

## Conversation with Aura Cumes on Maya epistemology, postcolonial theory and the struggle for identity

Aura Cumes - María Iñigo

*Kaqchikel Maya Resarcher from Guatemala - Universidad Oberta de Catalunya, grado de Artes*

Translated by Lola García Abarca

The work and perspective of Aura Cumes were, for me, important in understanding the Maya context and its issues in my research on art and indigeneity in Guatemala. I immediately thought that this issue encompassed another: the limitations of the methods used in Western thought in examining the very things that have been rejected by these methods themselves. What was most inspiring when studying Guatemala was the realisation that much of the broader theories on Indigenous cosmovisions and animism exist at the local level but yet do not borrow from French structuralist thought (as in the case of Viveiros de Castro's *Cannibal Metaphysics*). Given the fact that half of the population of Guatemala is Indigenous and the country has Indigenous Universities, I believe we have seen sufficient examples of dialogue between epistemologies and their impossibilities and frictions enabling us to explore global issues – issues faced by European museums and their colonial collections.

Aura Cumes, a Kaqchikel Maya (from Guatemala) is a thinker, author and activist who holds a PhD in Anthropology from CIESAS Mexico (2014). In 2004 she co-lead a vast project entitled *Mayanización de la vida cotidiana* (Mayanisation of daily life) which "referred (to the process) of accepting one's self-identification as a Maya, with the identity and ideology this entails, among Indigenous peoples. But it could also refer to transformations that arise in the discourse, without regard to who has emitted the discourse and regardless of whether identity is affected or not: as in, for example, the 'Mayanisation of government discourse'".<sup>1</sup> I thought it was quite interesting that in recent years we have seen the publication of Clifford's *Returns: Becoming Indigenous* (2013) which precisely explores the international institutionalisation of indigenous identity and how this has affected indigenous movements. It seemed to me that there was a debt to be paid for the use of concepts such as Mayanisation, indigenisation, etc. In this interview with Aura Cumes I try to explore the possibility of transferring learning and tools from the struggles and cosmovisions of the Maya to our own work context and debates on coloniality, identity, epistemodiversity and other issues.

**María Iñigo Clavo:** Until now we've had a white/Western postcolonial theory that has allowed us to create an appropriate context for promoting new interlocutions and other postcolonial theories that we could call "non-white" or non-Western. These are very significant times as they offer an opportunity for a decolonial epistemological turn. But these interlocutions are often rejected. What are the demands made by this situation upon the Western intellectual community which for centuries has operated from a position of privilege? <sup>2</sup>

**Aura Cumes:** What is most dangerous about "white/Western postcolonial" theory as you have called it (which can also be referred to as decolonial, or anti-colonial) is that Indigenous and black struggles are not recognised, and they think that they have discovered that the colonial issue is a modern problem, that is, one that has existed without interruption. This happens when thinkers write from a position of privilege, I guess that in their countries they were members of the creole or mestizo privileged elites, but when they went north they were subjected to conditions of "racial" subordination as Latin Americans, for example, and I believe this led them to think that in Latin America the colonial problem was not a thing of the past but actually a contemporary issue, as our ancestors have claimed, as have their grandsons and granddaughters, and their sons and daughters. As we have indicated here, anti-colonial and decolonial struggles have existed ever since Columbus and Pedro de Alvarado set foot on our lands. However, we cannot rid ourselves of this racialisation of knowledge and its equally racialised consumption that easily. The words and the thoughts of white and mestizo postcolonial, anti-colonial and decolonial thinkers have been expressed in a context of colonial hegemony where they hold and have been granted authority over Indigenous men and women. Therefore, their current intellectual production subordinates or subalternises our own struggles, thinking and words, but not because they are calling for this alone, but because this authority has been granted to them as I have said earlier. As a result of all this, they seem uninterested in entering into dialogue with us, and what's more, want to continue educating us. In Guatemala, Indigenous peoples have never stopped talking about the colonial problem, and there is evidence of this, yet ladino and mestizo (Caxlian) thinkers working in the field of social sciences, with rare exceptions, are only now starting to recognise that the problem exists, after the decolonial turn has "educated them" in this regard.

