

Introduction

LEILA GÓMEZ

In addressing Indigenous American languages in a transhemispheric context, this issue of *ELN* opens up conversations across disciplines and regions of the Americas. Failure to cross the North-South boundary constitutes a long-standing geographic blind spot in the field of Indigenous studies, one that this special issue encourages scholars to examine meaningfully. This issue brings together fruitful comparisons of theoretical frameworks and case studies across regions to find commonalities and specificities that shed light on hemispheric Indigenous studies in North and South America today.

This special issue is devoted to studying narratives of creation and territorial origin as they are told and transmitted in Indigenous languages and conflictive settings of the Americas. This emphasis on tribal language, long the target of colonial policies of eradication, constitutes the editor's endeavor to engage Linda Tuhiwai Smith's framework of "decolonizing methodologies": the central anticolonial strategies for which Smith advocates are the revitalization and revaluation of Indigenous languages, not merely for linguistic purposes but also because these languages are vehicles of non-Western worldviews and forms of knowledge for epistemological and political purposes.¹ For this reason, this special issue includes studies across the broader sweep of the Americas with a focus on interdisciplinary work (anthropology, film studies, literature, linguistics, and so on) and on the theme of origin and territory narratives (i.e., the Theft of the Sun, Fallen Star, Isko Bird, and others) that often share transhemispheric commonalities and have the capacity to provide narratological, cosmological, and mythopoetic bases for transgeographic, transhistorical, and transdisciplinary discursive analyses.

This issue also invokes Emil Keme's proposal of Abiyala as a transhemispheric Indigenous bridge. This category could "potentially lead us to develop political alliances in the formation of a new Indigenous and non-Indigenous historical bloc that opposes Eurocentric concepts and projects like 'Latin America,' 'Latinity,' or 'Americas,' as well as extractive economies based on capitalism and socialism at national, continental, and intercontinental levels."²

Following Aníbal Quijano's critique of the coloniality of power as the system that imposed the devaluing of certain cultural knowledge, including that of Native Americans, to enforce Western racial, cultural, and male superiority, this issue

investigates Indigenous narratives of the hemisphere depicting visions of territorial origin that claim the land as their own.³ Symbolic territory and land reclamation are the focus of much Indigenous activism in the Americas. This issue explores Native narratives that provide legitimacy and a foundation for this political practice and, at the same time, finds ways in which they are spread continentally in specific contexts and beyond national histories. Furthermore, through these narratives this issue explores a system of knowledge that contradicts discourses of the conquest of empire and modern nations, discourses imposed by the coloniality of power; moreover, these discursive formations are authored by settler colonialism, a process-based structure that Patrick Wolfe informs us insists on “the elimination of the Native,”⁴ an observation with particular prescience in the context of Latin America and a pivot around which *Latinidad* is often leveraged, as Keme argues. Specifically, Keme contends that *Latinidad* must be removed from scholarly discussions to allow the indigene, and presumably Indigenous thought, to emerge in Latinx contexts. Our contributors’ reliance on language as a methodology seeks to disrupt and intervene in the totalizing force of *Latinity* in the cultural imaginary and illustrate the creation of indigenx models in Central and South American Indigenous studies as defined by Penelope Kelsey.⁵ Kelsey’s concept of indigenx praxis gestures to the choices that Latinx/Chicanx scholars must make about how to engage indigeneity within Latin American and Chicanx texts and cultural production. Specifically, indigenx theory implies the structures of analysis a scholar crafts that may address these intersections specifically and in a thoroughgoing way, situate oneself along the borders of these two streams of identity, or amplify the presence and epistemologies of one in preference to the others. Indigenx methodologies always acknowledge the presence of Indigenous peoples and Indigenous ancestry, but whether and how those theoretical practices are engaged is a matter of informed choice, of strategic maneuvering, and of an awareness of the implications of the choice to identify cultural expressions as Latinx or Indigenous.

