is written by Western scholars who align their theoretical assumptions with academic itineraries couched in nationalistic discourses . . . (309). In consequence, she problematizes that

[b]y internalizing these nationalized identities we—Chicanos and other native people of the Americas—are internalizing borders imposed by foreign powers. By internalizing these borders we are performing the separation of our own histories, our own knowledge structures. We are performing the separation of our own people, and in many cases our own families. (309)

In his most recent publication, *Decolonizing Indigeneity* (2017), Thomas Ward labels the same attitude condemned by Legrás as “the coloniality of literary practice” (xi). Ward challenges canonical literary studies in the United States that configure undergraduate and graduate studies as well (xiii), denouncing anthologies that are always in Castilian, and colonial reading lists that always give preference to Spanish chronicles over Indigenous texts, and limits the latter to a minimal number, while emphasizing their destruction or loss, when not their disappearance.⁷ He observes that Modern and Foreign Language Departments do not teach Indigenous languages (xv). He adds that we must evaluate “how to represent people in terms of mutual respect, diversity, human rights, and global humanity, not distorting them with our perspective, letting them speak . . . with a lexicon that does not distort them” (xii).

It should not be surprising in the context outlined in the previous section that Native American scholars have led the decolonizing effort in U.S. academia. How this happened is a long story and a complex process. Briefly stated, as late as 1988, Yaqui Juaneño scholar M.A. Jaimes-Guerrero argued how in the United States an American policy of linguistic and cultural eradication had been imposed by the State for Indigenous language speakers. This form of cultural and linguistic genocide included what she labeled autogenocide, a method to force Native American groups to lose their identification with their culture. Florencia Riegelhaupt, Roberto Luis Carrasco, and Elizabeth Brandt stated that the United States “Americanized” Native Americans by means of the boarding schools that were established.⁸ As most readers possibly know, in these institutions Native American students were forbidden to speak their respective languages. There is no need to argue the genocidal implications of this gesture. Ironically, however, it was because of abject procedures in these boarding schools that a new generation of Native Americans had a slightly easier time, comparatively speaking (and trauma aside), in entering institutions of higher education than did their counterparts in Abiyala who preserved their languages and knowledges, albeit in fragmented form, and whose mastery of Castilian

remained for the most part limited until late into the 1960s, thus delaying much more than fellow Native Americans their insertion into institutions of higher learning.

Indeed, from the time Jaimes-Guerrero made her statement to the present, the panorama is very different regarding Native American scholars concerned either with decolonizing knowledges or analyzing critically decolonial literatures written by Native American authors. Allow me to mention a few. Mi'kmaw scholar Marie Battiste edited a seminal collection of essays, *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, in 2000. It is a foundational text for Indigenous decolonial thought. The eighteen essays collected aimed to offer a comprehensive analysis produced by the first generation of Indigenous scholars in North America. The text both narrates the damage inflicted by European colonialism and frames elements of Indigenous decolonial thinking. Battiste not only argued that Indigenous thought was based on native communities' own experiences and on their refusal to allow anyone to appropriate them, but was also thriving, as was their cultures and languages. She organized her edited text around the Medicine Wheel of the Plains tribes, with each of the four directions of the Sacred Circle Wheel furnishing interrelated chapters of many Native histories, critiques, and decolonial struggles. Battiste states that the restoration of Indigenous knowledges will "allow humanity to rebuild society based on diversity rather than an ancient quest for singularity" (xviii). She adds that "Indigenous knowledge, including its oral modes of transmission, is a vital, integral, and significant process for Indigenous educators and scholars" (xx). The text emphasizes the importance of new alternative educational systems, the importance of elders as critical links to epistemologies, and language revitalization.

