Special Section:

The Lands and Languages of Indigenous Futures: Perspectives from Latin America

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Introduction

When working on creating an anthology of Indigenous thought in Latin America several years ago, we found ourselves confronted with the problem that many of the Indigenous thinkers with whom we collaborate do not typically use the terms of dominant discourse and were even less inclined to write formal academic essays about these topics. While we work with a number of Indigenous writers and activists who do indeed write academic texts in the terms of global present discourses, setting aside the intellectual production of those who do not strikes us as highly problematic and an exercise in making these People's thoughts and philosophies conform to our own academic ways of reading and writing.

Turning to the topic of this dossier, the Anthropocene, our friends and colleagues have expressed their growing concerns orally in song and poetry. They sing about the relationship between diminishing rainfall and diminishing crop yields; they write poetry about the threat of multinational corporations that exploit spaces inhabited by sacred beings for oil, gas, or mineral wealth. Are these expressions somehow less valid or pressing because they were not originally done for an academic audience? Are they somehow less powerful because they do not directly situate themselves within what we would call the Anthropocene? While

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we would emphatically say "no" to both of these questions, we acknowledge that many others in academia do not feel the same way. Therefore, we are thankful to the editors of *American Literatures* for their willingness to give us this space to share the following pieces that address, broadly, "living and dying in the Anthropocene" from diverse Indigenous perspectives in México and Guatemala. In keeping with the intellectual production of these Peoples, the selection here varies widely in terms of formal genre, ranging from poetry to prose to performance, and offers the reader a glimpse of how Indigenous responses to our current global crisis take shape. We are also grateful to Nancy González and the Colectivo Comunidad Tz'unun Ya', Aura Lolita Chávez Ixcaquic, Mikeas Sánchez, and Pedro Uc Be for their willingness to have their work included in this space, as well as to Whitney DeVos, Gabriela Ramirez-Chavez, Wendy Call, and Melissa D. Birkhofer for the time and effort they have given to their respective translations of the pieces included here.

In "Plastic: a regime of silent violence rampant in Lake Atitlan," Nancy González and the Colectivo Comunidad Tz'unun Ya', a woman-led collective that guards the lake, address the degradation of Guatemala's Lake Atitlán due to an abundance of single-use plastics in the region that make their way into the lake's waters. This article is a report on a collaborative performance these women staged with artist Manuel Chavajay Morales to visibilize pollution in and around the lake, to demonstrate that plastics are not simply pollution but "forms of visible and invisible violence", and to "to challenge sustainability as a concept that can often be boiled down to a series of proposals to sustain the economy instead of Mother Nature." In other words, they question the very terminology used to frame these issues globally.

A more traditional essay that was originally published as a pamphlet, Aura Lolita Chávez Ixcaquic's "Indigenous Women: Bodies, Territories, and Communal Life," focuses on the role that Indigenous women can and do play in struggles for life and sovereignty, underscoring the intimate connection between female bodies and the territories in which they dwell, not only highlighting the power of Indigenous female thought but also challenging us to engage with an Indigenous alternative for living, "Buen Vivir."

We have two contributions from the poet and columnist Pedro Uc Be, each of which addresses aspects of the relationships between language, bodies, and territory. "The corn with Maya Skin" examines the role that corn plays in Maya communities as both sustenance and a sacred plant that gives meaning to Maya Peoples. As seen, for example, in the K'iche' Maya text, the Popol vuh, humans are literally formed from corn, meaning that corn's present-day cultivation is an activity that structures Mayas' connections with the natural world, as the corn garden or milpa is a space of reciprocity between humans and the environment. Planting GMO corn or using chemical fertilizers are therefore not mere agricultural choic-

dation mirroring language endangerment and, perhaps, the pending murder of one implying the murder of the other.

The two poems by the poet Mikeas Sánchez, "Gift" and "Feast," address the concerns of the other essays and performance in a different way: They show the intricacy and importance of connection and relatedness of all beings of the world in which we live. Across all of these contributions, the binary between human and Nature (capital "N") slowly breaks down and we are encouraged to recognize that, ultimately, humanity is not at all separate from Nature but a single strand within it. We do not stand apart from Nature and we are certainly not, as the Biblical story is frequently interpreted, given domain over it. Rather, we cannot act on the environment without acting upon ourselves. We are Nature and we are the environment. They are also us.

We hope our presentation of these texts provides the reader with a window into the great work being done by Indigenous writers, artists, and activists in Latin America, and how they offer alternatives to dominant culture's understandings of life in the Anthropocene. Even as we all dwell on the same planet and in the same century, not all of us come from a philosophical tradition in which humanity occupies creation's center stage. Many Indigenous Peoples consider humans as part of a whole, not less or more valuable than other living and non-living beings, but equally important. In addition, there are reciprocal relations and responsibilities between all members: healthy relationships lead to a good life for all. Non-Indigenous people's engagement with decentering the human and embracing a horizontal understanding of life and all its components opens up the opportunity for collective paths forward as well as alternatives to the environmental disasters we are facing.

Biographies

Paul M. Worley is a settler scholar from Charleston, South Carolina, and Professor of Spanish at Appalachian State University, where he serves as Chair of the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures. Co-written with Rita M. Palacios, his most recent book, *Unwriting Maya Literature: Ts'iib as Recorded Knowledge* (2019), received honorable mention for Best Book in the Humanities by LASA's Mexico Section. Together with Melissa D. Birkhofer, he is co-translator of Miguel Rocha Vivas's *Word Mingas* (2021), whose Spanish edition won Cuba's Casa de las Américas Prize in 2016. In 2023, he and Birkhofer won *the North Carolina Literary Review*'s John Ehle Award for their article, "She Said That Saint Augustine Is Worth Nothing Compared to Her Homeland: Teresa Martín and the Méndez Cancio *Account of La Tama* (1600)." He has also translated selected works by Indigenous authors such as Hubert Matiuwaa (Mè'phàà), Celerina Sanchez (Mixteco), Manuel Tzoc (K'iche'), and Ruperta Bautista (Tsotsil).

Rita M. Palacios holds a doctorate in Spanish with a specialization in Latin American Literature from the University of Toronto. She is a professor of languages in the School of Liberal Studies at Conestoga College in Kitchener, Ontario, and her research examines contemporary Maya literature from a cultural and gender studies perspective. She recently co-authored the book *Unwriting Maya Literature: Ts'íib as Recorded Knowledge* (March 2019) with Paul M. Worley, in which they privilege the Maya category *ts'íib* over constructions of the literary in order to reveal how Maya peoples themselves conceive of cultural production.

Luz María Lepe Lira is a researcher, scholar, and member of México's National System of Researchers, who obtained both her MA and her doctorate at the Autonomous University of Barcelona in Spain. She is widely recognized for her work on Indigenous literatures, oral traditions, and Indigenous languages. Her work has garnered a number of prizes, such as an Honorable Mention in Cuba's Casa de las Américas Literary Awards (2013) for her book *Relatos de diferencia y literatura indígena, Travesías por el sistema mundo*. In 2009, her book *Literatura indígena y crítica literaria: traducción y tradición: recovecos del pensamiento oral* won the XXI Alfonso Reyes National Literary Competition. She also won the Andrés Bello Award for Latin American Memory and Thought in 2004 for her book, *Cantos de mujeres en el Amazonas*. She is currently a professor in the MA Program in Amerindian Studies and Bilingual Education in the Department of Philosophy at the Autonomous University of Querétaro.

Nancy Nancy González / Colectivo Comunidad Tz'unun Ya'

Plastic: A Regime of Silent Violence Rampant in Lake Atitlan[1]

translated by Whitney DeVos and Gabriela Ramirez-Chavez

Originally published as: "El plástico, violencia instaurada, silenciosa y dispersa en el Lago Atitlán." Prensa comunitaria, 24 Oct. 2022, prensacomunitaria.org/2022/10/el-plastico-violencia-instaurada-silenciosa-y-dispersa-en-el-lago-atitlan/. Accessed 21 October 2024.

Tropical Storm Julia and recent flooding have washed large amounts of trash into Lake Atitlán, mainly single-use plastics. Images circulating in different media outlets and on online platforms exposed how mass amounts of plastic debris collect on the Lake's surface. In the not-so-distant future, most of these materials will disintegrate into dangerous particles, blending into and becoming imperceptible in the waters; others will sink to the bottom of the Lake, while the rest wind up floating toward the shores of nearby towns, asphyxiating the lives of the many species that depend on the sacred Lake Atitlán. Each winter, this cycle repeats.

This scene is a mirror that reflects the inconsistencies of consumerism imposed upon us by the capitalist system, which drives us to destroy the resources Mother Nature provides. However, this destruction is by no means unrelated to the relations of domination and forms of violence that characterize the present capitalist, patriarchal, and sexist system.

Existing environmental regulations and organizations in Guatemala are lax and weak, subject to the interests of national and transnational economic power. In 2022, powerful interest groups attempted to create a "Super Ministry of the Environment." Had they succeeded, the Ministry would have eliminated the few existing checks and balances on decision-making regarding natural resources, instead concentrating all technical, administrative, and financial decisions under a single governing body.[2]

Single-use plastic is the quintessential symbol of the comfort and convenience promised by modern life; however, it has brought imbalances to the environment and surrounding communities, destroying entire ecosystems and deteriorating the health of local populations around the Lake.

In 2018, Ninoshka López, a biologist from the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala, found that seventy percent of the Lake is contaminated with microplastics, which are as detrimental to the health of nearby communities as they are to the Lake and the species that depend on it; this type of violence is difficult to observe because it spreads silently.

We cannot confront the deterioration of Lake Atitlan's ecosystems if we ignore its root causes. We can no longer continue to cover up the damage,

especially with proposals that demand that local populations take on a financial burden to repair problems they had no part in creating.[3]

We can no longer take a simple approach to a complex issue—investing large sums of money to reclassify solid waste and sacrificing irreplaceable ecosystems to convert them into landfills—for the sole purpose of satisfying technical mandates that do not require the consultation of Indigenous peoples. Cleanup proposals should not become a profit motive for the same industry that causes pollution in the first place.[4]

At times, the Lake has been at the center of the developmentalist imagination, which at different moments has meddled with its waters. In 1862, dictator Rafael Carrera's government announced its intentions to drain Lake Atitlán by redirecting its water toward the Southern Coast. In the 1960s, the administration of President Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes introduced black bass and carp in an attempt to bring foreign tourists interested in recreational fishing to the Lake.[5] In 2017, the Supreme Court failed to prohibit Agropecuaria Atitlan S.A., a company owned by the Torrebiarte family, some of the nation's wealthiest and most influential landowners, from pumping out millions of liters daily for crop irrigation.[6] More recently, especially in 2019, different media outlets featured a proposal for a hydroelectric plant that would control life and monetize water and sanitation rights. Any proposal to revitalize the Lake should not center on technocratic posturing, but must take into account the political consensus of local communities and, above all, the vast knowledge Indigenous peoples have held for thousands of years.