**MIC:** In studying the Guatemalan context, it was quite important for me to understand how the term "Indigenous" was being disputed and defining it in a single way was impossible. You showed me how the old essentialist idea of Maya identity (strategic) associated with a culture or ethnic definition perpetuated languages of exclusion which I think still persist today and evidenced in cases where certain indigenous artists are questioned by others for being mestizo and as a result are unable to discuss Indigenous culture. That is why you propose the creation of an identity based on a specific political struggle and not on a cultural or ethnic identity. I think it would be interesting to contrast this with how in the West group identities are using this discourse against white European oppressors, essentializing them as well (strategically). How does the Guatemalan experience deal with this Western/non-Western opposition? Is it possible to not essentialise the West at present?

**AC:** The "West" is essentialised all the time and to counter this it aims to essentialise us and many of us end up accepting it. What I suggested back then was that Maya men and women, Indigenous peoples or whatever we've called ourselves, what we needed, was political force that could help us address this negated existence. But during this process of articulating this us, there were conflicts as to what parameters would we use for determining who was and who wasn't Maya. In many cases, this was not a problem, but in others it was. An example of this were the women who did not wear Maya clothing owing to its associated history, or who did not even speak any Maya language. Some denied them their Maya identity even though these women called themselves Maya. So, several of these women began to question who had the authority to define this and the parameters used and why men who did not wear Maya clothing or spoke a Maya language were unquestionably Maya, but not the women, etc. etc. All of this was problematic because instead of coming together, this created division. Another delicate point of contention was Maya spirituality, which many Indigenous peoples, who were a product of colonial aggression, as well as Caxlians (ladinos, mestizos, foreigners) considered sorcery. At this point, I agreed with other people that, more than an identity based on what was cultural (and folkloric-essentialist even less so) we needed a political identity as a People in order to reconstruct a Maya notion of "We", not only for our self-identification, but also in terms of a commitment towards thinking and entering into a dialogue about what we wanted to be, this identity, to not be governed by a decalogue of what it meant to be Maya based on cultural elements but reconstructing this identity making use of internal diversity and recognition in order to take up that thread of collective history. I believe that this is still relevant today because this needs to be articulated and consolidated as we face acts of multiple and simultaneous pillaging and threats to the life of our communities and Peoples. Today, I don't quite understand what you are referring to when you say "essentialism" but I do defend the ways in which the Maya Peoples see life which have not yet been destroyed, for example our systems of government, our way of understanding and experiencing politics, justice, health, the way in which we position ourselves as *winaq* (persons) with respect to all that makes up life which in Spanish is encompassed by the word *Naturaleza* (Nature). All of this is connected to our marvelous languages which embody a world logic that differs from that of the Western world, and the capitalist world in particular. I also defend the history and aesthetic of our existence observed in the clothing worn primarily by women but also men. And I could go on to speak about many other things such as the need for an appreciation of astronomical observation, architecture, mathematics, etc. That is why I believe that political identity implies a defending of a life, a reconstitution of what we want to be, in dialogue with our past and this must continue to be the result of an act of construction that is collective.

**MIC:** Cherokee coloniality has denounced Jimmie Durham, an American artist who has actively fought for indigenous rights since the 1960s but, because he is not officially Indigenous, the community believes that he has misrepresented them or that he has co-opted Cherokee signs of identity. <sup>3</sup> Evidently, the first concern is that Durham has not tried to represent indigenous identity (as this is not what a contemporary artist in this day and age), but he still has made use of their signs. What is your opinion on this controversy?

**AC:** This is something which should be discussed by members of the Cherokee Community; I do not know about this problem and therefore it would be irresponsible of me to offer an opinion on it. What I would like to discuss, if we look at this problem from a distance, is what actually happens with mestizo and white people in various situations. I can offer some examples. There are some mestizo people who conveniently co-opt indigenous markers of identity (clothing, discourse on their cosmivision, indigenous phenotypes, etc.), exploiting the characteristics that make them "exotic" and which also grant them greater opportunities in numerous fields of life. This often happens when people move to other countries – in their native countries these things generate racism or discrimination. In other cases, there are people who look down on "the indigenous" but exploit it commercially abroad in the form of art, scholarship or literature. But there is something that is even more dangerous, something happening now, and which I have criticised greatly – the competition that exists within indigenous academic, activist and artistic circles caused by the irresponsible actions of white, mestizo or foreign individuals who come to our countries and use their power to decide who is more important over others. Unfortunately, what often occurs is that the people involved actually believe this and we end up wasting much of our vital energy in destroying our own communities and people for this reason. I think that we should be watchful and not place too much value on this kind of colonial destruction that ends up becoming a problem for us, a problem that we are forced to address.