Battiste also prepared with Chickasaw scholar James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson another foundational text about Native American and First Nations' knowledge and culture published in 2000, titled *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage: A Global Challenge*. Like her previous edited text (where Henderson also collaborated with four articles), this collection covered a wide array of issues, ranging from colonization to research ethics, but also included language, cultural property, comparative epistemology, and domestic and international law. It also delves into issues impacting, if not global Indigeneities, at least those residing in various nations colonized by Great Britain, and which still retain a substantive component of Anglo settler societies. They demonstrate how Western-centered legal codes have been deficient in protecting Indigenous knowledges and elaborate a series of premises to change this situation. Their text is divided

into four clusters. The first deals with Indigenous knowledge in modern thought. The second covers an understanding of the rights of Indigenous peoples to their knowledge and heritage. The third explores legal regimes and Indigenous knowledge and heritage, and the fourth tackles the need for legal and policy reforms to protect Indigenous knowledge and heritage. Part I is especially important in its coverage of Eurocentric and Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, whereas part II elaborates an analysis of how Indigenous knowledges and cultures were negatively impinged upon by the imposition of Eurocentric thought and understanding.

In 2004, Anne Waters, of Seminole, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, and Jewish descent, published the first edited volume written exclusively by Native Americans with a PhD in Philosophy, *American Indian Thought*. She is also the founder and first President of the American Indian Philosophy Association. This volume consists of twenty-two essays about Native American knowledges and philosophy. Their aim is to create an intellectual space where ideas, philosophies, spiritualities, and esthetics can be examined in a significant manner. The essays appear under eight subheadings: American Indians and Philosophy; Epistemology and Knowing; Science, Math, and Logic; Metaphysics and Being; Phenomenology and Ontology; Ethics and Respect; Social and Political Philosophy; and Esthetics. Issues or philosophical questions pertaining to time, place, history, national communities, religion, law, science, the arts, and ethics are all examined, often in contrast to Western beliefs (though in his positive review of the text, Sandy Grande did state that she thought there was “an undertheorizing of ‘the Western’ thought-world”; not that this matters from a decolonial stance).⁹ Waters’s own essay, “Ontology of Identity and Interstitial Being” offers a solid argumentation on the nature and complexity of Native American identities and how “Indigenous cultures nurture individual identity formation with a communal interdependence and sustainability in a specific geographic location” (154). Specific geographies matter. This stand transforms our understanding of culture in relation to personal identities. “American Indian identity, is cognitively of, and interdependent with, our land base” (155). New intellectual spaces and concepts offering innovative perspectives on Native American scholars’ thinking emerge in this text. As Grande states, the book is “an important and impressive first step” (199) toward conveying the breadth of a burgeoning Native American theory.

In 2008, the *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, edited by Norman K. Denzin, Yvonna S. Lincoln, and Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith—about whom much was said in the introduction to volume 1—developed further theories of decolonizing inquiry, critical and Indigenous

methodologies, as well as issues of power, truth and social justice. In their preface, they argued that if the Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples (1994–2004), declared by the United Nations in the wake of Rigoberta Menchú's Nobel Peace Prize in the emblematic year of 1992, had ended, it was now time to create the Decade of Critical Indigenous Inquiry (ix). Their edited text was a step in that direction. In their preface, they also stated the “great need for a dialogue between critical theorists and indigenous scholars and indigenous peoples” (x), as “indigenous scholars can show critical theorists how to ground their methodologies at the local level” (x). At the same time, the questions asked by Indigenous scholars “are addressed to indigenous and nonindigenous researchers alike” (9). The issue is not a separation along the old lines of identity politics, but rather a collaboration in which both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers embody the emancipatory, empowering values of critical decolonial theories and methodologies that disrupt subalternization and racialization.