This issue comparatively studies narratives of territory and creation of Native communities that were and are today constantly displaced and seeks to understand the diasporic meaning of these narratives in the context of the struggle for land. As LeAnne Howe writes in “Tribalography”: “Native stories are power. They create people. They author tribes. America is a tribal creation story. Creation stories, as numerous as Indian tribes, gave birth to our people. It is with absolute certainty that I tell you now—our stories also created the immigrants who landed on our shores.”⁶ Thus “Native people created narratives that were histories and stories with the power to transform,” and the contributors in this special issue analyze the power of these stories.⁷

Although all the authors in this special issue engage—to a different extent—in discussions around all the above-mentioned problematics in the Indigenous studies of Abiyala, they are divided into groups conforming to the main topics they address: land and language.

The Land Question

In 1928, in his influential essay “The Question of the Land,” José Carlos Mariátegui clarified for his fellow Peruvians as well as Latin Americans in general that “the

problem of the Indian” is not their culture, their language, or their beliefs—it is their land itself.⁸ Although his essay additionally addresses the problems resulting from the Peruvian bourgeoisie’s flawed mechanisms of land exploitation, Mariátegui inaugurated a way of thinking about a situation that has persisted since the conquest and colonization of the Abiyala peoples: the dispossession, forced displacement, and subsequent criminalization and marginalization of the original inhabitants and their descendants. Thus the articles in this group study narratives of origin or belonging that address the relationships of different Indigenous peoples of the Abiyala to their land. In this sense these narratives function as foundational tales that configure not only social and cultural spaces but also their intricate relationship with their surroundings and the natural world. The authors included in this group do so by approaching diverse aspects of this relationship: they explore linguistic loss and recovery, ancestral memory, land expropriation, and the restitution of human remains, as well as political and economic struggles against the colonial legacy of national states and new imperial oppression.

This critical lens foregrounds these narratives of origin as intimately linked to what Winona LaDuke has termed “struggles for the land,” which, in Latin America, have expanded over centuries and in alliance with non-Indigenous popular sectors, similarly “deterritorialized” or marginalized struggles in which Indigenous peoples were in conflict with not only the republican states but also industrial expropriation.⁹ These narratives of origin in connection with territory are a fundamental part of the activism that today occupies the Indigenous struggle.

In “The Chamorro Creation Story, Guam Land Struggles, and Contemporary Poetry,” Craig Santos Perez explores how narratives of Chamorro creation have historically performed as a source of Indigenous values and ethics until settlers attempted to supplant them during the colonization of Guam’s land and waters. He then recounts the history of Guam’s occupation and resistance to militarization of the Mariana Islands and examines recent efforts to reclaim the Chamorro creation story as a vehicle for cultural revitalization. Specifically, he analyzes Jay Baza Pascua’s “Chachaláni,” a Chamorro-language chant-poem, which has been made into a film. Perez’s translation and close reading of the poem illustrates how Baza not only subverts Christian narratives of creation but also expresses Chamorro beliefs and values as central to the ecological health of the land and people.

The Abenaki poet Cheryl Savageau’s essay “Listening to the Land” contemplates Abenaki Territory of the Dawn Land through the lens of geography and the story of Ktsi Amiskw (Beaver). Savageau frames the Abenaki creation story as a “conversation” among various Abenaki writers, including the historian Lisa Brooks, the anthropologist Marge Bruchac, and her, establishing how the land carries knowledges that “speaks” and asserting that Abenaki people hold a responsibility to be present, listen, and help recover those stories. She then exemplifies this process by recounting the story of Ktsi Amiskw and providing specific examples of where one can find particular geographic features that correspond to this story’s record of the land’s formation.

In “Borders Be Damned!” Geary Hobson examines the origins of the Native Writers’ Circle of the Americas and its associated Returning the Gift conference and places it in the longer history of border-crossing narratives from 1492 to the

present. Pointing to examples like Chief Clinton Rickard and *Returning the Gift's* own extensive experience in bridging the US-Canadian border and bringing First Nations and Native American authors together, Hobson issues a call for an ongoing effort among Indigenous authors to traverse colonial boundaries throughout North and South America. He models the gains of such Indigenous collaboration by offering a bibliography of Indigenous authors from throughout the Américas, Arctic region, and Sámi land.