Colectivo Comunidad Tzu'unun Ya' invited the multidisciplinary artist Manuel Chavajay Morales to bring public attention to the complex reality of Lake Atitlán, where plastic floating on the Lake's surface and microplastics hiding in its waters engender forms of visible and invisible violence.

Chavajay's performance piece attempts to recreate the yearly "Bringing of the Fruit" procession along the Lake's southern shore, carried out each Holy Wednesday. According to many scholars, this practice has roots in the celebration of Wayeb, a short month of five days that concludes the Haab cycle of the Maya calendar. Following the procession, some of the fruit is displayed throughout the town as a show of gratitude for a successful harvest season. During the performance designed by Chavajay, plastics are used instead of fruit in an act of protest and consciousness raising, as a way to make visible and denounce the stealthy and lethal violence destroying the lake. The artistic demonstration feature Samuel Cumes and other artists, as well as women from San Pedro la Laguna who volunteer their time collecting trash. They are guardians of the Lake who, in addition to organizing volunteer clean-ups, have defended its waters from extractivist projects.

This political art performance confronts the symbolic space of the status quo, challenging the plastics industry and its flawed logic. The industry has

attempted to hide its own socio-environmental impact in the Atitlán basin by shifting the blame onto local communities and their consumption habits. The plastics industry even took legal action in the Constitutional Court to try to suppress an initiative that would have reduced the local use of plastic and banned styrofoam.[7]

This artistic intervention is driven by a desire to challenge sustainability as a concept that can often be boiled down to a series of proposals to sustain the economy instead of Mother Nature. In fact, in practice, 'sustainability' has been used to legitimize ways of organizing, transforming, and destroying nature. For this reason, such practices are not enough to revitalize Atitlan, a living entity, a part of life, and the material and spiritual survival of surrounding Indigenous communities. We need to move away from legal anthropocentrism and toward biocentrism and new narratives so that our legal system more closely reflects the rights inherent to nature.

With their procession of trash, participants call attention to the contradictions inherent within our consumer society and invite us to reinterpret our relationship with and ties to Abuela Lago, while at the same time awakening the dormant conscience of industry and demanding a stop to the plastic garbage that flows into our municipality. We demand these industries seek real sustainable alternatives and recognize Nature as a subject with rights. We demand the State protect her through its legal system and public policies.

San Pedro la Laguna, Sololá, October 22, 2022.

Notes

[1] Translators' Note: Lake Atitlán is a volcanic lake located in the southwestern highlands of Guatemala. It is one of the nation's most visited tourist destinations, the result of decades of state-sponsored initiatives designed to bring foreign money to the region—often with disregard for the environmental and social consequences.

[2] T.N. Initiative 6054, or «Ley que Sitúa bajo la Coordinación del Ministerio de Ambiente y Recursos Naturales las Instituciones de Competencia Ambiental» [Law that Places Institutions of Environmental Responsibility under the Coordination of the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources] proposed eliminating those governmental bodies responsible for environmental protections, transferring their budget and responsibilities to the Ministry of the Environment. Environmentalists and critics dubbed 6054 as "The Super Ministry of the Environment Law," since it would grant total control, including control over a vast amount of resources, to a single agency. See Cuevas.

[3] T.N. A major problem afflicting the Lake is contamination by raw sewage, the result of an increase in tourist activities and the damage done to a wastewater treatment plant in the lakeside city of Panajachel during Hurricane Stan (2005). After the storm, the local municipality had the opportunity to repair the existing plant. Instead, the Inter-American Development Bank successfully lobbied officials to construct a new $90 million plant whose exorbitant operating costs prohibited it from

Notes

ever being used at full capacity; the plant was shut down entirely one year following its completion. Instead of solving the problem of contamination, this initiative left local communities without a solution. As Jeff Abbot points out, other possible solutions are "prohibitively expensive, or are themselves wrapped up in corruption and special interests, or both." Local communities are, in effect, saddled with the responsibility of responding to a problem stemming from state-sponsored tourism projects and inadequate natural disaster relief. Yet by a rhetorical sleight of hand, "Indigenous communities across Guatemala are regularly blamed for the contamination and environmental destruction that companies and the wealthy create." See Abbot.

[4] T.N. In 2013, the Friends of Atitlán [Amigos del Lago Atitlán], a non-profit NGO made up of vacation-home owners and funded by private businesses, put forth one such proposal: the construction of a mega-collector, a network of sub-aquatic pipelines that was supposedly going to divert and treat the sewage polluting the lake. However, according to Débora Quiacaín, a lawyer and member of the Tzunun Ya' Collective, "what they really wanted to do was sell the waters for monocropping on the southern shore" (Guarchaj and Gonón). Under the terms of the proposed project, control of the water would be transferred from fifteen local municipalities to a centralized, public-private entity whose ultimate commitment to community accountability is unclear. A common concern about the project is that water rights may ultimately become privatized, forcing communities to pay for water they currently have access to for free. In 2021, the Collective successfully obtained a writ of protection from the Constitutional Court, on the basis that local communities had not been properly consulted about the project. See Guarchaj and Gonón.

[5] T.N. The introduction of black bass was done as part of a plan for Pan Am, the US-owned airline company, in an effort to encourage tourism through sport fishing. The venture failed, and the non-endemic species wreaked havoc upon the lake and its endemic species; over 16 native fish species are estimated to have been killed off. For more, see Aburawa.

[6] T.N. In the wake of the decision, community members took it upon themselves to block the further extraction of water. See Julajuj.

[7] In 2016, the municipality of San Pedro la Laguna banned residents from using single-use bags, containers, and straws made from plastics, polystyrene, and styrofoam. Members of the plastics industry challenged the legislation (Acuerdo Municipal 111-2016) in the Constitutional Court, which upheld the community's right to enforce their prohibition. See Corte de Constitucionalidad, 5956-2016.

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Biography

Nancy González is a Maya woman and one of the coordinators of the fight to clean Lake Atitlán.

Aura Lolita Chávez Ixcaquic

Indigenous Women: Bodies, Territories, and Communal Life

translated by Whitney DeVos and Gabriela Ramirez-Chavez

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Introduction

Achieving a collective understanding within our communities and between living beings means seeking out more humane relations between women and men, ones in harmony with the web of life and the cosmos...

Consejo de Pueblos K'iche's[1]

This essay is rooted in the sovereign collective wisdom of women who walk along the Web of Life.[2] On this path, we create ways of knowing, feeling, and taking action within historical processes that have largely been silenced, forgotten or suppressed by the systems imposed on all of human existence. Nation States have historically delegitimized our existence as Indigenous women, which is undeniable if you read their history books.

Daring to write from our perspectives as Indigenous women means recognizing here and now the legacy and wisdom of our grandmothers, the women who came before us and wove our collective knowledge, in a cosmogonic, existential, and intergenerational commitment (Mérida).

It takes courage and historical clarity to write in an environment with powerful recreations, in which Indigenous peoples are on the move, in which we make decisions and wage internal and external battles, and in which Indigenous women are fighting for a dignified life free of violence. To write in an environment in which our territories, our source of strength and what binds us to life, are coveted by world powers and transnational companies that have steered the course of capitalism and invasion. This monstrous history has meant death and destruction for us, because they've been perpetrating it generation after generation for hundreds of years, perfecting their perverse ways. In this context, the written word is an ally: it moves between worlds, inspires critical thought, allyship, commitment, strong bonds, and communication. In short, it creates ways of relating that go beyond a simple, concrete process of writing and reading, because it moves thoughts, feelings, and actions towards more humane, just ways of life. This process is intimate, encouraging, and empowering.

It is also wonderful to write in this moment of history, in a territory still deep in the mountains, where we live among the trees, cornfields, plants, birds,

the outdoors, and fresh air free from pollution, where chickens roam free in the yard, where our people know they are part of a community and act in community.

In some of the sections that follow, we provide examples of actions, what we call "Seeds that bring light and hope for change." This essay is an expression of the collective, transformative light that we create together as Indigenous women. Here, we share our reflections and critical views; we share our concerns as well as our movements.

We are in living territories! And we greet all the species of different shapes, sizes, and life forms with whom we coexist.

Our Bodies and the Territories Where We Develop

> It is important to respectfully recognize the connections shared between different cultures and the many diverse species making up life, in all its fullness…
>
> K'iche' Peoples' Council

Often, people overseas, or in territories outside the region or the American continent, think America is only the United States. In the same way, they also form an idea about who we are based on our appearances, what nation States say about us or, worse still, what corporate marketing depicts in photos. Generally, there is the idea that we are passive, defenseless, strange beings. We have long been framed through the lens of private property, of possession, so that farmers, bankers, and officials have historically referred to us as "my Indian women" and, at times collectively, as "our indigenous women."

It's important we recognize ourselves in history. To know and make known that we are women, that we are beings, that we exist, that we live, that we contribute, that we think, feel, and are always in constant movement. That we have cultures thousands of years old which sustain our own cosmovision, with life systems we put into practice in our territories. That we are not the property of humanity, nor of States, nor of men, nor of white people, nor of millionaires. We are people who recognize histories; we recognize our permanent outrage at the fact that, historically, we have been conceived of as enslaved and taxable masses. We critique the cruelest historical periods lived, such as the eras of assimilationism and protectionism, brought about by the consolidation of States, itself an outcome of colonization. We always remember that the term "Indian" comes from a mistaken gaze, a historical error of geographic location. We recognize wars in our territories during which acts of genocide have been committed, and that these acts have left traces, such as the gendered division of household labor and the strategy of utilizing women's bodies as spoils of war.[3]

We have proposals and questions for humanity. As women, we often ask ourselves, "Why do men see us as their enemies at home and in bed? What is it

that causes this brutal transformation whereby our partner becomes our number-one abuser, who discharges all of his accumulated violence against us?" This brings us to the colonizer, since recognizing that he was the owner of women, of their bodies, helps us understand that the man of the family, of the community, that is, the men with whom we live on a daily basis, also have to work on the relationships of oppression they experience in their being.

As women, we recognize that we are facing contexts adverse to our worldviews, our aspirations, our ways of relating. That means permanent threats for us.

The Web of Life

Indigenous women recognize that we are part of the web of life, which is related to the fabric of life. This web encompasses the relationships among our species, between all species and the different spaces they inhabit, between the elements and the energies that span the entire planet and interact throughout the universe. In this way, nature teaches us it is not possible to determine or delimit a linear vision of life. Our analyses will be one-dimensional if we separate human society from nature.

Cosmovisions

Over the course of our lives, we have shared thoughts, practices, and feelings with our grandmothers and grandfathers. The path we've traveled has left us a history and a heritage, one which is important to return to.