Many other publications linked to issues of literary production and colonization by Native American and First Nations' scholars, a list too long to include here, have appeared since the beginning of this century. For starters, *This is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy* (2006) by Temagami First Nation scholar Dale Turner, professor at Dartmouth, cites an urgency for academically trained Indigenous philosophers to advocate for their peoples to generate a broader dialogue “between Canadian and Aboriginal peoples” (5). For Turner, Indigenous philosophies are linked to spirituality that is “central to indigenous philosophical thinking” (110), adding that Indigenous philosophies lack the respect or recognition of European cultures. In consequence, he posits two important roles Indigenous philosophers can play: (1) a pedagogical function (114), and (2) helping to reconcile Indigenous and Western traditions by addressing “the spiritual dimension of our indigeneity” (114). Because of this, from an Indigenous perspective it is “impossible for us to avoid the centrality of the spiritual in how we perceive the world” (114). Turner adds that Indigenous forms of knowledge are “grounded in profound *spiritual* relations with the World” (115; my emphasis). The problem Turner finds—and leaves unanswered—is how to translate this spirituality to Westerners when engaging in a dialogue, without confusing it with Western religions or religious practices, given the separation of philosophy and theology in the Western tradition. For the present, he states, “we must keep to ourselves our sacred knowledge as we articulate and understand it from within our own cultures, for it is this knowledge that defines us as indigenous peoples” (110).

Cherokee sociologist's Eva Marie Garroutte's *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America* (2003) engages the complexities of Native American identities and the tensions that instill them. Not surprisingly, a great deal of her effort is invested in wrestling with multiple definitions, even if she takes bold positions on the attributes of "Indianness" and the viability of "traditional" Indian knowledge systems. Garroutte explores four ways of defining and constructing Native American identities: legal means, biology, culture, and personal proclamation. She tracks down the transformation and outcomes of these categories, scrutinizing both contentions and controversies emerging from their formulations. This leads Garroutte to the conclusion that there is a need for "distinctively American Indian scholarship" (101). Arguing that kinship in native communities is different from Eurocentric definitions because it is characterized by both relationships of ancestry and expectations of reciprocity, she formulates an epistemological notion named *Radical Indigenism* as a way of legitimating identities and knowledges, even if this may be "indefensible from the perspective of the social sciences" (136). Garroutte states that "[r]adical Indigenism assumes that scholars can take philosophies of knowledge carried by indigenous peoples seriously. They can consider those philosophies and their assumptions, values, and goals . . . as intellectual orientations that map out ways" (10) of ordering and being in the world. She adds that these can also serve as "tools for the discovery and generation of knowledge" (113). Like Turner, Garroutte steers definitional efforts in the direction of the spiritual aspects of indigeneity while claiming that spiritual and sacred elements are not present in the "dominant culture's" knowledge system. She sees this element as critical in decolonizing Indigenous subjects and reasserting Native American knowledges as well.

In that which concerns specific critiques of Native American literature, my Mapuche colleague Luis Cárcamo-Huechante noted in "Literaturas de Abya Yala" (2011; Abya Yala's Literatures), the seminal importance of *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions* (1995) by Osage scholar Robert Warrior. He also included in this brief list *That the People Might Live! Native American Literature and Native American Community* (1997) by Cherokee scholar Jace Weaver; *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (1999) by Creek scholar Craig S. Womack; and *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (2008) by Abenaki scholar Lisa Brooks. I have already considered these texts in the introduction to volume 1.

In this area, we should not forget to mention Chickasaw scholar Chadwick Allen, whose *Trans-Indigenous: Methodologies for Global Native*

Literary Studies (2012) proposes new critical approaches to comparative Indigenous literatures within decolonial frameworks, as well as an Indigenous-to-Indigenous focus on intertextuality. Allen virtually creates a field of comparative Indigenous studies that breaks from the isolationism of looking at this topic exclusively within national or regional borders. He considers and elaborates comparisons between Indigenous texts from the United States, Aotearoa (New Zealand), Hawai'i, and Australia, while asking, "Shouldn't the objective of a global Indigenous literary studies in English run more along the lines of "together (yet) *distinct*"? (xiii). Allen then adds:

The point is not to displace the necessary, invigorating study of specific traditions and contexts but rather to complement these by augmenting and expanding broader, globally Indigenous fields of inquiry. The point is to invite specific studies into different kinds of conversations, and to acknowledge the mobility and multiple interactions of Indigenous peoples, cultures, histories and texts. (xiv)

Despite the fact that Allen centers his critiques on Native American and Māori literary and cultural production written in English, which elides the critical issues of native languages for decolonial analyses of Indigenous literatures whose epistemologies and ontologies are often framed philosophically in their original languages—an issue that needs to be addressed if we are to invoke sophisticated reading practices—his argument could very well frame my own work on Mesoamerican Indigenous fictions. Though divided in three volumes, my goal is to examine an Indigenous production that articulates dialogues among novelists of at least two nation-states (Mexico and Iximulew or Guatemala) with significant regional differentiations (Iximulew, Yucatan, Chiapas, Oaxaca, the Huasteca, the Mezquital Valley, and the Sierra Tarahumara), markers, and languages (Maya Q'anjob'al and Maya Popb'al Ti', in volume 1; Maya Yukateko, Maya Tseltal, and Maya Tsotsil in volume 2; Binnizá, Bene Xhon, Nauatl, Rarámuri, and Wixarika in volume 3) for Mesoamerican Indigenous peoples to be understood—and to understand themselves—within a regional, if not global, network of other Indigenous societies.¹⁰ Despite diverse colonial contexts, Mesoamerican peoples share a millennial history prior to 1492, one in which epistemological and ontological conceptions included a cyclical interpretation of time bounding our planet with the galaxy that remains extant to this day despite the Spanish genocide. These conceptions were similar, but never identical. The nuances articulated heterogeneous

relational complexes that provided a certain patterning, conjunctural allegiances, common knowledges articulated in different languages, and they do offer interpretive frameworks to this day. Yet they remain to be explored. Interpreting contemporary Mesoamerican Indigenous production is one way of approaching them.

The Latin American Indigenous experience varies in a significant way from that of present-day Native American and First Nations' scholars. In North America, most First Nations' and Native American writers and scholars frame their literatures and critical inquiries almost exclusively in English, due to the Epistemicide that generated a massive and unforgivable loss of Native American languages in what is now the United States and Canada. This is largely due to the English model of settler colonialism implemented in North America. As James Belich states in *Replenishing the Earth* (2009), between 1780 and 1930 the number of English-speakers rocketed from twelve million in 1780 to 200 million, and their wealth and power grew to match.

The Spanish invasion in Abiyala was a different phenomenon. It is no accident that decolonial studies use the Spanish invasion of the Americas as the emblematic date when the centrality of European knowledge was first posited. The day Columbus landed, October 12, 1492, he wrote in his journal about Indigenous peoples that “[t]hey should be good servants . . . I, our Lord being pleased, will take hence, at the time of my departure, six natives for your Highnesses” (*Diario* 69). These captives were later paraded through the streets of Barcelona and Seville when Columbus returned to Spain.¹¹ On October 14, 1492, Columbus wrote in his journal, “with fifty men they can all be subjugated and made to do what is required of them” (*Diario* 72). After his second voyage, he sent back a consignment of natives to be sold as slaves.¹² Under his orders, the Spanish attacked the Tainos, Indigenous peoples of Hispaniola (present-day Haiti and Dominican Republic), sparing neither men, women, nor children, and reducing Hispaniola's Taino population, estimated at two million in 1492, to extinction within thirty years. Needing labor to replace the rapidly declining Tainos, the Spanish introduced African slaves to Hispaniola in 1502. By 1510, the slave trade was of critical importance to the Caribbean economy. Columbus bears responsibility for the first global Holocaust, a term used by historian David E. Stannard in his text *American Holocaust: The Conquest of the New World* (1992). Indigenous and African peoples were the primary victims.