**MIC:** If we look at the idea of not speaking and listening silently there is an emotional question in this debate which goes beyond the intellectual, when we see the harsh circumstances of Indigenous peoples, including medical negligence, homicide, and suicide. Natalie Cromb said: *White people need to stop being so fragile. White people need to stop tone policing First Nations people who are going through so much. We are angry, we are sad and sometimes when we are voicing our emotions we struggle to enunciate the sheer weight of our situation but that is not an opening for the non-Indigenous to offer solutions, suggestions or opinions. Now is the time to sit down and shut up.* <sup>4</sup> I am greatly concerned by paternalistic silences. You've precisely said that receiving criticism was a guarantee of horizontality when in conversation. How does one handle the emotional and intellectual sides of things at the same time?

**AC:** Although I have never read Natalie Cromb, I am going to use the text you have cited, which I fully agree with and does not contradict with what I propose in any way. I insist on something which for me seems perfectly possible, that our voices can attain dialogical status, and that is all. It's easy to say, but it is difficult to understand and even more difficult to put it into practice. See, we encounter interlocutors whose discourse may be a "open" one, but their subjectivity reveals great moral superiority. A dialogical attitude is horizontal because it is built from both sides – I offer a critique of you and you offer a critique of me, that is, we use our criteria to have a conversation, to build. But what happens is that if you invite me to speak about issue X, I arrive and speak and in the end, you say nothing – something which frequently occurs – I may think that you don't care about what I said at all because your attitude is that of indifference, of "condescension" and "hypocritical solidarity". I am speaking of the constructive potential of criticism, where horizontality is ensured. Indigenous men and women should know how to recognise and disallow condescension, paternalism or materialism, it is shameful no matter how you look at it. If our interlocutor comes to the table with a morally superior attitude, and begins to criticise us, or even educate us, without having listened to what we have to say, this is an aggression which makes us relive that systematic colonial humiliation. This is where I fully agree with Natalie Cromb's suggestion of shutting up and listening. This means that mestizos, whites and foreigners should check their power. And I would take your question and turn it around: I would ask how can white or mestizo people handle the emotional and intellectual sides of things, because so often the questions are quite offensive, and we are careful to not offend with our answers but when we are blunt, it is the white mestizo person who is usually offended, and they immediately accuse us of being "reverse racists". I think there are some examples, only a few but which are very promising, where mestizo and Indigenous people have achieved that horizontality in their behaviour towards us and in their dialogue, and that's why I feel it is possible.

**MIC:** I think it's easy to generalise and that academic moral superiority is also a generational position that many writers of my generation do not identify with; we do not want to occupy that position, nor do we represent one culture, nation or institution. Many of us aspire to build from a foundation based on a questioning stance to contribute to a greater dialogue. As a result, I think there is an urgent need for another model for the intellectual/writer. I've been told after giving a conference that we were living in a time of war – a war between white and non-white people. How do we protect active thinking from a reactive one? That's why I think that perhaps at this time what is needed is reparation, and this challenges theory itself, it goes beyond it. It's inadequate.

**AC:** I am not sure that the generational factor is a decisive one, nor is it a question of "people" alone, and even less of "whites against non-whites" – that sounds terrible, I've never heard that before. This issue is one of racialisation of power that has been instated from a structure of colonial domination, but when the discussion gets personal then a difficult knot is created, it's a shame when we get to this point.

**MIC:** At the same time, is horizontal interlocution possible when cosmivisions are always subjected to Western coding or translation? And what about secrets? Secrets that we cannot or do not want to translate?

**AC:** The problem is that perhaps we are talking about horizontal interlocution but for different issues. I am talking about collective building of societies where the colonial is still in force and needs to be overcome. If you are referring to learning about other cosmivisions, this is a complex issue because as you say the issue of extraction is always present. For example, you visit a community to learn about their medicinal plants and then you patent them – this is no longer an issue of dialogue but of pillaging.