Our ways of being as women—how we interpret, explain, react, feel, and think—draw on those our ancestors developed for life. This allows us to understand the universe and form relationships within the territories where histories and environments come into being. This, in turn, makes way for spirituality, science, knowledge, art, organization, economy, politics... that structure and give meaning to our existence interrelated with the cosmos, plants, animals, and human beings with the Earth.

Territories

We are living in our territories, we love life and we love the way we coexist with biodiversity. Territories are, for us Indigenous women, constructions of vital spaces for communities. They encompass historicity, culture, identity, education, politics, the economy, coexistence between beings such as animals, plants, minerals, cosmos... Our conception of territories goes beyond physical spaces: we identify them with existential elements that give life to a community; for example, the ties connecting people who remain active and aware, attentive to and participating in the processes taking place in the defense of life, despite no longer residing where they were born. Such is the cross-border experience of

La Consulta de la Buena Fe,[4] which was carried out with sisters and brothers of the Maya K'iche' people, residents of Los Angeles, California, United States. They also made decisions regarding the defense of their territory. These decisions are being made from local community territories to national and international territories.

Abya Yala

Abya Yala is the name given to the American continent in the Guna Yala region of Panama and Colombia before the arrival of Christopher Columbus and the Europeans. Literally, it means "land in full maturity" or "land of vital blood" (López-Hernández 10). Indigenous women recognize and claim this name to refer to the continental territory. Instead of saying "America," by using this name we take a stance and, with our thinking, we aim to decolonize ourselves biologically.

Clash of Cosmovisions, Source of Violence

Different models of existing, clashing worldviews, impact our women's bodies, which show these violent ways of existing. A clash in ways of seeing and relating to the world has led to intense territorial confrontations throughout our existence, to long wars, and to long processes of systemic violence. Prevailing is the imposition of nation States with patriarchal, capitalist, and racist structures, which generate invasion, slavery, repression, exclusion. Our existence is affected by violent modes of life, expressed in the trajectory of our life histories, from the intimate and communal realms and expanding to the national and regional.

It's important to ask ourselves the following questions: How are our bodies? Where are they? What are they doing and who are they doing it for? After these violent transits of existence, we say that we are located in strategic territories, because the region where we live is one of the world's richest in terms of biodiversity. These characteristics constitute a power including strategic natural assets such as water, mountains, or the bowels of the earth, home to a variety of minerals, naturally purified air... with which we can continue living for thousands more years, satisfying our needs in accordance with our worldviews, for the common good, taking from nature "only what we need," following the maxim of non-accumulation. However, mercantilist macroeconomic models have determined that the transnational capital of foreign companies will be invested in Indigenous territories, regardless of our existence or our will. They have been given the power to invade us with armed forces, without States providing any protection to our peoples. Territories made up of diverse communities coexisting with biodiversity make us a strategic model for life: for humanity's survival, even.

Life and Our Histories as Indigenous Women

There is a historical route of violence, transmitted generationally, where[by] the ties that bind perpetrators and victims together persist. The stories our grandmothers

tell us mark our lives since they are stories that engender ways of life, feelings, and models of behavior; they continue to shape cultural attitudes, developing a legacy that is almost always invisible. These lives are marked by systematic sexual violence. Indigenous women have been considered spoils of war. Deep within our being are stories that reflect the droit de seigneur/right of pardon that the white man used to assume ownership of our grandmothers, forcing them to have sexual relations before getting married. Many of these atrocities were established through the imposition of the State and they are still practiced in many territories, among other cruel forms of treatment.

In another sense, Indigenous women have consolidated our own historical wealth along the way. We have amassed the different experiences of our grandmothers and therefore it is important to recognize that our stories as Indigenous women, the ones we recognize and keep alive, have not been imposed upon us by the invaders. Our stories are legitimized by our grandmothers, by our ancestors, by ourselves, by our daughters, and by our granddaughters. These stories give us knowledge and underpin our origins, our identity. Our stories demonstrate how deep the violence has gone within our own organizations.

Decisions have been made without our consent, against our wills; they have invaded our being with immense violence, violating The International Labour Organization Convention 169[5] concerning Indigenous and tribal peoples in independent countries. Isn't this exactly what transnational corporations do? What governments do? What exactly do we mean when we use the term "good government"?

> History has shown us that our path has been obstructed, interrupted, and assaulted by numerous actors, among them: churches, political parties, defeatist governments, transnational companies, militarization, local officials, and international aid that seeks to introduce the false promise of development, which comes with dispossession and plunder, among other things.[6]

> These people impact our communities in many ways, and the following stand out: they sow division, utilize our being, violate our rights, foment chaos within our struggles, co-opt leadership, kill and destroy. They have caused our critical thinking to stagnate, as they shift the focus of everything toward accepting absolute truths imposed by faith. They entertain us with political games or absurd meetings, robbing us of valuable time. We often go to church, and many churches play on our needs and examine us in detail. They have professionals who make assessments of us.

> Instead of going to local meetings organized to defend our rights, we often choose to go to church or political assemblies or presentations in support

> of government programs, all of which entails decisions being made for us because we are ashamed to say no, a fact that results in conformity and submission. Others decide for us. Then, when they violate us or want to take away our property, the political parties and pastors and parish priests, among others, do not get involved. They say it is not their responsibility; on the contrary, they instill fear of protesting. We feel guilty and this robs us Maya women of courage, strength, and spirit. Many Maya women accept what happens to them because they believe their faith tells them this is just what they have to live through. It has even happened to those of us who have devoted ourselves to struggle. (Chávez Ixcaquic)

Multiple Oppressions

Indigenous women, down to the very core of our being, experience multiple oppressions at different stages of our lives. In general, oppression begins in childhood, even in our mother's womb. These multiple oppressions operate within our bodies, they multiply, accommodating and interacting with one another, implanted in such a way that the violence they produce becomes naturalized and normalized. States express their approval on a daily basis.

Internalized oppression has caused the profound illnesses of fear and guilt. They are deeply rooted and naturalized in our being; they produce complications in our thinking, attitudes, dreams, feelings, and cause problems when we interact among ourselves or others. Many times, we do not value ourselves or other women.

How Do Indigenous Women Experience Racism

Over time, dominant forms of thinking have been legitimized. Within our historical context, the systems imposed on us place the white man as the dominant referent, strong and powerful. What he says goes; he makes the decisions in our territories. Naturally, this becomes institutionalized in the symbolic realm and daily life, which results in subordination. They annihilate us from history and enslave us again, focusing their efforts on controlling our minds. As a result of all this, Indigenous women are the targets of racism in the States in which we live. This racism is reflected in statistics, where our real situation as women goes unaddressed; the sparse data we have available has been achieved only through applying constant pressure and waging ongoing struggle.

Colonial remnants persist in the thinking of the dominant class and their racist modes of classification that have brought categories of Indigenous women into the language of daily life. These people talk about the "mute Indigenous woman," the "ignorant Indigenous woman," the "stubborn Indigenous woman," "Maria the Indigenous woman." They extol those whom they approve of, referring to them as "intelligent, obedient, competitive, knowers of the one true faith,

rational, prestigious, modern, classy, of stature." On the other hand, they reject the other "savage, crazy, rioting, trouble-making, terrorist" Indigenous people. This is what they call those of us who have had the courage to fight for life, for Mother Nature, for the land, and for our territory. In this way, they offer prestige to the chosen ones and manufacture violent power struggles between women, in a clear exercise of societal breakdown and the instantiation of deep relations of exclusion.

Patriarchy and Colonialism in Our Communities

Deep-rooted in our communities, colonialism equips men, including Indigenous men, with privileges they, unfortunately, wield against us. To some extent, their holding these privileges has to do with our bodies. Thus, the end result is a series of unequal relationships that we contest, in part by making demands for change, since it is important to recognize that all of us, men and women, are committed to creating patterns of change in the name of territorial defense.

Indigenous men have control over the bodies of Indigenous women. This is not the result of a political accord between women and men, but a patriarchal imposition, an oppressive pact that must be eliminated from our territories. Having constantly reflected on the experiences that have marked our lives, we call upon conscious men to do this work. When we walk alongside male comrades, we think and feel that our path is a shared one, that our strength is shared, that they recognize our ancestral principles such as Tzq'at, reciprocity: "I am you and you are me." We trust that he is a "compa," a brother who shares our sense of suffering and will not harm us. Along this path, and over time, we come to realize we were wrong: that the man we thought was a "comrade, a brother, a friend" attacks us, brings violence into our lives, bloodies us, insults us, humiliates us, defames us, persecutes us, makes fun of our inequalities, harasses us, blackmails us, and many times, sexually violates us. For the most part, when we report rape or sexual harassment to groups or organizations in our communities, we are not met with reciprocity but rejection and reactions like this:

> You're fucking us over. You must be in bed with the government or with mining companies because they want to destroy us. The oligarchy bribed you, no doubt. What happened to you is nothing compared to what we went through during the war. Now that was awful, because they pulled guns on us, they threw bombs at us, they kidnapped us…

Violence and Power

We Indigenous women are redefining our relationships, so that violence and power do not act on us. Addressing the violent deaths of Indigenous women, as well as rampant impunity and injustice, is not a priority to Nation-States. This

becomes abundantly clear when we women come together and share our stories and draw our own conclusions. It becomes clear that the violence we experience exists across many territories—although violence is perpetrated in distinct ways in each, our experiences as a whole reflect a widespread pattern of patriarchal violence throughout Mesoamerica and other regions.

For hundreds of years, the systems imposed on us have silenced our historical wounds and the ongoing, systematic violations we have experienced.

Because our territories are affected by serious crises of systematic violence, we continue to face not only historical forms of oppression—due to class, cultural identity, gender, and the aftermath of imposed wars—but also ongoing invasion by multinational companies that perpetuate severe inequalities, discrimination, and impoverishment.

Guatemala is in Mesoamerica, a region of the American continent with the highest rate of inequality and increasing poverty among Indigenous women. We work triple shifts for minimal pay: it is not enough to cover basic living expenses. Over the years, a culture of impunity has taken hold in the region. In El Salvador, for example, 99% of femicide cases go unpunished (Mateos Herraiz).

In Guatemala, we're now up against a government led by a genocidal, military president, Otto Pérez Molina, who is owned by transnational corporations, powerful states, national oligarchies, and drug trafficking, among others. He has been programmed to violently repress the people since he was first trained as a K'aibil. The K'aibiles are the elite soldiers of the Guatemalan army, trained in and subjected to extreme conditions, forced to complete trials based on the famous theory that the mind dominates the body, a phrase often repeated in each training session. Another one of their mottos is: "If I advance, follow me; if I stop, urge me on; and if I retreat, kill me."

Sexuality as a Terrain of Power

Challenging systems of power through sexuality is a wonderful thing: this territory must be respected! As we Indigenous women go about our lives, we come to recognize the way men perpetrate violence day after day. There are many experiences, many moments in history that we remember and fill us with outrage down to the tenderest parts of our being, our sexuality…

For violent men, there are no limits to the sexual obligations we must fulfill. Indigenous women are mandated to obey, to attend to the desires of men at any time and in any place. Inside our homes, the violent man wields power; there, the husband's power is superior to any other. Not only his violent acts, but also his controlling behaviors are institutionalized.