Despite Henry F. Dobyns's polemical contention that the Indigenous population of the Americas totaled about one hundred million people in 1492 in his seminal article “An Appraisal of Techniques with a New

Hemispheric Estimate” (*Current Anthropology* 1966)—an assertion that nevertheless changed the demographic field—most scholars estimate that the Indigenous population of the Americas hovered between fifty and seventy million by 1492 (Taylor 40; Thornton 2000:11). An estimated 80 to 90 percent of this population—that is, a minimum of forty million people—were dead fifty years after Columbus’s arrival, according to Stannard and other scholars reworking new data during the last twenty-five years, even if the high number was not the exclusive result of military violence, racism, and enslavement. To a large degree, diseases brought to the New World by white Europeans played a key role.¹³ Despite their differences, Indigenous peoples of the Americas share the common history of this Holocaust, one of haunting legacies: “things [pasts] hard to recount or even remember, the results of a violence that holds an unrelenting grip on memory yet is deemed unspeakable” (Schwab *Haunting Legacies* 1). Following this trauma, the Spanish crown implemented in the area under their control a model of extractive colonialism (Belich 31), even if a highly sophisticated one, in which Indigenous subjects were enslaved to work in mines.

Survivors of the invasion who did not live in mining areas were exploited as slave labor in hacienda-style agricultural production during the colonial period. *Criollos* (Spaniards born in the Americas) in turn developed ideologies of racial and cultural superiority, to the point that in 1537 Pope Paul III was forced to issue an apostolic brief recognizing the New World peoples as “true humans, eligible for conversion,” as quoted by Christy Rodgers in “Deconstructing the Barbarian: Polemical Ethnography and Identity in Las Casas and Montaigne.”

In 1550 and 1551, Friar Bartolomé de las Casas participated in a series of debates with the Spanish royal historian Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda before the Council of the Indies in Valladolid, on the putative humanity or inhumanity of Indigenous peoples. As already stated in the introduction to volume 1, David Theo Goldberg argued in *The Racial State* (2002) that this was the true beginning of the concept of race. Despite Las Casas’s spirited defense of Indigenous peoples, the Spanish colonial order, rooted in a caste system that brought about “the idea of race, a mental construction that expresses the basic experience of colonial domination and pervades the more important dimensions of global power” (Quijano 533), and upheld through violence and antagonism, prevailed. Criollo historian Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán’s *Recordación Florida* (1690) consolidated the subalternization of Indigenous peoples in Central America (which at the time included Chiapas), by portraying them as “those miserable, blind and savagely hopeless, primitive Indians of this Kingdom of Goathemala” (16).

“Until the eighteenth century, its core business was the mining of silver and the transport of as much as possible of it to Spain,” states Belich (31). Indigenous populations were exploited for these purposes, while oppressed, subalternized, and racialized by Spaniards for a little over three hundred years. This, along with the import of African slaves, reduced Spain’s need for European settlers as they negotiated the social vortex then known as *Indias Occidentales* (West Indies),¹⁴ the name used in the sixteenth century to designate the territories encountered by Columbus. One of the negative outcomes of the Spanish imperial model was that as subalternized and subordinated subjects, Indigenous peoples in Abiyala were denied access to higher studies for a much longer period than Native Americans and First Nations’ subjects were, without denying the great difficulties, oppression, and discrimination that these groups also had to overcome to be allowed to enter higher education. Among others, we can cite Benjamin Madley’s *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe* (2016) as emblematic of the unspeakable degree of murder and violence, clearly proving that a genocide took place in the United States in the nineteenth century. Many other texts have combed this violent and murderous legacy.¹⁵

After the original genocide of the 1500s in Abiyala came the horrors of neo-slave exploitation and the politics of exclusion (Indigenous peoples were not allowed to live in the same spaces as Spaniards but instead lived in *pueblos de indios*, though in some cases Indigenous elders requested this to protect their community from Mestizos who were pestering them for egregious designs). Indigenous populations recovered numerically toward the end of the eighteenth century, but—perhaps as a paradoxical consequence of the marginalization imposed on them until almost the last quarter of the twentieth century—they not only salvaged an important number of languages but also retained significant elements of their ritual cultures and knowledges. Regarding their languages, Spanish colonialism did not envision the acquisition of Castilian by colonized majorities. This contentious issue was for the most part a debate between the Hispanizers and the Evangelizers—that is, those who thought Christianization could work in the Indigenous languages. By the end of the eighteenth century, only a small minority spoke Castilian.