In "Restitution of Human Remains and Landscape Resignification: The Case of Chapal-có Hill (La Pampa, Argentina) and the Rankülche Nation," Rafael Pedro Curtoni, Guillermo Heider, María Gabriela Chaparro, and Ángel T. Tuninetti explore the restitution process of human remains in twenty-first-century Argentina in relation to the appearance of new actors, the reconfiguration of public policies, and various academic approaches to land restitution and resignification. The authors point out that in the case studies involving the Rankülche Nation, there was a clear resignification of territory after the discovery of ancestral remains in the region. The subsequent restitution process deepened the roots of the Rankülche people in this territory, which have long been an object of dispute in modern Argentina.

Javier Alonso Muñoz-Díaz's "Indigenous-Inspired Authorial Figures and Networks of Rural-Urban Migrants in *The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below* (1971), by José María Arguedas," discusses the representation of Indigenous-inspired authorial figures in Arguedas's novel about the highland rural migrants in the coastal city of Chimbote, Peru. A bicultural and bilingual writer (Quechua and Spanish), Arguedas explores the complexity of the experience of Andean contemporary migration and how narratives of origin and mythical characters are reconfigured in urban settings. The Quechua population of Chimbote evinces an incredible capability to create networks of rural-urban migrants that speak to the vitality of their narratives of origins and their cultural practices.

Alexandre Belmonte's article "The Past Embedded in Everyday Life: The Meseta del Collao as an Illustrative Case" describes how, to attain financial success, people in the Andes look to the assistance of *yatiris* (symbolic miniatures found in local markets), which were considered heretical and therefore were severely repressed by Spanish priests in the colonial period but which constitute part of an important tradition in myth and rituals today. Belmonte's article highlights the importance of the *yatiris* in a practice that connects past and present in Andean culture and ties people to the social space they inhabit.

Leila Gómez's article "Narrative of Origin and Utopia in Lucrecia Martel's *New Argirópolis*" analyzes how both Domingo F. Sarmiento's essay *Argirópolis* and Martel's film address the question of landownership and river navigation in Argentina. In Martel's *New Argirópolis* in particular, an eight-minute film that presents a multilingual plot and multilingual characters, the Qom people's fight for their land is placed in the sphere of science fiction and foundational narrative. The inability of Argentine officials to understand Indigenous languages leads to their insurrectional plans of land recovery. Martel's story is that of the land question itself, precisely what Mariátegui in 1928 asserted to be "the problem of the Indian." In her

film Martel recovers the history of over five centuries of colonization that continued with the Argentine nation and persists today.

Language and Epistemologies

The careful application of language-based methodologies in Indigenous studies acts as an irreplaceable ameliorative for addressing the absences of Native thought in the academy throughout the Americas. One could argue that only through the careful study of language can scholars identify and outline the parameters of Indigenous epistemology; further, these languages serve as generative loci of Indigenous thought and theory in ways in which few other sources (e.g., story, land) are capable. In Native American and Indigenous studies (NAIS), a new generation of Indigenous linguists is emerging (e.g., Jenny Davis, Margaret Noodin, Frederick White) whose scholarship exerts pressure on how linguists engage with Native peoples and languages. Rather than limit its scope to the discipline of linguistics, this special issue endeavors to illustrate the *transdisciplinary* gains made possible by applying knowledges and methods based in Indigenous languages to environmental studies, film, history, literature, religious studies, and NAIS texts. The issue works to expand the scope of the journal itself by engaging scholars with expertise across a range of Anglophone and Hispanophone contexts and regions. The essays in this section are meant to provide models for understanding how Indigenous languages refuse confinement to the territory of linguistics and instead far exceed the boundaries established by the Western academy and insist that we engage with them on their own terms, in their own ways, and across a range of academic fields.

Indigenous languages are arguably the catalyst that can make indigenizing the academy a challenge, which Devon Mihesuah, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Robert Warrior, and many others have written about. However, this movement toward a new academy can happen only when Indigenous studies scholars hold themselves responsible for studying the languages of the peoples whose cultural, history, literature, and religions they research and write about. This shift begins as simply as no longer issuing master's and doctoral degrees to candidates who do not speak an Indigenous language; this is notably a simple change, but it is one that would require many institutions to change the nature of graduate study. Those of us in the previous generation need to acknowledge this oversight in our own training and find the resources to study Indigenous languages germane to our area of expertise. For some, this adaptation means convincing our institutions to commit to offering courses in languages indigenous to the territory in which they are located; in other cases, pursuing online classes is sometimes the best way to appropriately expand our knowledge base. By taking these courses ourselves, we model for our graduate students the approaches they need to take to perform responsible—and thorough—scholarship.