Birth control, for example, is not readily accessible. If a woman has contraceptives, in many cases she must keep them hidden from her husband or risk the grave consequences of being discovered. She feels a huge weight on her

chest, full of dread because she is hiding something, and she worries, "What will he do when he finds them?" From the moment we begin to think in such a way, we become more susceptible to tolerating the violence inflicted upon us.

In this sense, when we come together as Indigenous women, fostering spaces for critical and self-critical analysis in order to promote radical change, we are profoundly struck by how systems continue to separate sexuality from what is considered the political sphere. However, sexuality is not a natural relationship. What we know about sexuality today is a social and historical construction, an effect of our relationship to culture.

How Patriarchy Controls Women's Bodies and Sexuality

It is important to recognize that sexuality is the result of a socially and historically constructed process, and therefore different peoples have their own ways of relating to one another. The body and sexuality are also political: throughout our lives and histories, we have experienced how power relations are exerted upon our bodies. For this reason, communities have rules, punishments, limitations, and discourses that reinforce male dominance.

These days, little is said about the spoken and unspoken agreements between men and how they control our sexuality. Men's role here in seldom analyzed, given that they are born into a society that grants them access to our bodies in order to sustain the system of domination. Accepted codes of conduct demonstrate and reinforce men's right to dominate women's bodies; the end result is rape, a logical conclusion of existing societal structures. Obviously, all of this produces unequal power relations. So, violence against our bodies is the result of a system of domination, one that is not spoken about in the home, nor in schools, and much less in churches. To deconstruct this system of domination as Indigenous women, we had to undergo a process of educating ourselves and questioning systemic power structures, which is why it is essential for us to have our own autonomous educational spaces.

Nation States imposed by the patriarchal system have implemented life models whereby our existence is considered as a body property, a body that belongs to someone else. That is the current generic identity, which is why many systems do not recognize violence against Indigenous women, because this is socially accepted and gives men the legal authority to make decisions about and control our bodies. Power relations are institutionalized through marriage, by means of permanent rules and surveillance. Our sexuality is reduced to a single function, namely, reproduction. It is acceptable only within a specific intimate context, marriage, and with a socially acceptable person, a man. Any other expression of our sexuality is harshly punished because it represents a danger to the patriarchs. Either we belong to one man, or we belong to all men: this is the basis of the patriarchal order.

Thousands of us Indigenous women and girls are being trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Over time, human trafficking has become increasingly associated with forced migration. In Latin America, nine million people are victims of this business, which moves more than $16 million (USD) each year.[7] Mexico and Central America are prime areas for the recruitment and trafficking, primarily of girls, who are vilely exploited and sexually enslaved upon their arrival in the United States.

The violation of sexual and reproductive rights also involves other types of actors, such as the State, which can imprison women for up to decades for having terminated a pregnancy, the result of the profound power held by fundamentalist groups and enduring religious hierarchies.

Not all violence against people is made visible: it depends on where it is perpetrated and who perpetrates it, all of which has to do with the dominant powers. Violence against Indigenous women is nothing new within the Nation-State. It has been naturalized to such a degree that societies see rape as normal,[8] or they blame us. Domestic violence has become so naturalized that it seems strange if there is no violence, the same can be said of violence within social movements or within Indigenous communities.

Pacts Between Indigenous Women: Seeds of Light and Hope for Change

In the face of the patriarchal political order, many Indigenous women have given another meaning to life; we have decided we have no loyalty when it comes to this violent approach, so we are contesting this system. It is wonderful to say this aloud and even more intense to live it.

This has led us to be creative, to find one another in order to identify alternatives and reconstruct new referents for our social relations, all the while having critical and self-critical positions and recognizing how we have been shaped and educated to serve the all-powerful. It is important to recognize and demystify the power relations that mediate our experiences with sexuality and our intimate relationships.

We have forged our own path, following the seeds that offer light and hope for change and recognizing how we are anatomically and physically built. Recognizing the parts of our bodies, calling each other and reassuring one another, having safeguards between us that allow us to make our own decisions in our own spaces, practicing autonomous processes of self-determination, clearly expressing our freedom.

This process involves making our own political pacts: covenants of love, respect, and reciprocity; creating bridges between us; recognizing that we have sexual and reproductive rights and coming up with strategies and determining spheres of action with our greatest strengths being rebellion, opposition, and redefinition.

We have declared that our bodies have the right to rest, that we have the right to decide if we want to reproduce. These are struggles we are also currently waging in our territories, because we recognize sexual and reproductive rights as human rights, as universal, interdependent, and indivisible. This journey is a long one, and that's why it is important for this work to be carried out intergenerationally.

In community assemblies, we voice our agreement that our territories be declared free of transnational companies. Likewise, we also want these same territories to be declared free of violence against women. So, every day we fight to reclaim our own bodies: as more bodies are able to exercise their capacity for self-determination, the more we, as women, move towards the good life. We take another step along our path!

Seeds That Offer Light and Hope for Change

The two cases we present below offer hope in breaking the silence around sexual violence against Indigenous women.

On May 9, 2014, the Guatemalan justice system sentenced former dictator Efraín Ríos Montt to 80 years in prison (50 for genocide and another 30 for war crimes). A criminal court found the ex-military man guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity that were responsible for the deaths of more than 1,700 Indigenous people. Although the conviction was later overturned, this was a historic trial for Indigenous women in Guatemala, since it set the precedent that sexual violence and violence against women constitute war crimes and genocidal strategy (Chiquin). In the process, Ixil women narrated the atrocities they suffered at the hands of Guatemalan soldiers between 1982 and 1983, and how members of the army systematically abused them sexually. These events occurred when the Ixil women were between 11 and 30 years old. According to the Report on the Recovery of Historical Memory of the Guatemalan Episcopal Conference, humiliation was used as an instrument of torture and sexual slavery, including the repeated rape of victims.

Another recent example is the Sepur Zarco Case, in which two soldiers were prosecuted on counts of rape and sexual slavery committed during the war in Guatemala.

Sepur Zarco is a community located in the municipality of El Estor in Izabal. There, in 1982, during the worst years of the war and genocide, a military base was built. Here, and elsewhere, the military committed a series of crimes against humanity, including the rape and sexual enslavement of approximately 20 women over the course of at least six months. Several of these women also had their husbands or relatives disappeared or murdered (de León).

On October 14, 2014, Judge Miguel Ángel Gálvez of the High Risk Court B decided to try two soldiers for war crimes committed during the Civil War (1960-

1996). Former lieutenant Steelmer Reyes Girón stands accused of crimes against humanity in the form of sexual violence, sexual slavery, and domestic slavery of eleven Q'eqchi' women; he is also charged with the murder of Dominga Choc and her two underage daughters, Anita and Hermelinda Choc Pop. Heriberto Valdés Asij is going to trial for the forced disappearance of seven Q'eqchi' peasants on August 25, 1982, as well as for sexual violence against two women, constituting crimes against the duties of humanity.[9]

What Does Self-Determination Mean to Us, Indigenous Women

To us, self-determination means making our own decisions as a daily practice. This understanding guides our approach to life—from personal to communal, from private to public, from individual to collective, in their multiple expressions. This is how we realize our aspirations: to strengthen ourselves politically, economically, socially, and culturally.

Self-determination means enacting practices that move us toward greater autonomy, turning a critical eye on the way we have individually and collectively internalized oppression, and breaking with learned patterns of resignation, submission, inferiority, humiliation, and helplessness. We are starting to take these steps in our territories, in order to undergo processes of personal and collective healing and slowly, one step at a time, reclaim our power as Indigenous women.

It means anything and everything we are already doing in our territories: resignifiying our being, strengthening our spirituality and lives, and honoring life with our ancestors' seeds.

It means revolutionizing our thoughts, our feelings, and our actions every day, and generating other forms of being.

It means having the freedom to rebel and exercise the tools of rebellion, inventing alternative forms of relating that bring forth our own systems of life.

It means making individual and collective decisions as Indigenous women through democratic, assembly-based, and autonomous processes.

Self-determination also means walking with our people, carefully considering which of our traditions work in these times and do not violate our lives, analyzing them, and working to strengthen life.

It means remaking our entire way of life to incorporate foundational aspects, such as holding authority as Indigenous women, learning to hold authority, in an intergenerational way, living our lives as a collective, taking up other ways of being.

It means going through a learning process as women and experiencing deep transformation across many generations, as a result of multiple processes.

It means creating our own collectives and forms of production based on a communal economy and enacting changes as a community.

We are women who face different struggles, in many different territories, with our own forms of expression and ways of being. We have established ourselves as defenders, leaders, spiritual guides, authorities, spokespersons, and leaders. The systems imposed on us do not recognize our wisdom, our political positioning, or our constitution. They don't even see us! And when they do, they call us crazy, troublemakers, rioters, bitches.

We are decision-makers in our territories, we practice self-determination and are determined to fight so that our territories and decisions are respected. For Indigenous women, this means freeing our territories from State violence, systemic violence, and the violence enacted on our bodies.

We are tired of hearing you talk about us—how our bodies are found dismembered or how we exist only as man's counterpart: we do not belong to any man (not even our partners, fathers, children, or friends), any system (patriarchal, capitalist, racist, or neoliberal systems), or any religion. Stop referring to us as "our indigenous women": we will continue fighting so that parish priests, presidents, state officials, and owners of multinational companies are not the ones making decisions about our bodies. We do not come from a rib, we come from Life and all the ways it is expressed in the human form, no more or less. We are the only ones who can make decisions about our bodies—we will make them within us, between us, for us.

We face battles in our territories and continue to fight so that our choices are respected. The right to have as many children as we want. The right to break free from physical, psychological, financial, and sexual abuse. The right to inherit, to give ourselves a break, and to rest. The right to be more than symbolic vessels.

We are continuously violated in our territories, and hiding this fact would be a huge historical error that would cost more women's lives. That is why we recognize the ongoing gender conflict that has still not been brought to light. What is clear, however, is the strong effort to silence, hide, attack, and continue to exercise control over us, including on the part of international aid groups that seek to separate our demands from those of the broader community. Such efforts serve the patriarchy, its institutions and models, and thus we not only face the transnational companies that invade us, but also the problems stemming from a permanent patriarchy that each day perpetrates violence against us.

We are actors with critical awareness of the past, present, and future, and we know what we want as Indigenous women.

That we carry out our own analyses of the gendered division of labor is truly meaningful. The work of human reproduction is rendered invisible. Our living presence is absorbed, like a silent, submissive, emotional record player on repeat, and we are thought of as devoted, self-sacrificing, all-giving.