Nineteenth-century independence from Spain did not change these policies. The consequence for surviving native populations was one of ignominy, and of shame at having Indigenous blood by *Mestizo* (mixed Spanish-Indigenous) populations, which began to dominate the region in the nineteenth century. After independence from Spain, Indigenous

peoples were not considered citizens and were viewed with contempt as the perception that they were less than human beings continued. Nineteenth-century textual representations such as that of José Milla y Vidaurre's *La hija del adelantado* (1866; *The Daughter of the Adelantado*)—Central America's foundational fictional text—depicts them as demonic, dangerous nonsubjects. Ruling elites excoriated them as ignorant, residual, inferior, and nonproductive, condemning them to social forms of nonexistence.

It would be impossible to delineate in a few lines a twentieth-century history of the gradual shifts that took place throughout Abiyala regarding Indigenous agency, personhood, and decolonizing struggles. Evidence of the frightfully slow pace of this process is that in Mesoamerica, Indigenous students gained their right to literacy and bilingual education only after the First Interamerican Indigenous Congress that took place in Pátzcuaro in the state of Michoacán, Mexico, in 1940. Access to secondary education began to make small gains only in the aftermath of World War II.¹⁶ Even then, these small steps were followed by a retrenchment that lasted until the politically explosive decade of the 1960s, when a series of intense political mobilizations and dramatic cultural changes led to a faster transformational process.

The triumph of the Cuban Revolution, the spread of guerrilla movements in its wake, and the rise of Theology of Liberation, all addressing simultaneously the burning social issues of the 1960s, contributed in significant ways to develop Indigenous movements throughout Abiyala. Peruvian anthropologist Stefano Varese claims that the writings and actions of a series of intellectuals that surfaced in the 1960s, such as Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Amílcar Cabral, Aimé Césaire, Ho Chi Minh, and Che Guevara, as well as “those of the rediscovered Indian critics, and leaders such as Huamán Puma de Ayala, Túpac Amaru, Túpac Katari, Juan Santos Atahualpa, and Quintín Lame had been nourishing the thoughts and political experience of new generations of anthropologists and Indians” (*Memories of Solidarity* 23).

To illustrate this point, in Iximulew, Maya subjects such as Achi' community leaders from Rabinal Fidel Raxcacoj Xitumul and Enrique Román López were founders of the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR, for its Castilian acronym), Iximulew's oldest guerrilla force, under the noms-de-guerre of Socorro Sical and Pascual Ixpatá, becoming the right-hand men of legendary commander Marco Antonio Yon Sosa (1940–1970). Both Yon Sosa and Raxcacoj were killed by an officer of the Mexican army with another Maya militant, Enrique Cahueque, at the border of Iximulew and Chiapas on May 16, 1970.¹⁷ The same year, Bishop Samuel Ruiz (1924–2011) began to

significantly transform his Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas in favor of Chiapanecan Mayas and abandoned the traditional approach of Westernizing Indigenous peoples, as chronicled in chapter 4 of this volume. Soon, those who would join the Zapatistas began to meander in the Chiapanecan jungle as well.

Concerning writing processes, during the 1960s Indigenous subjects were finally able to enter institutions of higher learning in many countries. In a hemisphere with more than twenty independent nation-states of divergent histories, this process was a highly heterogeneous one. Marc Becker, for example, argues that by the middle of the twentieth century Ecuador saw increased opportunities “for people from Indigenous communities to attend university and earn law degrees” (112). That was not the case in Iximulew, Chiapas, or Yucatan.