**MIC:** It's not about encyclopedically learning about other cosmivisions, instead it's about understanding tools for thinking that could help us challenge that coloniality. I mean methodological tools. But these are always subject to a certain logic of translation. For the first-generation postcolonialists, it was precisely this translation which created new intermediate knowledge (Bhabha, Brathwaite, Glissant, Mignolo, Kathibi, Anzaldúa) that would soon be turned into the criticism of appropriation (of the parts that interested them) denounced by Watts.

**AC:** First-generation postcolonial? How curious. And which generation do all the black and Indigenous peoples belong to, I'm wondering – all those people who participated in the anti-colonial and decolonial struggles ever since Columbus and the successive patriarchs invaded our land. It's clear that I do not know these "postcolonial" and "decolonial" academic codes nor do I know to whom these hierarchies have been attributed. I'm telling you what I think, no matter how revolutionary a tool is, if it is tainted by power then it can no longer be considered transformative. There are certain strands of thinking that take very decolonial or anti-patriarchal stances, which use that same mask to reproduce the same methods of domination, which is quite perverse in my opinion. This is where an ethical perspective needs to come into play – the ethics of who wants to know those "other worlds" and why. Here there was a German colony in the Maya territories of Q'eqchi' and Poqomchi', and many of its members investigated what they termed "Indian culture" in depth; there were Germans who had learned the Q'eqchi' language perfectly and they used this knowledge to construct mechanisms to oppress people that were more subtle, taking everything away from them and turning them into their slaves or their *mozos* ("boys"), people that would be sold along with a farm, as chattel, as late as the early 20th century. Maya culture was also appropriated by the army, which perverted sacred symbols and names of deities to designate their destructive forces during the genocide. The T'zult'aq spirit of the valleys and mountains – a Q'eqchi' deity profoundly revered by its community – and the army used this name for the military forces that persecuted these same peoples during the genocide. I've used harsh examples; I have many more, but I prefer to stop here.

**MIC:** How does spirituality become a place of political anti-colonial struggle? Can it be used for thinking about nature but also the way academic thought is structured? In the West emotions and what is spiritual continue to be dissociated from reason and thought (political or otherwise). Guate speaks of *desCaxlianización* (deCaxlianization). What does this concept mean?

**AC:** There is more than just one question here. The West has established an epistemology which fragments personhood and life, and Maya spirituality embraces a notion of life where existence is an indivisible whole and everything is interrelated and interconnected. This is not only a political proposal – it's a way of life.

**MIC:** A meeting with a working group with Princeton and Forensic Architecture in Rio de Janeiro, went very badly for me (or I was misunderstood) for trying to question the absence of problematization of Western methods of thinking and their failure to question some of the concepts we regularly use such as "human rights", basing my approach on that of Sousa Santos, who, when working with farming or indigenous communities slowly realized how human rights were colonial in nature. Do you think the notion of human rights is colonial?

**AC:** I am unaware of what de Sousa says, but the concept of what is human in and of itself is tremendously capitalist-colonial-patriarchal, if we revisit the history of how the notion of "what is human" was conceived. Human Rights separate the rights of peoples from everything that makes up their existence. But for Indigenous Peoples, everything has life, and therefore it should all have rights just like people do; for many Indigenous Communities this is very clear, but this is not true for the capitalist West, which sees every living thing as something to be exploited.

**MIC:** Viveiros de Castro's theory on Amerindian perspectivism has inspired a new materialism which confers animistic agency to objects. This in turn has inspired numerous texts and art exhibitions. Some Canadian thinkers such as Vanessa Watts have insisted that this has only been conferred for our own benefit – for instance while it's true that agency has been conferred to objects and this has inspired a global conversation on the rights of nature, Watts believes that these rights were granted with a hierarchal status (that is, the agency of nature as though it were a domesticated being?). Some have also spoken of how the West absorbs some aspects and ignores others that seem essentialist or naive, which is once again nothing more than a colonial operation. What do you think of how Western theory is recuperating Amerindian cosmivisions to help it examine its relationship with nature and understand the agency of objects?