The essays in this group evince a heartfelt appreciation for what Indigenous languages can teach us and how their closer examination reveals worlds of knowledge that would otherwise remain hidden. In essence, by reclaiming the epistemologies housed in languages in the service of Indigenous studies scholarship, these essays work to undo damage and loss caused by colonial education and showcase the

revelatory insights made possible by reading texts and cultural expressions through the lens of language. Ultimately, by using language-based approaches to Indigenous hemispheric narratives, these scholars engage and model *tribal theory* as a method derived from Indigenous language and worldview, and they leave a body of work that will stand for generations of Indigenous studies scholars to follow and expand on.

Amber Meadow Adams's "Yotsi'tishon and the Language of the Seed in the Haudenosaunee Story of Earth's Creation" invites us to consider the creation story as recounted by John Arthur Gibson (Onondaga) to the ethnologist J. N. B. Hewitt (Tuscarora) in 1888, the longest extant version of Iroquois creation and easily the richest in ethnobotanical knowledge. Couching her analysis in an exhaustive knowledge of the extant print versions of Haudenosaunee origins, Adams builds an insightful linguistically based argument for why we should read language surrounding Sky Woman through the lens of seeds and generation and focus on the sequential emergence of plant species of the Carolinian biome in both the Hewitt-Gibson and Dayodekane Seth Newhouse's versions as a principal interpretive frame for the narrative. Adams uses Kanien'keha concepts such as *yoti'nikò:n:ra* (the collective's "mind," or thought, will, and decision), *'nihstenh* (to mother someone), and *ka'shatstenhsera* (power, potential) to aptly demonstrate how language performs as a necessary key to understanding many early ethnological texts.

In "A Central Sierra Miwok Origins Story: The Theft of the Sun," Andrew Cowell turns our attention to a Sierra Miwok creation story, "Coyote Steals the Sun." Examining the story in the original language, Cowell's line-by-line translation functions as a centralizing methodology in his "ethnopoetical" reading of Lena Cox's recounting of the narrative to the non-Native linguist Lucy Freeland in the 1930s. Cowell's attention to word, imagery, and structure highlight how Cox's version confirms Sierra Miwok knowledge of their origins in the Great Basin and their arrival in the California woodland as simultaneous with the arrival of the Sun.

Christopher Vecsey takes readers into early contact between Native Americans and missionaries in "American Indians Encounter the Bible: Reception, Resistance, and Reinterpretation" and examines how Indigenous peoples understood and deployed the Christian Bible within their own discursive and rhetorical frames regardless of the intended meaning of the non-Natives disseminating it. While principles of the Doctrine of Discovery envision Indigenous peoples of the Americas as without writing, culture, or civilization, Vecsey details how early explorers and missionaries confronted the presence of pictography and various forms of Native record keeping (such as birchbark scrolls, wampum) and how Native peoples often used the Bible for their own purposes and not those intended by their would-be evangelists.

Sarah Hernandez's essay "Translating and Retranslating 'Fallen Star': An *Ohų'kakq* Tale" focuses on a Dakota creation story that literary critics have ignored. Hernandez considers both Stephen Riggs and Ella Deloria's renditions of this story. Hernandez contends that Deloria's English-language version of Fallen Star decolonizes the Dakota storytelling tradition, asserting the primacy of Dakota language, literature, and lifeways through the medium of print culture.

In “Tales of (De)colonization in the Peruvian Amazon: The Case of the Iskonawa,” José Antonio Mazzotti presents some of the results of a long-term research project on the Iskonawa, one of the endangered communities in the Peruvian Amazon. Since 2010 Mazzotti and a team of researchers have been collecting Iskonawa oral tradition. In this article he analyzes two narratives of origin and survival that explain the Iskonawa’s relationship with nature and its fundamental role in shaping their social rules and cultural practices. Their alternative views of nature challenge the Western, neoliberal approach to the Amazonian Basin that has brought deforestation, contamination, crime, and drug trafficking. The article also traces the way these narratives of origin have been incorporated into the literature of decolonial Peruvian writers such as Arguedas and César Calvo.

