

Feminist Decolonial Politics of the Intangible,
Environmental Movements and the Non-Human in Mexico

by

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ABSTRACT

This study weighs the connection of environmental crisis with race and gender in different cases of environmental crisis and conflicts. The study documents how Indigenous cosmologies and cosmopolitics, and scientific arguments converge in unexpected alliances in the advent of environmental crises. This research focuses on specific instances, or situations related to environmental justice movements addressing the environmental crisis in Mexico (and its convergences to other similar cases). I examine and present a discussion of the research methodologies and methods used to study the ‘environment’ as well as indigenous cosmologies and cosmopolitics. With this, I embark on a research that includes feminist decolonial theory, eco-feminism and material feminisms into a larger project for autonomy and decoloniality.

In particular, I discuss one of the concepts that have caught the attention of those studying race and ethnicity in the Americas: *mestizaje* as an ordinal principle in the context of Mexico. Also, I discuss the inscriptions of the mestiza body in relation to the materiality of race and gender in the context of Latin America. It is shown how the discourse of *mestizaje* is tangled with the idea of a modern civilization, such as in the Mexican state. Overall, this research analyzes different responses to environmental crises; from environmental activists, community organizers to plastic artists and scientific experts. Also, it includes a literary analysis of contemporary indigenous literatures to show how state sponsored violence and settler colonialism have an incidence in gender violence by placing the female body close to nature.

As global environmental problems have risen, this research contributes to the understanding of the underlying factors in environmental crises and conflict that have been overlooked. Herein lies an important possibility to reach a broader audience in different disciplines, ranging from indigenous studies to the global politics of human rights. Furthermore, this research aims to contribute to the work of environmental activists, scholars and scientists with regard to the understanding of how different arguments are used in research and advocacy work, and how they can integrate an interdisciplinary and intercultural approach when addressing environmental justice cases.

DEDICATION

To the ones who were before me and the ones who will come after I materialize into something else.

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Chapter 1

Decolonial Research Methods: Ethnography of Global Connections and Researching the Intangible and the Non-Human

Introduction

Part of this research project is the process of following a research protocol. I encountered moments of stalemate when researching “marginalized populations”¹ and when attempting to make sense of non-canonical theories and intellectual endeavors. In the case of this research, I include unconventional subjects (or actors) and agents of research, including indigenous sacred sites, seeds, water, peasant land, corporeal implications of environmental activism, indigenous languages that embrace indigenous cosmologies, including its different representations, in literature, performance, among others. Although some of the aforementioned agents or actors are tangible and in some cases (are made) quantifiable, social scientists “make sense” of its presence most of the times by using approaches of the interactions of humans and non-human agents, using established mechanisms for the conceptualization, objectification, quantification and differentiation of what is worth considering present, existent, and including the invisibilization of actors, spaces and territories that have been in constant reconstruction, encompassing both human and non-human actors. It has been widely discussed how the term *human* in Western civilizations is framed under a colonial imperial anthropocentric perspective. As Salleh (1995) addresses the question of how ecofeminist perspectives uncover the relationship of

¹ I chose “marginalized populations” to name what other scholars and governmental agencies named “vulnerable populations.”

capital accumulation subjects in four different ways comparing women to men. These differentiations are based on the embodiment of reproductive labor, care work and the association of women with nature.

Then,

[t]hrough this constellation of labors, women are organically and discursively implicated in life-affirming activities, and they develop gender-specific knowledges grounded in this material base. As a result, women across cultures have begun to express insights that are quite removed from most men's approaches to global crisis— whether these be corporate greenwash, ecological ethics, or socialism. (Salleh 1997, 161)

Then, as Salleh comments, female corporeality (and the construction of 'women' as a gender) is distinct from other experiences inasmuch as the history of exclusion in political participation, spiritual practices. The connection of female corporeality is emphasized by Claudia von Werlhof (1997b), when discussing how patriarchy as an organizational system, denied and prohibits a matriarchy which eventually demolished and diminished traditional forms of life that were based on a matrilineal system. By linking the State (and its violence) to the colonization of life, including women, and the negation of matriarchy, von Werlhof (2004) observes that this is "trying to transform the originally matriarchal society into a patriarchal one by developing the policies of "divide and rule", by dissolving and abstracting from the interconnectedness of people, communities, genders, generations, cult, commons, and nature in general" (5). Since "capitalism is the latest stage of patriarchalism" (von Werlhof 2004, 9) a discussion on matriarchy as an opposition to patriarchalism is inherent to system of oppression that permeates several aspects of life, including the colonization of nature and women.