This is based on the continuation of a perverse system that makes us work long hours each day and erases our labor so that we do the same thing the

next day and the day after that. As Indigenous women, we know that erased labor is silenced labor, it is work that does not exist and, at the end of our hard workday, it's as if we did nothing at all. Every day the system enslaves us more, until we waste away alongside the thousands of women who die young due to illness. They are killing us without allowing us to fully exist.

We affirm that we are not only life-giving mothers. We are mothers and so much more. We choose whether or not we want to be mothers, because motherhood is not a divine mandate. We are women who hold deep wisdom!

How We Rethink Leadership as Indigenous Women

Our collective reflections are part of an ongoing process of formation that is both self-reflexive and liberatory. They allow us to rethink ourselves, since we refuse to reproduce leadership practices that hand over our decision-making power to someone else who manages our freedom. We likewise refuse to reproduce leadership practices that emphasize individual characteristics and thus place us in various degrees of competition with one another, emphasizing differences among us instead of the collective objectives we need to achieve through those leadership practices. We recognize that Indigenous women can build new forms of leadership and allow for processes that build lives for everyone, recognizing the leadership of other beings of the planet.

We recognize and are striving toward forms of shared, rotating, intergenerational leadership. Inspired leadership that builds relationships and attends to the spirituality of people, that encourages and focuses on clarity of purpose, that learns from practice and encourages the ritual arrival of both joys and sorrows.

We are inspired by forms of shared leadership that foster collective support and create safe spaces for expression, self-care, participation, and the development of leadership skills.

The Commitment Indigenous Men Make: Generating New Masculinities That Combat Violence Against Indigenous Women[10]

In some territories, when we demand that men declare themselves free of violence against women, they begin to transform their lives, first by recognizing themselves as sexists, taking on the commitment to be self-critical in the interest of radical change. As Indigenous women we have witnessed these processes of transformation: they form a finely-woven fabric, which takes shape slowly but constantly. Regarding this space of self-reflection, it is most important to highlight that:

- These men recognize that one of the deeply-embedded personality traits they must change is the hubris of wanting to remain always in control of what they were taught belongs to them, that is, women, and they recognize this

hubris as an element of machismo they inherited, voluntarily or involuntarily, in childhood.

▯ They realize they need to put a stop to their feelings of anger and frustration and the conflicts that have arisen regarding conception. These are generational troubles they have borne since inception, because custom has instilled the expectation that the first-born child should be a boy. When this does not happen, women are blamed, often violently, and the men start along a path in which the main object is to conceive a male child. This is neither sustainable nor conducive to a harmonious life at home and affects societies more broadly, since men who have only daughters are singled out as incapable because they do not give birth to males. Many men who have questioned and transformed their machismo express that they do so for several reasons: one of the most frequently mentioned being a newfound sense and vision of life that values equality between and dignity for both women and men.

▯ Based on their own experience, men know how they have treated their mothers, partners, sisters, and other women. Men know they have acted violently toward the women in their lives and they recognize that other men have also. When they have daughters, they are perfectly aware of what violence against them would mean; they recognize the fear this engenders and this is why they are willing to radically change.

▯ Appreciating women's intelligence is one of men's predicaments. They are working on this, as the changes need to come from the oppressor. One prime example is leadership envy, since men do not accept when women exert their leadership and decision-making capacities. Therefore, changing the relationships produced by patriarchy is their challenge, since they are part of its system of power.

▯ Within the interior life of the male being, the call to happiness means becoming "sentipensante."[11] To transform the sexual division of labor and domestic roles, we must reassess old habits meant to accommodate men and instead take up principles and habits that facilitate life as a community and collective. As soon as we put this into practice, the family lives more peacefully, and men are far less likely to experience alcoholism or drug addiction or resort to prostitution.

▯ They recognize that, in our communities, men need to undergo a process of healing in order to transform a sense of being that has been enslaved by the oppressor. Men also recognize that Nation-States are complicit in their violent acts and vice versa; they exist together in a perverse relationship, since impunity and corruption in justice systems make violent men stronger. It is important we agree that couples no longer reproduce sexist beings; that is the way forward.

Territorial Invasion in Abya Yala: the Ruses of Development

> Certainly, there exist many worldviews, where Indigenous peoples do not necessarily want false development; there are other ways of life, ones that challenge global powers.

Transnational companies, whether related to hydroelectric projects, mining, oil, monoculture agriculture, etc., all come with well-crafted discourses about "development" that promise to get people out of so-called "underdevelopment." They use this message to invade our territories, offering everything from jobs, health, education, and well-being for all, to the distribution of profits—with great inequalities, of course. An example of this is the mining law in Guatemala, which grants 1% royalties to the Guatemalan state. Nation-States, increasingly privatized, are becoming the property of oligarchies, world powers, and multinational corporations. We Indigenous women cannot keep trusting in states that have been taken hostage and fail to respond to our concerns.

We know what the arrival of multinationals in our territories is like. Generally, it is facilitated by the long-standing oligarchies of the countries involved. Multinationals ally themselves with state officials and clandestine networks, including organized crime. At the local level, they act similarly, allying themselves with local state and municipal officials, entering our land without permission. We often see technicians taking land measurements, lying to communities, and buying large swaths of land, without asking for permission or informing Indigenous authorities. They don't have the slightest sense of respect.

When communities and peoples ask for explanations, demand respect, and say no, what do companies do? They criminalize us, intimidate us, go after us legally, perpetrate violence against our most vulnerable; pursue illegitimate cases and manage to have us imprisoned illegally. Today, many political prisoners remain unjustly incarcerated; states implement repression against people officially by declaring states of siege, evictions, and murders, all within a framework and scenario of complete impunity. It is evident that the logic of development is being imposed and disseminated militarily, and that the weapons wielded by companies and governments are the main actors in this ongoing imposition. In the Mesoamerican region especially, the army is one of the most powerful governmental institutions operating today.

Transnational corporations, especially those carrying out mining operations, are ever-present and encroaching on our territories. They are carrying out—and getting away with—massacres.

The development model is riddled with major errors that are evident in our situation, position, and condition of life as Indigenous women. This is reflected in State statistics, where one can plainly see that States, without even the

slightest bit of shame, use the bodies of Indigenous women to subjugate and dispossess us and to satisfy their unending desire for greed and domination.

Our messages are potent: They say "Mining is development"; we say "The mine destroys and pollutes!" They say "Mining is going to contribute enormously to the economy and development"; we say "Mining poisons, pollutes, sickens, and kills." We defend life and our territories and we women have waged battles as political actors, as demonstrated in our many interventions:

- Indigenous women have our own spaces for: critical analysis and resignification, historicizing our existence, and strengthening ourselves intellectually and emotionally, as well as through self-care.
- We are participating in local processes related to the defense of life and territory; in political assemblies and mobilizations, we take up positions against transnational companies and in the defense of our rights, from the intimate to the public, from the individual to the collective, from the local to the regional.
- We are constantly speaking out, engaging in direct actions that break the silence about our lived experience with violence. We use and recreate tools, of healing and self-care, as a transgressive political tool.
- We build networks with other Indigenous women, including those from other continents.
- We are saving and protecting seeds alongside young people, men, and elders. In September 2014, the Law for the Protection of Obtaining Vegetables, known as the "Monsanto Law," was repealed in Guatemala.[12]
- In certain territories, we keep records of attacks on human rights defenders, taking into account that we are targeted for being Indigenous women and because most of us live in rural areas.
- We are creating networks among ourselves and training ourselves through forms of national and regional legal advocacy.
- In certain territories, we are making decisions about our bodies in relation to aspects such as reproduction, rest, fun, exercise training, and sexual and reproductive health.

We know that we need to work with local communities to foster cultures that eradicate violence against Indigenous women. For this reason, we will continue to insist on analyzing in more detail those global strategies that have local impacts. Speaking out against Nation-States and exposing their systems of multiple oppressions is an important challenge to take on; we insist that this must be taken up by communities on a local level.

Women Taking Action and Participating in Territorial Defense

We recognize how diverse we are as Indigenous women and that we have always participated in Indigenous rights movements. We joined the struggle to eradicate economic exploitation and fight for decolonization, and to eradicate the

oppression we have historically faced because of our gender, Indigenous, and class identities, in every facet of our lives.

As women, we recognize that the earth cannot be sold. We see this happen in our territories. For instance, in the Maya K'iche' region in Guatemala, men are usually the ones who hold property titles, which has led to clashes with men who say, "This land is mine, I bought it, and I'll hand it over to whoever pays up." Women in the community respond, "Yes, it's yours, but where does it come from? It comes from our ancestors, our grandmothers and grandfathers. What did they tell you to do, sell it?" Women in the community go back to the words of our grandfathers and grandmothers, go visit their graves to gain a new understanding and consciousness. Women do so much consciousness raising!

We actively and consciously participate in Consultas Comunitarias de Buena Fe, community meetings where we make decisions collectively. For us, this is a practice in autonomy, self-determination, and strategic political positioning, one rooted in the knowledge our people have held for thousands of years and which keeps us moving forward. In our communities, we adhere to the principles of consultation. This means we carry out the things we've committed to as a community, the decisions we've made at community meetings where women, men, girls, boys, and elders are consulted on a given matter. Thousands of us have participated in these consultation processes, but the number of women involved has declined. We believe this is because women financially depend on their husbands, a fact many women have mentioned when we have engaged them in dialogue.

Some of us activist women have partners who support us financially, encourage us, and fight alongside us to defend our territories. For women to participate in these actions, we must either be financially independent or have a supportive partner because, as we say, we aren't getting paid for this. Most of the time, we have to cover the costs associated with mobilizing ourselves and defending our territories, and for many women this is a barrier to participation.

As women, when we defend our territories, we are defending every life-sustaining space, every feeling, every thought, every body, every principle, every story and every history, every horizon, and every element that coexists. Indigenous women from different territories have decided to come together, rooting ourselves in a critical understanding of our history and recognizing that our present conditions and our existence are embedded within a network of interrelated systems. We have decided to speak out and challenge the silence that has marked our lives, to challenge systems, spaces, concepts, worlds, models, authorities, and men. In short, to challenge everything that engenders violent forms of relation in our lives.

We are living proof that there are other creative forms of existing, ones that generate life in community and fullness. We keep walking toward them. We may get frustrated, tired, and come up against obstacles along the way, but we are walking and opening new paths towards a dignified life. So we come together,

drawing on principles from our cosmovisions, our principles of reciprocity, to create a holistic way of relating, and safe and strategic spaces. We recognize current existential voids, mistakes, conflicts, and, above all, that the situation of Indigenous women has not changed: they are subjected to structural violence and violence produced by the machismo prevailing in our communities and among our peoples. We are outraged by misogyny, including within our territories, communities, and peoples. That is why we stress the importance of our own spaces and environments, and then move on to address the collective agreements we make as communities, between distinct communities, and between women and men.