Enrique Bernales Albites’s “Indigenous Narratives of Creation and Origin in *Embrace of the Serpent*, by Ciro Guerra” explores how narratives on the curative power of plants such as Ayahuasca are valuable for understanding Indigenous rationality in relation to Western science and how the knowledge of these plants enriches the communities and histories of Indigenous cultures of the Amazon. The same can be said for the soundscapes in Guerra’s film, which shows both the interaction of Indigenous and non-Indigenous languages in the contact zone of the Amazon and the conflictive power-knowledge relationship among those who are multilingual: diverse groups of Indigenous people, priests, anthropologists, and businesspeople and their conflictive perceptions and uses of natural resources.

In “World(build)ing in Mohawk- and Seneca-Language Films,” Penelope Kelsey examines recent Indigenous-language films produced in Hodínöhšö:ni:h languages, focusing on environmental and ethical concerns within digital media. Her essay illustrates how these films articulate “ecologies of expression,” as defined by Zayin Cabot, which simultaneously regard all epistemologies as equal *and* seek to confirm Iroquois conceptions of the natural world. Through these filmmakers’ focus on Iroquois languages in the film, Kelsey reads their works as expressive of a collective agency that reflects and extends Cabot’s theorization of Indigenous ontologies.

This special issue, in sum, links narratives of creation/origin to land struggle from transdisciplinary and hemispheric perspectives and Native people’s narratives of their kinship and responsibilities to the land. The issue includes contributions on origins and diaspora, land reclamation and Indigenous activism, territorial struggle and environmentalism, Indigenous resistance to state and neoliberal policies of land expropriation, alliances between academic and Indigenous knowledges and activisms, non-Western epistemologies and territory, and films on land claims and Indigenous languages and epistemes.

LEILA GÓMEZ is associate professor of Spanish and director of the Latin American Studies Center at the University of Colorado Boulder. Among her books are *Iluminados y tráfugos: Relatos de viajeros y ficciones fundacionales en Argentina, Paraguay y Perú* (2009) and the edited collection *Darwin in Argentina (Major Texts, 1845–1909)* (2011). She is also coeditor of *Entre Borges y Conrad: Estética y territorio en W. H. Hudson* (2012) and *Teaching Gender*

through *Latin American, Spanish, and Latino Literature and Culture* (2015). Gómez is writing a book about the mythical image of Mexico in travel writing of the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries. For this book project she was awarded the Alexander von Humboldt Fellowship for Advanced Researchers in Germany.

Notes

- 1 Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.
- 2 Keme and Coon, "For Abiyala to Live," 42.
- 3 Quijano, "Colonialidad del poder."
- 4 Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism."
- 5 *Indigenx* here is used to refer to Indigenous studies models applied in Latin American and Chicana/o/x contexts. The *x* invokes the cross-currents of Latinity and indigeneity that inform these methods and also acknowledge the intersection that *must* be navigated—whether removed, as Keme suggests; obviated temporarily; or delved into and meditated on as part of one's theoretical praxis.
- 6 Howe, "Tribalography," 118.
- 7 Howe, "Tribalography," 118.
- 8 Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretative Essays of Peruvian Reality*.
- 9 LaDuke, *All Our Relations*.

Works Cited

- Howe, LeAnne. "Tribalography: The Power of Native Stories." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 14, no. 1 (1999): 117–25.
- Keme, Emil, and Adam Coon. "For Abiyala to Live, the Americas Must Die: Toward a Transhemispheric Indigeneity." *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 5, no. 1 (2018): 42–68.
- LaDuke, Winona. *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*. Chicago: Haymarket, 2016.
- Mariátegui, José Carlos. *Seven Interpretative Essays of Peruvian Reality*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971.
- Mohawk, John. *Thinking in Indian: A John Mohawk Reader*, edited by Jose Barreiro. Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2010.
- Quijano, Aníbal. "Colonialidad del poder: Eurocentrismo y América Latina." In *Cuestiones y horizontes: De la dependencia histórico-estructural a la colonialidad/descolonialidad del poder*, 201–46. Buenos Aires: CLACSO, 2014.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed, 2012.
- Wolfe, Patrick. "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native." *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409.