The educational problem in the hemisphere of course was not limited to Indigenous populations. Until the 1960s, except for larger nations such as Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and Colombia, most nation-states had but one national university and a private Catholic one in their capital city. It was only after significant migrations from the countryside to the city began to take place during the 1950s that Indigenous subjects began to be enrolled in urban public schools. It would take a few more decades for the most advanced to enter institutions of higher education. Some endured in the process a significant amount of public scorn and humiliation from Mestizo students and faculty. However, as Becker also signals—and as happened with guerrillas in Iximulew—many succeeded in establishing relationships with Mestizo allies who shared a common political search for social justice (112). These new alliances often enabled the emergence of new—often radical—political organizations that surged in the 1960s in the wake of the Cuban revolution. Despite national elites’ abhorrence of these protests and their U.S.-induced paranoia of “Communism,” participation in political organizations empowered Indigenous peoples in terms of negotiating relationships with dominant cultures. As will be explained later, Mestizo-Indigenous alliances relinquished their place to Indigenous rights organizations by the 1980s. This turn led to a rise in racialized rhetoric and violence targeting these movements. The entire second half of the twentieth century thus became a sort of workshop on “what kind of work race does” (10) and what effects race indeed has in the hemisphere, as Laura Gotkowitz explains. Alluding to Thomas Holt in the introduction to *Histories of Race and Racism*, she signals that “race and racism are made and remade in distinct historical and political contexts . . . there is not one form of race and racism that transcends space and time” (10).¹⁸

Intercultural Argentinian scholar Daniel Mato—who developed most of his work in Venezuela—argues in a recent publication that Indigenous peoples have long fought for educational rights “in order to successfully advance projects of social, economic, political, institutional, and/or legal reforms” (211). He adds:

The historical struggle of Indigenous peoples around the world, along with the actions of other social agents with overlapping agendas, resulted in the establishment of a number of international instruments in the 1960s that have been helpful in advancing the recognition of their rights. The adoption of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965) was a first step, followed by the formulation of several other international instruments that have been invaluable in this regard. It is generally accepted that the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, established by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1989, and also known as “ILO Convention 169” has been the most influential among them; at least until the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007. (214)

This tendency has grown over the last forty or so years. As Mato documents, in Abiyala it has happened in conventional universities, as well as in Intercultural ones, a euphemism to designate new institutions created in the last decades to favor an overall Indigenous curriculum specifically designed for them. These have either been established by State agencies, as in the Mexican case, by “conventional” universities as in Iximulew, or else by groups of professors in collaboration with Indigenous organizations, activists, and intellectuals, as in many Andean countries. In some cases, Indigenous peoples also manage these institutions.

We mentioned earlier in this introduction that Indigenous peoples in Abiyala preserved for the most part their languages and knowledges, while suffering with the mastery of Castilian until late into the 1960s. This explains why when they entered institutions of higher learning, they immediately developed an interest in configuring written forms of their respective languages which, for the most part, had not been previously codified, except in a few notable exceptions, such as that of K’iche’, as explained in chapter 1 of volume 1. Some efforts took place in both Mexico and Iximulew by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, a U.S.-based Christian nonprofit organization whose goal was to translate the Christian Bible into local languages. However, in the 1960s they were denounced by both anthropologists and

Indigenous activists for trying to change communities' cultural patterns. They were expelled from these countries in the early 1980s.¹⁹