**AC:** I am unaware of the proposals of the authors you have cited. But I'll answer your question. For the "West", which has built itself up through pillaging of nature and all that which it considered to be nature, including Indigenous Peoples and women, it is obvious that this "awakening" brought on by Indigenous cosmivisions is something which they hierarchise. The problem here is that the practice is applied to a life that is separate from "nature", while in places such as Guatemala this disconnection does not exist among most indigenous communities and peoples, which explains their present-day fight for the protection of rivers, lakes, seas, mountains, and valleys, because if all of this dies, then people die too, as their lives are interconnected. From this emerges the notion of *loq'olej* (sacred is the word which best describes it) which gives everything a name – water, food, air, fire, plants and everything. A spiritual connection exists if one desires it; it is not an economic relationship, which is the way capitalism sees everything. I have heard that some Euro-American people defend nature as "a garden", in his way of thinking that which gives life has never been called a garden or thought of as being decorative, yet the lifestyle attained in these exceedingly materialistic societies has led them to think this way.

**MIC:** Is it really possible to decolonialise Western methods after it's been made abundantly clear that Western thinking is based on an extractivist perspective that has even been applied to ourselves?

**AC:** In the West there are many other ways of thinking that are critical of the extractivist epistemology. These views could come together and begin to dialogue with Indigenous epistemologies.

**MIC:** In Amerindian perspectivism there is an insistence on the idea that nature and objects are filled with intentionality. That animals can be persons too, the notion of person here going beyond Western understanding. This has to do with the rights you were talking about earlier. I believe that the fundamental difference lies between what is human and the process of personalisation or *winaq*-sation. <sup>5</sup> What is the difference between these terms? And why is *winaq* important if we want to understand the agency of nature?.

**AC:** I don't fully understand the question, but I'll answer what I've managed to understand. In many "Indigenous" modes of thought, but I am speaking of the Maya idea of what life is, animals, objects or nature are not put into the category of "people" in order to be legitimized, as this would be pretty much the same. Here the idea is that everything is alive including people (*ni winaq*), and because it is alive, then it is part of existence, and a reciprocal relationship is established among all beings to ensure their existence.

**MIC:** This is interesting because it wouldn't be about granting human rights to nature, but granting rights to all beings. But I am very interested in the idea of personifying as something that implies movement, a transformation and the transitional which is contrary to the putting up of frontiers between beings, concepts, disciplines... It's an idea which interests me. Abj'e Jiménez says "*winaq* specifically refers to the act of becoming alive, the fullness and completeness of life, and it also gives a name to the dynamic notion of continuing to be (what always is), continue being (becoming), and walking forward (moving) in time."

**MIC:** How could a concept such as *winaq* help to change Western methods?

**AC:** *Winaq* refers to a person or a complete being, fully whole in every sense.

**MIC:** I have heard you speak of how the concept of *winaq* challenges the separation between genders, for example...

**AC:** Yes. Once, when I was in Mexico, I heard an archaeologist talk about the Popol Vuh and she translated the word *winaq* as "man". To be frank, this frightened me because in my head *winaq* has always been "person" or "people". Since then I have been reflecting on this idea: One of the darkest examples of Western androcentrism is to equate human with man (human-man). And still they tell you "don't worry, when we say man we're also referring to women, we're not excluding them". This expression encapsulates centuries of subjugation suffered by women, because it disappears them as humans. In Maya languages, in contrast, *winaq* is not a man, it's a person or people, yet, what I learned gleaned from the archaeologist's translation was the ease with which the Western world's androcentricist is imposed on the Maya world in this case. Today, for many Maya Peoples, *winaq* is still a person but as it turns out, in one of the places where the so-called "peaceful conquest through evangelization" occurred, a place given the name of "*Verapaz* or *verdadera paz* (true peace)" by Bartolomé de las Casas, for these Maya, *winaq* is translated as "man" today. In fact, it is in these places that the term "*winaq*" is equated with "*Christian*". Many Q'eqchi' and Poqomchi' peoples, instead of saying "people" say "Christians", an example which illustrates the imposition of Christianity and the power it has exerted. Fortunately, in these Q'eqchi' and Poqomchi' communities there are other ways of showing that these ancient modes of thinking did not have androcentric roots. Thanks to their pertinence, oral memory and ancient texts, we can see that indigenous epistemologies "do not have androcentric roots because their vision of the world does not correspond to "one", "mono" or "unique", but to the notions of "double", "quadruple", "pluri-", "multiple" or "poly". Yet colonialisation is a permanent force which destroys whatever remains, that's why it is important to think about this.