> In both Mexico and Central America, Indigenous women are leading their communities in the struggle to defend their territories and natural resources, opposing unregulated extractivist projects and land grabs carried out in the name of 'development.' Whether it is the Kuna of Panama or Mixtec communities at the U.S.-Mexico border, women call out the injustices committed by mining and logging companies. In addition, they expose corrupt policies carried out by their governments, which deploy police and military units to repress activist communities. (JASS)

Living in harmony is not something that only women or only men can bring about; otherwise, we would be unable to call it harmony or balance. For women to live well and in harmony, we need men, women, movements, communities, peoples, nations, all of us who are deeply committed to harmonizing existence.

How Do Indigenous Women Experience Criminalization in Our Territories

We are currently experiencing a wave of criminalization in our territories. One must concede that the legal system benefits groups holding economic and political power. Our own lives as women who defend life and territory makes this clear and is the reason we are criminalized and persecuted legally. All of this affects us in our territories: high rates of impunity, social and economic inequality, police and military forces, as well as the presence of private security companies. We've seen a constant, daily escalation of persecution, punishment, and criminalization related to our actions, and the demands we make in defense of our collective rights as Indigenous peoples and our rights as Indigenous women.

These are some of the cases of our colleagues criminalized for defending life and territory.

> The only thing I have done and we have done alongside local communities is defend our territories, defend the land, defend mother nature. (Hermelinda Simón, 2013)

Like other women, Hermelinda Simón Diego has been criminalized for her territorial defense of Santa Cruz de Barillas, Huehuetenango, Guatemala, amidst the construction of the Hidralia Ecoener hydroelectric plant, a project rejected by local communities. A warrant, issued by the Public Ministry of Santa Eulalia Huehuetenango, is out for her arrest. She is falsely accused of aggravated robbery, the destruction of machinery, and the unlawful detainment of security forces employed by the Hidro Santa Cruz company.

Blanca Julia Ajtún, human rights defender and CODECA (Committee on Campesino Development) activist, has been criminalized and imprisoned due to allegations made by the Energuate company. Along with two human rights defenders, she was kidnapped for several hours on June 26, 2014, by people who claimed to be affiliates of this company. They were "allegedly" released by the Human Rights Ombudsman and the National Civil Police, before being transferred and locked up without a court order. They were charged with specialized fraud and national security crimes, without any legal argument to substantiate these charges. Three days later they were released on bail.

> Everything I have written I have written responsibly, ethically, with social commitment, with conscience, for the right to life and the rights of women, children, young people, Mayan peoples, Xincas, and Garífunas, and especially all those who are struggling against extractivism today. (Francisca Gómez Grijalva)

> To inform is a fundamental human right related to the freedom to access information. I bring information to light, but all citizens also have the right to be informed, to choose what type of information to read and listen to, but this is not the case with mainstream media, because they adhere to a hegemonic narrative, one that always represents the absolute truth of those in power. It shouldn't be that way, because if we are talking about a human right guaranteed in state constitutions, the "ley de emoción del pensamiento" [the law protecting freedom of the press in Guatemala], in international agreements and conventions on human rights and freedom of expression, then we are talking about fundamental human rights. If they silence us, if they take away our voices, what do people expect us to do; we cannot keep our heads down. (Francisca Gómez Grijalva, August 11, 2014)

> When they captured us, they physically and verbally abused us; they treated us badly. The Government failed to guarantee our human rights; they caused us psychological harm, yet the Public Ministry does not investigate those responsible, nor does it investigate the private citizens who detained us... They said we are like a malignant cancer that gets worse every day. (Francisca Gómez Grijalva, September 30, 2014)

Francisca Gómez Grijalva is a Maya K'iche' journalist, Prensa Libre columnist, academic, and Human Rights defender who is currently being threatened for speaking out against the violations of the special rights of local Indigenous communities. The extractivist company Cementos Progreso filed a lawsuit against her for writing an article called "¿Agua o cemento?" on February 6, 2014, which brought attention to a series of problems caused by Cementos Progreso in the Kaqchiquel Maya territory in San Juan Sacatepéquez.

Buen Vivir

> The land as a referent of life, not slaughter. For this reason, we call ourselves to unity, to communal labor, to exercising our legitimate rights in our territory and to creating a planet for all species, colors, sizes, and forms…
>
> K'iche' Peoples' Council

Buen Vivir ("good living" or "living well") is a model of life that Indigenous peoples are presenting as an alternative to the so-called "development" model.

Unmasking false development is a task that we Indigenous peoples have taken up for ourselves. We invite the peoples of the world to join us in this journey, which is neither simple nor easy; it is difficult and complex, but it takes us on a journey beyond systems and States and puts as a referent Life itself, a woven fabric always in motion. From our bodies to our nationalities, this collective journey invites us to unlearn and recreate learning.

If we destabilize the patriarchal, colonial, and capitalist order, we destabilize the violent domination and submission that threatens us. This inspires and strengthens not only Indigenous women but the many worlds suffering from these systemic diseases.

> Buen Vivir, which we welcome, is integral. It fosters coexistence and complementarity, freedom and natural rights, the self-determination of persons and peoples, the self-determination of identities, bodies, sexualities, and territories. It is collective and encourages care for life and pleasure, love, joy, and the different ways of expressing care as well as sentipensante knowledge. Buen Vivir recognizes as life everything existing in the cosmos and everything that has essential life and an active part in the construction of good living. To foster it, we make pacts, agreements, and alliances, without forms of hierarchization. Buen Vivir recognizes the value of all those who are part of the covenant, from children to elders. (Confluencia Nuevo B'aqtun)

The model of Buen Vivir begins to take shape and gather strength the moment our communities put our own decisions into practice.

Indigenous women are walking towards Buen Vivir, recreating our existence in many ways through deep critical analysis.

We walk along a very hopeful path; we have life and we have life in community, so we will keep moving, honoring the steps taken by our mothers before us, who also accompany us in joy, together, in our frames of reference, our frameworks of coexistence, of diversity and creativity.

We will continue to defy borders because our communities do not create those borders. The more we Indigenous women exercise our right to freedom, our right to a life without violence, our right to self-determination, the more we will bring them into being.

Because we are free beings… we will continue walking onwards, because we draw inspiration from life, our life, the life of our grandmothers and the life of our granddaughters, we will continue our march towards el Buen Vivir!

Notes

[1] Translators' Note: This statement was made at the end of Oxlajuj B'aktun in Q'umarkaaj, K'iche', Guatemala. The Oxlajuj B'aktun ends a period of 5,200 years, per the long count of the calendar of Maya culture: the long count is a system that records time linearly, combined with cyclical rhythm. Its calculation expresses the number of days elapsed since the date 4 Ajaw 8 K'umku', on which Maya Grandmothers and Grandfathers began to count the Fourth Era of the world, which ends on 21 December 2012 and begins a new cycle.

[2] Translators' Note: One of the twenty nawals of the Maya calendar, "K'at," refers to the net: physical nets such as fishing nets and nets for holding mazorcas (corn cobs), as well as the relational nets composing the "web of life" or "network of life" that connects all beings energetically, spiritually, and materially.

[3] This relationship is reflected in numerous episodes that took place during the Civil War in Guatemala, when Indigenous Q'eqchí women were raped and enslaved. The Sepur Zarco outpost case is only one example. As discussed in a later section, two former soldiers were tried and convicted for war crimes in October 2014. The utilization of women's bodies as spoils of war includes the forced exploitation of women's domestic, reproductive, and care work.

[4] La Consulta de la Buena Fe is a right communities are granted in accordance with national law. This took place on October 22, 2012, when more than 27,000 people from Indigenous communities expressed a resounding "no" to extraction and exploitation in their territories, particularly those of large-scale mining and hydroelectric projects.

[5] These struggles are waged on the basis of rights guaranteed by the International Labor Organization Convention 169 [the Indigenous and Tribal People's Convention] (1989) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), as well as in the community laws known in Guatemala as "customary rights," which were part of the 1996 Peace Accords.

[6] Translators' Note: This appears as an open quote in the source text and is perhaps a typo.

Notes

[7] Translators' Note: The author likely drew these figures from an article published in La Razón reporting on the Organization of American States's Third Meeting of National Authorities on Trafficking in Persons held on October 15 and 16, 2012, in Guatemala City, Guatemala ("La trata de personas"). However, there is some discrepancy between the figures reported by La Razón and those reported by Ambassador Albert R. Ramdin, Assistant Secretary General of the Organization of American States. The OAS, for example, reports human trafficking to be a $16 billion-a-year business in Latin America and the Caribbean (Ramdin 1), rather than the $16 million reported by La Razón.

[8] Translators' Note: Such as in Euro-Western hetero-patriarchal societies.

[9] Translators' Note: Reyes Giró and Valdés Asij were found guilty in 2016. For more, see United Nations, "UN Fund for Victims."

[10] Interview conducted by the author with a member of the K'iche' Peoples' Council, K'iche', Guatemala, 2014.

[11] T.N.: Sentipensante—a portmanteau combining the Spanish words sentir (to sense or feel) and pensar (to think)—is theorized by Laura I. Rendón as a pedagogical approach based on "wholeness, harmony, social justice and liberation" (132). She encourages educators and other individuals to integrate their inner affective knowledge (sensing) and outer intellectual learning (thinking).

[12] The Monsanto Law was passed by the Guatemalan government in June 2014, as a provision of a 2005 trade agreement between the United States and Central America. It would have granted exclusive ownership rights of a few genetically modified seeds to a handful of transnational companies. Organizations in Guatemala mobilized against the law, arguing that it violated the Constitution as well as the right of Maya peoples to the traditional cultivation of their land in their ancestral territories. In granting patents for new plant varieties to transnational seed companies, the law essentially privatized seed ownership in a country where seed varieties have a long, multifaceted history and where about 70% of the population dedicates themselves to small-scale agriculture. Furthermore, the Monsanto Act could have criminalized small farmers who have been growing corn and black beans for their own consumption for generations: if their seeds were crossed with patented seeds of other crops as a result of pollination or wind, they would be accused of breaking the law unless they paid Monsanto for a license. Another possible risk was that the costs of patented seeds would have caused prices to rise, worsening a food crisis for families who could not afford to purchase a seed license, and intensifying existing violent social conflicts between local Maya communities and transnational companies. The National Alliance for the Protection of Biodiversity opposed the law for being "a direct attack on knowledge, biodiversity, life, culture, the traditional rural economy, the worldview of the Peoples, and food sovereignty." On September 4, 2014, Maya communities protested before the Guatemalan Congress and the Constitutional Court, taking to the streets for 10 days, marching through the capital and demanding the law be abolished. Ultimately, the Congress decided not to review the legislation and threw it out. For more information, see Sandberg, 2014.

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Biography

Aura Lolita Chávez Ixcaquic is a K'iche' human rights activist from Guatemala and a leader in the fight against extractivist industries.