Urbanization and access to middle social sectors have also endangered many Indigenous languages in Abyayala. Quite a few disappeared during the twentieth century, and many more are threatened as of this date.²⁰ Nevertheless, an important percentage of the population continues to be rural, and most of them speak their native languages as their first language. Thus, it should not be surprising that emerging literary movements have focused on rescuing these languages in written form. In many cases, writers have first standardized their writing—a titanic linguistic team effort, to say the least—prior to producing literary works in those same languages. Others, such as the case of Maya Q'anjob'al novelist Gaspar Pedro González, chronicled in chapter 3 of volume 1, did it simultaneously. In consequence, it is rare to see an Indigenous publication in Abyayala that is not bilingual: the original language of the writer appears in the first half of the book, followed by the Castilian version. In consequence, these book presentations immediately mark the otherness of Indigenous literatures.²¹ I know of only one author who has experimented with a novel published exclusively in an Indigenous language without a translation: *Aqupampa* (2016) by Pablo Landeo Muñoz, written in Runa Simi (Quechua or *Qhiswa* from Ayacucho). There were a couple of precedents in two Bolivian short stories: *Sumaq Urqu* (El Cerro Hermoso/The Lovely Hill; 2012) by Zulema Pary Montesinos, and *Saqapa* (El cascabel/The Rattler; 2013) by Jinés Cornejo Endara. Landeo himself also edited from 2010 on an academic journal, *Atuqpa Chupan*, published entirely in Runa Simi.

Indigenous writers and theorists are often political actors, working, in the case of Abyayala, often outside of the academy, within their respective grassroots movements. In some cases, their writings aim to help grassroots organizations or their own communities to advance specific goals. Nonetheless, there are important theoretical advances in understanding decoloniality being done in settings—Chiapas, Iximulew, the Amazon, the Andean countries, the southern tip of the continent—where people are actively engaged in political struggles yet carry out systematic analyses of the processes in which they are or have participated.

Indigenous analyses resulting from their own struggles are plural in the sense that they are not systemic, and they did not emerge at any one place. They best exemplify Gramsci's notion of organic intellectuals in the sense that they were first activists who participated in the everyday lived experiences of their respective communities. Per Chilean historian Claudia Zapata Silva, the growth and public appearance of Indigenous scholars

in Abiyala is directly connected to mobilizations that began around 1970 (409). She understands research as linked to a struggle for identity issues, in which political tension is evident. Indigenous scholars behave as “political and cultural anchors” (69) in the larger struggle for Indigenous rights in colonized societies. In consequence, the bulk of their action is done in a close collaboration with their respective communities. In fact, a good portion of their struggle, says Zapata Silva, is aimed at legitimizing and dignifying communal functions, while also seeking recognition for the ontological nature of their knowledges, respect for those oral traditions within which much of their wisdom is encoded, as well as validation of parental and communal networks.

Having survived myriad confrontations with land or mine owners and governmental authorities, these organic intellectuals/activists afterward engaged in higher studies, analyzing, critiquing, and theorizing, their own counter-hegemonic movements. In a few cases, it was the reverse. First the education, then the militant activity. But, in either case, their scholarship came to light as critical responses to specific political struggles of hemispheric Indigenous populations marked by coloniality. Over time they gradually acquired the status of mastering “knowledges otherwise,” as Colombian sociologist Arturo Escobar stated.²² Anthropologist Charles R. Hale and the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) refer to them as *Otros Saberes* (Other Knowledges). In 2005, they promoted deep and sustained collaborations between intellectuals inside and outside the academy to produce knowledge validated by, and useful to both. Indigenous collaborators worked on their own practices from within their singular histories, subjectivities, and cosmologies.²³ Keisha-Khan Perry and Joanne Rappaport stated in chapter 2 of *Otros Saberes* that North American academics have for the most part overlooked the significant body of critical thought produced by social movements or Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in Latin America. They understood these communities as simultaneously knowledge producers and political actors, producing, in their words, “a kind of theory-in-action that merges political militancy and cultural renewal” (31).

Latin American academic social researchers are in turn more politically engaged than in U.S. institutions. They often work with grassroots movements as both activists and researchers. Perry and Rappaport concluded in *Otros Saberes* that the emergence of organic intellectuals in some Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities led to “a closer working relationship between activists and academics” (46), enabling community researchers to play protagonic roles and to find their own voices. As