**MIC:** Does it make sense to integrate Indigenous communities within the framework of a nation when it is precisely that framework which has been shown to be colonial in nature, and the very same one which has excluded them? How would the idea of a Maya nationalism work?

**AC:** As Indigenous Peoples we have our own struggles, whether they be ideological or not is for us to discuss. Now, it has been sufficiently proven that the forced "integration" of Indigenous Peoples represents an aggression against their existence. I do not agree with the idea of Plurinational States or the creation of Indigenous nationalisms, if what they do is repeat the bad habits of European nationalisms, many of them involving ethnocide and genocide. I am more in favor of an autonomy based on other, more suitable logics. Still, contemporary colonial-patriarchal Nations-States use their tremendous power to forbid these nations, and in the best of cases most accept the idea of "inclusion", a lethal trap for the existence of Indigenous, as this is starting point for extending the Western, capitalistic, colonial and patriarchal ways of life.

**MIC:** The right to self-representation is directly connected to the access to civil rights. How do museums represent the Maya? What is the Maya Peoples' reaction to/relation with them?

**AC:** I think we need to reflect upon this more carefully. For instance, in the Indigenous Town Council of Sololá there is some controversy about an Indigenous text known as the Annals of Sololá (*Memorial de Sololá*, in Spanish), located outside the country and which needs to return to the place where it originated, due to its historical and political significance. Unfortunately, the internal conditions of the country are inadequate, and we cannot ensure its protection. For example, there is still widespread looting of valuable objects from Maya cities; there is national and international traffic of these objects. This does not justify the existence of museums and their sense of colonial expropriation. Here in Guatemala, "rich" people, the ones who are the first to oppose the struggle of Indigenous Peoples, those who drain the rivers and blow up mountains in collusion with international mining, hydroelectric power and agricultural monoculture companies, have filled their houses with valuable Maya objects; they own private museums and this is how they have sought to rob the thread of our great millenary history and our memory deserving of merit, eternally converting us into their workforce for their cane sugar, cotton, coffee and oil palm plantations.

**MIC:** Yes, the problem is that there doesn't seem to be many alternatives to the representation offered by museums. Although they carry out projects in collaboration with Indigenous peoples, these often serve to reinforce the dynamic of academia and museums. Museums need to represent, and to do this they need to exhibit objects; how do we challenge this using other kinds of representation and historical perspectives? Can this be done within museums (whether they are contemporary art museums or not)?

**MIC:** How do contemporary Indigenous artists contribute to the evolution of the Maya political debate? I get the sense that in the case of mestizo women the key is not only found in art in general but also in the evolution of these debates?

**AC:** The contribution made by artists (singers, painters, poets, etc.) is invaluable because they reach a greater audience than academia or political activism. Still, I think there is the issue of separation, that is, art separated from activism and academia; if they joined forces in the fight we'd be stronger.

**MIC:** Ah! But why? Is there mistrust between them? You have extraordinary contemporary artists. Is it because they have one foot in Western circuits?

**AC:** I am not talking about mistrust or about having one foot in "Western" circuits, nor am I denying the power of artists, the only thing I am saying is that it takes a great effort to join forces. Thank goodness you're asking questions because your interpretations differ greatly from what I am thinking.

**MIC:** Can Maya cosmivisions, or *naab'ijil* – systems of Maya thought or philosophy – help us to create tools that will assist us in revisiting our way of understanding history? And who knows? Perhaps even decolonialising our methods in order to rethink them?

**AC:** For the Maya themselves, they are still important but at the same time they are degraded by school in the first instance and by other fields of Western life which dominate our worlds. The Maya idea of life can be a perfectly applicable principle in both the specific and universal sense, but I think that the reasons for decolonialisation can be formulated by Western thinkers themselves by firstly questioning what lies at its source: massive pillaging in its multiple dimensions. What is urgently needed is to put an end to, or at least limit capitalist pillaging, because it is accelerating the destruction of our indigenous worlds. As you already know, our communities, the people who defend the rivers, lakes, and mountains are being destroyed and assassinated; a clear example of this is Berta Cáceres in Honduras and a long list of people in Guatemala. There are many people who are defending life with their own lives. It is important to try to understand indigenous worlds, but right now, apart from understanding our worlds we urgently need to stop their decimation.