Pedro Uc Be

The Corn with Maya Skin

translated by Paul M Worley and Melissa D. Birkhofer

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"The general public is advised that beginning today a kilo of tortillas will cost 22 pesos owing to the high price of corn." This was broadcast from a car with a speaker on its roof today in my hometown as the day had, with a certain laziness, barely begun to awaken from the deep calm of a night that had fastened itself across the four corners of the community.

During the last few months, the price of tortillas has risen amidst a noisy debate among some citizens about the prices of things like gasoline, natural gas, electricity, and now tortillas; some said that thanks to the current government things have not gone up in price because they had taken charge of creating "services and products wellbeing" like the banks and gas; others countered by saying that it was better under previous governments because even if it is true that they were shameless thieves, there were more jobs, better access to medical care, more medicine in hospitals, and a few more people who cared for the land.

A third party intervenes in the discussion to state that the problem of the increase in the cost of tortillas is historic, as when Yucatán was a henequen-producing state, there were times when the people stopped making milpa and there was a subsequent shortage of corn, and so the hacendados and the government sold corn at a high cost. When the henequen industry collapsed in 1992, many farmers returned to the countryside and went back to making milpa. Even though they didn't have much money in terms of cash many families could eat well with everything they grew in the milpa, like beans, squash, *iibes*, sweet potatoes, *makal*, bananas, chiles, onions,[1] and many other things that let a farmer have sufficient sustenance, so the increase in the price of corn didn't impact the population too much.

However, the offers of well-paying jobs in the centers of development like Cancún and the Maya Riviera, advertised in the mass media, impacted the attitudes of many young Mayas who opted to leave their communities and live on the edge of misery in those places, working in a space so alien to where they are from, alien to their color, to their language, and finally, to their own hearts.

For men and women one hundred years ago, corn wasn't discussed as a matter of commerce, production, or something peripheral; corn had to do with life, not my life, but life that flourishes like water, like the land, like a cloud, like a tree, like a stone, like the wind, like rain, like color, like sound, like sleep, like

plumage, like a thorn, like heart and breath; that's how corn was thought about, that's how Maya men and women were created, that was their faith in corn. That's why when you hear what is said in the *Popol vuh* about the creation of human beings, the face of each man and each woman becomes happy, a smiling, in plenitude.

Until a few decades ago, the main individual, familial, and communal activities of the Maya centered around corn and celebrations such as the *ch'a'acháak*, the *waajilkool*, the *k'uub*, the *tíich'*, the *bankunaj*, the *nook*, the *jets'lu'um*, and the *píibilnaal yéetel áak'sa'*. All of these are celebrations of corn. If the tortilla maker had decided to announce an increase in the price of a kilo of tortilla back then, which moreover wasn't even real corn, the people would have laughed out loud as if they'd heard a salesperson trying to sell a table to a skilled carpenter. But families who had stopped making milpa and had accepted the government handouts, those young people who "were destroying" their futures, and those who they say are cultivating a life but one without corn, were put in a bad mood by today's morning announcement. These people's faces grew long with pained looks of rage, and they cried out impotently because the money they were going to purchase tortillas with was no longer enough, neither the money nor the kilo itself, so they had to redistribute the number of tortillas given to everyone at breakfast.

In the time of our grandparents, the *nojoch wíinik*, celebrations of corn weren't just part of the heart of the town, but the community fiestas as well. The food and drink were made of corn, there were tamales, and atole made with squash seeds or the new corn, arepas, and *iswaaj*, a grilled or stewed cob. In other words, the life of the community was the life of corn from beginning to end, women sprout when they are pregnant and children are born like small stalks with tender scalps caressed by the south wind that fills them with color and energy. Lamentably, this belief, these celebrations, these fiestas, this identity, has been hit in the head and the heart by the fierce hammer blows of employment in the service industry, hotels and restaurants in the tourist zones where the people dirty plates, sheets, floors, spoons, bowls, and toilets, raising many larger walls to block Indigenous Peoples from having access to this kind of relaxation. But what they do need are Indigenous hands, and many young people of the Maya community who have renounced corn in their hearts decide to go live there. Many even believe they "were" Maya, as they have surpassed this previous identity and now stuff themselves into police uniforms behind a badge with an official number, and have permission to detain and torture those who continue to be "indios." Even so, they are still not a part of the luxurious scene of the hotel zones, the shopping centers, and the bars.

If this seems to be a passive issue, in reality, it is not. Maya culture is not being lost, it is being exterminated; the Maya language isn't being lost, its speak-

ers are being murdered; the Maya jungle is not being lost, it is being deforested by industrial megaprojects, and so on. After the deforestation and ethnocide committed by the regime of henequen haciendas in Yucatán, cattle ranching became one of the principal destroyers of the Maya jungle, destroying thousands of hectares of jungle in the northeast of Yucatán including the mangroves on the coast that have become cattle ranches and that today belong to people who don't even live on the Peninsula or are even from México.

Then they introduced monoculture of hybrid and genetically modified corn, and soon after, the mega project of genetically modified soy. Through these activities they completed the despoilment of the Maya territory in which they did not just violate the jungle, plants, and animals, but Maya culture itself, as they forced the young people to withdraw to smaller spaces until they decided to immigrate to the poles of capitalist development to survive. That is how the seeds disappear, they are extinguished and they begin to become scarce. However, the Indigenous communities in southern Yucatán decided to hold a seed fair after a powerful hurricane passed through in the early 90s, destroying a large part of the Peninsula. This was a very wise move, as many farmers were able to recuperate seeds that had long been absent in their region. Thanks to this exchange they made, year after year, they managed to diversify the Maya milpa again. Sadly, this activity that has been going on for almost three decades is being monopolized by intermediary organizations, researchers, and even commercial interests, becoming a new source of plunder. The point is that corn as a Mesoamerican cereal has, in its Maya version, been suffering persecution, violence, plunder, and death, as has the corn of flesh and bone that is the Maya women and men who farm and continue to be tied to this way of living, believing, feeling, celebrating, and loving. They are suffering the same kind of persecution, violence, plunder, and death.

Today, many people who live on the Peninsula are self-proclaimed Mayas, but in reality, they are genetically modified men, the *Popol vuh* would say they are mud and wood, creatures of the political system that existed before the fourth transformation, with their children being of the fourth transformation itself. They repeat a refrain that has been derived from petroleum and implanted in their electronic brains. When they are asked why they do not work the land, why they do not make milpa, their prefabricated response is that the land no longer provides the kind of crop they hoped for, the rain no longer falls regularly, and what little they harvest isn't enough for them to survive. Well, how can the land give you a crop if it is deforested, fumigated with poison, burned, and torn apart? Moreover, the men and women have stopped being made of corn and changed their hearts for one branded by Monsanto, they no longer perform the *Ch'a'acháak*, the *waajilkool*, and other celebrations that weave together nature's form of life with men and women who recognize the lives of the *Yuumtsil* who give us hearts of corn.

But, what does it mean to believe in corn? What do men and women of corn think and feel? Some brothers and sisters in a community in southern Yucatán did

an exercise, a brief reflection on this topic almost three decades ago; according to this *tsikbal*: Economically, the story of the men and women of corn is based in being and not individually possessing or accumulating; politically, it seeks to build a community tapestry; spiritually, one feels a part of a family whose last name is "Life," which blooms in the nature that can be seen as well as that which is unseen, like the wind or the darkness where the ancestors live.

Economically, what the men and women of corn demand (what they are asking for or seek) is to organize their labor; politically, they want deep, structural change for the benefit of all; spiritually, they ask for almost nothing, but always offer food to the *Yuumtsil* who provides for the community, always looking for the truth.

Economically, politically, and spiritually, the actions of the man and woman of corn are the being of the male and female creator, consistent with building integral transformative communal alternatives in opposition to the colonialist, individualist, egoist system.

Economically and politically, the intimate attitudes or disposition of the men and women of corn consist of working to serve for the benefit of their family, their community, and humanity (the common good). Politically, they are dreamers of a diverse world. Spiritually, they are guided by honor, love, justice, liberty, solidarity, and service. They dialogue, propose, announce, denounce, forgive, and learn to learn.

Economically, the responsibilities or obligations of the man and woman of corn consist of promoting processes or new ways. Politically, they lead by obeying. Spiritually, they serve the community. Economically and politically, the commitments of the man and woman of corn consist of offering up words from the heart. Spiritually, they are permanently free (autonomous), committed to cultivating a full and dignified life for everyone and everything.

Politically, when holding power, the man and woman of corn always look for the needs of the common good and only use it when the community demands it; spiritually, they understand power as service, it is voluntary (free) and can be renounced, it gives space to (respects) everyone, it cannot be restrained, it knows how to negotiate, it is rebellious and loyal.

Economically, the imaginative, forward-thinking, propositional capacities of the man and woman of corn are continual, creating new labor opportunities with the available resources in their territory, like the trades and the arts in their community. Politically, they are continual, opening up new awareness. Spiritually, they receive the light of Yuumtsil through the Pueblo and share it with the community.

Economically and politically, the historical memory of the man and woman of corn consists of knowing their history well and using it to better the life of the community. Spiritually, they know their beliefs well, promote their authentic identity, and defend it through the political use of power and against the cloning of

folklore and exoticism.

Economically, the foremost wish of the man and woman of corn is everything for everyone. Politically, it is the common good, that is, a new society where everyone has a dignified, full life. Spiritually, they enjoy the land and the territorialization of life.

Through this reflection we see that losing corn, that is, letting others wrench corn from us, is the same as losing or letting others wrench from us our way of thinking, it means losing our heart, it means losing our identity before the men of mud and wood who have become political instruments used to promote megaprojects that appropriate Maya territory to destroy it by polluting the water and the air, killing our territory because it is in the interests of political and economic power. But we men and women of corn are interested in life, our own health and that of our territory, so that our children have a chance to sprout, so their soft hair can play with the wind, with the sunlight and the misty rain of the coming millennia.

Notes

[1] Iibes are a kind of bean; makal is an edible tuber grown in Yucatán.

Biography

Pedro Uc Be was born in 1963 in the municipality of Buctzotz, Yucatán. He is a Maya Indigenous person, the child of monolingual Maya farmers. He is a founding member of the Assembly of Defends of Maya Land, Múuch Xíimbal. He writes in Maya, his mother tongue, for which he has won awards for his work that straddles the boundaries between story and poetry. He has a degree in Educational Media from the Department of Social Sciences at the Normal Superior in Campeche. At present he is a professor of Creative Writing in Maya Language at the State Center for Beaux Artes in Mérida, Yucatán.

Pedro Uc Be

Foundation of the Maya Word

translated by Paul M Worley and Melissa D. Birkhofer

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During the last few years in the lands of Indigenous Peoples, denouncements of racism, marginalization, and disdain towards descendants of the First Peoples have sprouted like flowers. From the corners and even the center of this continent we demand the acknowledgment of our rights as Indigenous Peoples: being guardians of our territories, to speak and be spoken to in our Maya language at least in schools, government offices, court hearings, and hospitals; that is, the right for our language to come out of hiding and recover its space in the light. After 27 years in this dreamed-of garden, we are followed by the challenging reality that has not ended, as our territory is being invaded and our maternal language, which was left to us by our grandparents as they were entrusted by the *Yuumo'ob* with it, has been gravely profaned.