**MIC:** I am doubtful as to whether this can be carried out from the inside. Postmodernism failed in trying to show multi-temporality of history from different cultural perspectives. Postcolonialism in a way has tried to reconcile postmodernity with history by looking at the genealogy of power relations, yet it still does not know how to re-narrate it very well. Now we speak of transhistoricity again, and museums are mixing art collections with collections from other disciplines in the hopes that this dialogue will also help them. Re-write history. Ivan Gaskell from Harvard University has suggested that a group of ethnographers curate an exhibition of late 19th century French imperialism. But I think there is great uncertainty in this field. That is why I thought that their cosmivisions could serve as a foundation for learning alternatives.

**MIC:** In an interview with Viveiros de Castro, he emphasised how now the class struggle is now a struggle of peoples, and I think it's interesting that you defend the idea of a people over ethnicity to avoid using colonial language. <sup>6</sup> You use the concept of *tinamit* (in the Kaqchikel language) or Abj'e Jiménez's *kojbi'l* (Mam language). Do you think that the concepts could make a contribution to the idea of peoples-concept?

**AC:** I don't believe that the struggle of Peoples is a class struggle, it's much more complex than that; I would have to really know what he was trying to say. What I am suggesting is the need for consolidating a collective political identity of their own. Ethnicity, that ugly concept, is a terrible imposition of the condition of subordination. I've suggested peoples (*tinamit* in the Kaqchikel language) in capital letters, other people say that this term is inadequate and that the term Nation is more appropriate. At the end of the day what is being sought here is an equivalence vis-à-vis other forms of national identity. It's obvious that it holds historical, social and political meaning that differs from Western meanings.

**MIC:** Isn't it a contradiction to speak of an Indigenous UNIVERSITY? How does that meeting of methods work at those Universities, one based on University, separation, frontiers that histories, disciplines, people, etc.) and extraction, and the other based on multiplicity and becoming?

**AC:** I believe that yes, it is contradictory. According to the Popol Vuh and other Indigenous texts, along with the content of current indigenous languages, the Maya vision of existence doesn't have at its centre the "one", but double, quadruple, the pluri-, and the multiple. The University is a reproduction of the world of one, it is also a place where knowledge is institutionalised and what's more, the indigenous students are taught by professors who are foreign or mestizo ladinos. Instead, I am interested in the attempts at creating spaces for dialogue and the generation of knowledge that is more horizontal, more plural; spaces where the Western method of the institutionalisation and racialization of knowledge is not repeated. Nevertheless, saying this is easy, but again, given the strength of Western knowledge-power, we can only approach this, and many indigenous worlds have been spaces for the preparation of people who learn Western codes to ultimately question them, for the good of indigenous struggles, and that is what is important about these spaces.

Notes:

[1] Santiago Bastos y Aura Cumes, *Mayanización y vida cotidiana. Ideología multicultural en la sociedad Guatemalteca* (Guatemala: FALCSO, 2004), 12.

[2] Mombaja, Jota. *Notas estratégicas quanto aos usos políticos do conceito de lugar de fala*

[3] <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/cherokee-curators-artists-jimmie-durham-cherokee-1007336>

<https://news.artnet.com/about/anne-ellegood-659>

[4] Cromb Natalie, *Drowning in White Privilege*.

Listen! Respect! Do something! Stop making your support contingent upon a pat on the back. Stop expecting us to listen to your point of view on our issues. Stop taking up space and speaking for us when we are so ready to speak, but are often sidelined by White spokespeople hell bent on telling us Australia is not racist. Each and every non-Indigenous Australian benefits from the special racism reserved for the First Nations population – one which denies our history, rebuts our voices when we speak against racist oppression now and implements policies to maintain the subversion we have experienced for over 200 years.

[5] See Jiménez Abj'ee and Aj' Xol Ch'ok, Hector. *Winaq. Fundamentos del Pensamiento maya*. Guatemala: Ximulew, 2011

[6] <http://www.buala.org/pt/cara-a-cara/o-que-estamos-vendo-no-planeta-hoje-e-um-combate-de-povos-e-nao-de-classes-ou-as-classes>