The jungle is the house of the *Yuumtsilo'ob*. You can perceive some during the day and hear others during the night. With a little luck, you can see them. They take turns accompanying the men and women who live with them under the shade of the *noj k'áax* or high jungle. There, we Maya learn the names of the trees and plants and discover their medicinal properties.

The birds are the *piixan* of our grandparents. They teach us the Maya language with their songs or wailing, they let us name the colors of their plumage, and show us the love they show each other when they build a nest and lay eggs together, eventually seeing their offspring achieve flight into the hands of *Yuum K'áax*, who waits for them with its arms made of *kopo'*, of *chukum*, of *tsalam*, of *ja'abin*, of *chakte'*, of *chéechem*, among other branches. They feed them with their *k'úumche'*, *wayúum*, *tsakam*, *xnúumts'uutsuy*, *waya'te'*, *ya'*, *jmak'*, and other fruits.

The animals are the strength of the *Yuumo'ob*. They teach us to be precise in our Maya language through their great fiesta, like the *báaxal kéej*, the military like *káaxil k'éek'en*, and the *kitam*, the *áakam* of the *ayim*, the hidden *jaaleb*, the construction of our house that appears like the *baj*, the patience of the *tsáab kaan*, the nobility of the *weech*, the protection of the *kok áak*, and the wisdom of the *ka' koj*.

The first voice or melody of our language is in the *Yuum K'áax*, under his shade, in his nests, in his caves, in his waters, in his dry leaves, in his colors, in his fruits, in his stones, in his dust, in every animal that walks in the jungle and in every bird that sings it like the *k'aay kuuts*. There is the first word; there is the

strength of our Maya language, that's where our Maya footsteps, our Maya gaze, and our heart are directed if we have ever dreamed of curing our wounds. If we delay, modernity could confuse a wind turbine with the great *piich*, the way people who pretend to speak the Maya language desperately look for a name for solar panel in Maya in the name of language revitalization.

The milpa, the altar of the *Yuumtsil*, the school of the language of the young Maya boy and girl, is also the space where they learn math through the *jolche'* and the *p'isk'áax*, adding the *ts'áak* to create the units of the *yáalk'an* and mark them with the *xu'uk'*.

Children discover fractions through the *súulub* which turns the milpa into the geometric figure of a circle, square, rectangle, or triangle. They recognize that the jungle has a *Yuumtsil* whom you ask for forgiveness for chopping down trees and that the earth, sun, wind, and rain have given them life and their grandeur.

The milpa is the first contact they have with the *Yuumtsilo'ob* who receive a *joma'* of *sakab* so that men and women can come together to prepare the earth to produce food.

Children discover how *Yuum K'iin* is one of the beings who helps them to make milpa when he dries out all of the felled trees. They also find themselves in the milpa with *Yuum K'áak'* who devours the *che'kool*.

They know the variety and quantity of seeds that the earth holds in its lap which has been fertilized by *Yuum Cháak* in the first few days of May. That's how they can confidently name in their own language that they have been taught in their school the stages in the growth cycle of corn, from *púuts'*, *bult'u'ulil*, *jumpool píixil*, *bulchuunche'il*, *jumtseemil*, *jumbulaj*, *táan u wáach'al u yi'ij*, *táan u p'o'ochajal*, *sakpak'e'en*, *chakpak'e'en*, to *ek'jute'en* and *k'áants'ile'en*.

Being educated in this area is to learn the Maya language, to know its soul, it's taking the primordial seed, it is what prevents us from confusing the milpa with an eco-tourist attraction. Revitalizing the language does not consist of using the sounds of the Maya language to come up with a name for a wind turbine. It's returning to the milpa for those who have grown distant from it, it's returning to our culture which is the storehouse of our word.

The rites are the celebration of the word, the most powerful word that the *aj Meen* pronounces only when he is prostrate before the offering which patiently waits to be accepted by the *Yuumtsilo'ob*, those who guard the colors that paint the trees, the feathers, the skin of the *báalam*, the stones, and the flowers.

The *sujuyt'aan* or original word, onomatopoeia, is that which is suitable for *Yuum iik'* and *Yuum Cháak*, it is the invitation to build a point of connection between flesh and breath, between the *Yuumtsil* and the *lu'umkaab*, it is a word that is not a word but a feeling, a commitment, a sung *mokt'aan*, a prayed, sobbed, babbled, stuttered *xmukult'aan*.

Suuyt'aan or word whirlwind is the word the circular movement of the word as it travels, embracing what it finds in its path like an offering, the emotions, colors, commitments, the sincerity found on a single face, not the *j ka'p'éel ich*. It is the word that emerges from our truth.

Rites are the *ch'il* of our sacred word, the communal word that implicates us with the Maya *meyajtsil*. However, the white shirts and red belts worn by adulterous intellects confuse revitalization with touristic commercialization, they have profaned our word with their false fire in the name of authority. Our hearing, our breathing, our seeing and our feeling would not be allied with showbusiness, with the *j ka'p'éel* ich and its synthetic firewood blessing solar and wind farms that destroy *Yuum K'áax*, enslaving *Yuum Iik* and *Yuum K'iin*.

Our grandparents are the great trees, the guardians of memory that protect the word born of water, the wind, colors, solidity, form, resin, the flower. They are *nukuch chuun che'ob*, *nukuch béeko'ob*, *nukuch xchu'umo'ob*, *nukuch xjúumch'íich'ob*, they are *yuum k'áax*, house and home of the *tsáabkan*, of the *k'óok'ob* and the *kalam* but also of the *xi'ipalkaan* or *x-ek'uneil*.

At this time, when a *nool* dies, a territory is lost and when the monsters with blades devastate the jungle, an *Ak'abal* dies. The *Xya'axche'* is the grandmother who has been satanized by a modern racism, who goes out to save those colonized by the strange word, she who plays with her grandchildren with her flying *piits'*, carrying the ancient word to plant it secretly in the light of *Yuum K'iin* in the farm of the *ts'uul*.

The territory is not a polygon, it is not a biocultural landscape, it is not a parcel, it is not an ejido.[1] The territory is memory that dances in the jungle, made word by our ancestors, it can be heard in the heart of *Yuum K'áax*, in the *jéebkal* of the *yuuk*, in the *xóob* of the *noom*, in the *áakam* of the *ayim* and in the *ts'íikil* of the *chakmo'ol*. To revitalize the Maya language is to enter the *áaktunsajkab* and take a seat before our grandmother and grandfather to weave the word with them. That's how the recovery of our territory will be possible.

Notes

[1] Translators' Note: In México, an ejido is communal land held by a community and farmed by the community's members.

Mikeas Sanchez
"Gift" and "Feast"

translated by Wendy Call

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Wenhti'

Sapa' te' mäja'ju'ki,
syukpa' te' najs,
yaku'ajkyajpa mäjarampä syaja'ram
sirijtpa käsi'anhkas, syi'ukyajpasenh'omote' ona'ram
Syi'asa'ajkuy mäjapäre
tekoroya kasäjpa myojkpa
yä' nasakopajk.

Sapa' te pät, mayapa',
nhtyi'a'tzyiä'pya yijtkuy, ja' nyiä' irä'anhkä saja',
maka'ankä' ya'e' syi'asa'ajkuy, maka'ankä atzyi'pä'aje'.
Te' wäpä' wenhti' nhtä nhkomi'koroya
ju'kiste nhkyonukskuy.
Te' wäpä' wenhti' nhtä' nhkomi'koroya.
pujtpa' ji' wyewenek' te' pät.

Ofrenda

Despierta el zopilote rey
y besa la tierra, extiende sus formidables alas
y vuela hasta bailar con las nubes.
Su mayor encanto
es su maestría
para limpiar el mundo.

Despierta el hombre y sufre,
maldice por haber nacido sin alas
y con una belleza tan fugaz.

No hay mejor ofrenda para los dioses
que la reverencia del zopilote.
No hay mejor ofrenda para los dioses
que el silencio del hombre.

Gift

The vulture king wakes up
and kisses the earth, stretches his impressive wings
and flies until he dances with the clouds.
His greatest gift
is his mastery
in cleaning the earth.

Humans wake up and suffer,
cursing for having been born wingless
and with such ephemeral beauty.

There is no greater gift to the gods
than the vulture's reverence.
There is no greater gift to the gods
than human silence.

Te' meke

Ji' nhkiänatzä'yoyepä' papynyi'omo'is
syi'nawajku nhwyt'
tese' nhki'omusku'päjki'aju sone' tzame'ram
jiksekanhte myatyajupä te' mä'ä'pät teserike te' tuj'pät,
kora'ayajpa' ne' myanyi'aju'ankä yom'nhtzame'ram
sutu' nyi'ujkya'ä te' tzame'ram
wäkä' yajk' wyruya'ä jojpajk'omoram,
tzajp'omoram,
matza'omoram,
kotzäjk'omoram,
tzu'omoram teserike jama'omoram
tese' mytyi'aju äj' nhtzätzä' tzeke'ram
äj' nhtzätzä' tompijtz'tam
teis'tam nyi'etyaju kyowa'ram, syusku'tyam
jiksekante te' sawa'pät te' mä'ä'pät
poksyajupä wäkä' nhkyämanäya'ä
te' sasapyä' wane' pujtupä jiksekpä' tzayi'omo.

El festin

La muchacha subversiva que soy
rompió las amarras
y cayó con furia sobre cada palabra prohibida.
Entonces vinieron los dioses del trueno y de la lluvia
alegando la imprudencia de lo femenino,
quisieron capturar las palabras
y regresarlas de nuevo a los ríos
a los cielos
a las estrellas
a los volcanes
a la noche y al día,
pero vinieron también las hermanas tortugas
y las hermanas tuzas
con sus instrumentos de percusión y de viento,
entonces los dioses de la lluvia y el trueno
se sentaron a escuchar
la hermosa sonata que salió aquella tarde.

Feast

The subversive young woman I am
broke barriers
and fell furiously on every forbidden word.
Then the rain and thunder gods showed up
irritated by such feminine recklessness,
tried to trap my words
and return them to the rivers
to the skies
to the stars
to the volcanoes
to night and day,
but our sisters the turtles and gophers
also showed up with their flutes and drums
and so the rain and thunder gods
sat down to enjoy
the sweet sonata unleashed that afternoon.

Biography

Mikeas Sanchez is an Indigenous Zoque poet, translator, educator, radio producer, and activist in Ajway, Chiapas, Mexico. She holds a master's degree from the University of Barcelona and has published seven books of poetry. Her first English-language collection, co-translated by Wendy Call and Shook, was published by Milkweed in 2024, in a trilingual edition.