The approach to studying environmental justice cases in social science research can be based on the material relations, capitalist accumulation, dispossession, and displacement, which emphasize the socio-ecological aspect of capitalist and neoliberal practices embedded in several aspects of life. Still, these perspectives prompt an understanding of the subjects of the research based on a differentiation between human/non-human, nature/culture and the Cartesian dualism of mind/body, i.e. the binaries that objectify. If what (supposedly) makes “us” human is different from other entities, then our skills and capacities are reflected in different manifestations such as language, writing, development of “civilizations” (noticing that some of them are considered more valuable than others), as well as scientific and technological advancements. (Harding 2006)

Hence, the “human” is transcendental inasmuch as it distances himself/herself² to *animality*. This results in differentiated practices of dehumanization that can;

depend(s) on the logic of a power that can decide on the value of a given life. Such a decisions works fundamentally to exclude the other from the realm of human intercourse, which can be achieved only by denying access to speech and, of course, law. (Seshadri 2012, ix-x)

Therefore, through the uncovering and deconstruction of how “the human” has been constructed and reframed around non-human forms of life, as well as the animalization of other people, *humanity* is placed into question, particularly how it has been used as a way to impose Abrahamic religions, unequal economic systems and the imposition of a “reality”

² Considering “the human” as part of a discourse, or part of the modern/colonial/capitalist/heterosexual/patriarchal system. For a discussion of this term and of the colonial/modern system, see the work of Maria Lugones (2007) and Ramon Grosfoguel (2007).

that have favored settler colonial societies. The dominant discourse around the “human” is constrained to relations of power reflected on ideological apparatuses and repression.

The series of uprisings in the history of the Americas, indigenous and Afroamerican uprising and rebellions were accompanied to corporeal punishment and constant criminalization, finding within the modern discourses of human rights a place to advocate for justice and freedom. We may ask, before the concept of human rights was associated with modern civilizations, how did non-Western civilizations theorize freedom, justice, and autonomy? More importantly, it is possible to ask throughout this research: if other notions of the “human” are possible, how are they entangled in a deconstruction of gender binaries, rebellion, autonomy, sovereignty, and other overlooked existences?

I have dedicated Chapter 1 to discuss the research methodologies and the “politics” impacting theory and methods. Without this discussion, this project would be incomplete. I present and offer a framework on what is entailed in the engagement of decolonial research methods and critical social science research. At the end of this chapter (Chapter1), I discuss the conditions needed to integrate non-human personhood, and subordinated knowledges and experiences in the light of researching justice.

Thus this implies, a question that rises for researchers looking into studies of non-conventional actors and agents is how to include something, a non-human agent, into the realm of *politics* that apparently has no *agency and personhood*. For example, the state-sanctioned legal cases that involved the rights of non-human actors have caught the attention of several social scientists and activists on how to integrate within Western ontologies and epistemologies the ones that may fall within the margins of acceptance of valid ontologies. Mario Blaser (2013) and Marisol de la Cadena (2010) demonstrate how

these are questions related to *political ontologies*, and therefore problems arise when probing if “what exists” is in fact real and therefore worth saving , as well as notions of “the real”, i.e., ways of knowing. For Blaser this is a political and conceptual problem, the same as based on the conflicting coexistence of different political ontologies (Blaser 2013). I am keen to suggest that these political ontologies are part of a series of problems that characterize hegemonic economic and social development discourses and policies, state legitimacy, and epistemic and ontological domination. One of the primary concerns of this research project is to bring into question the material and extra-material consequences of developmentalist practices and its relationship with environmental cases where humans and non-human (personhood) is present. In Chapter 2, I discuss the relationship of *mestizaje* in Mexico within environmental justice struggles, focusing especially on how *mestizaje* is inscribed in the body, as well as its relations to a racialization and genderization of nature and the economy. In Chapter 3, I discuss how environmental conflicts are intersected with the figure of the postcolonial and settler state as a sign of a failed project. As part of a larger conversation on the production and circulation of knowledge, Chapters 1 and 3 are linked to narratives of social progress and modernization that have been the center of research for postcolonial studies with its different approaches and focuses, including discussions on “postcolonial science and technology studies” (Harding 2013), as well as indigenous knowledges and the derived relationships of power, collaboration, and the contribution of a certain embodiment of science and technology ideologies to precarization of life, feminization of economy, and the material and the ontological violence³ that Western science and technology bodies of knowledge allowed, certified, and

³ Hence the discussion of the “intangible” and to “non-human personhood” in the context of justice research.

validated to exist. Chapter 3 opens up a discussion on how to introduce new *subjects* to the space of environmental justice research or any concern regarding *justice* as an ultimate pursuit within decolonial social justice research. In Chapter 4, I discuss how mestizaje and the body interplay in a postcolonial setting. These discussions around the body and race are a fundamental component on how environmental justice struggles are understood in Mexico, and postcolonial states where settler colonialism is taking place. As race and gender interplay on discussing forms of expression, and the forms that coloniality of power manifests, I provide an insight on how mestizaje reproduces dominant ideologies regarding the body, science and technology and life itself. In Chapter 5, I provide a discussion on contemporary indigenous literatures written by indigenous women and the ways this poetry is interrelated to different forms of oppression. This chapter, is based on an approach to coloniality of power with an ecocritical perspective.

Finally, I provide a discussion on Chapter 6 on how different crises are interwoven, as shown in this research, the confluence of the possible solutions by integrating different disciplines that work towards autonomy and liberation within the coloniality of power. In this chapter I conclude with the possibilities of the discussions presented in this research and the many venues to approach ‘the environment’ in relation to systemic oppression.

Knowledge Systems and Social Science Research

The creation and re-production of knowledge systems as part of the construction of dualisms that sustain the “ways of living,” knowing, creating and imagining are part of the

continuum of the Western ways of living and re-producing embodied experiences of re-creating the “human” (Wolfe 1998).

The “human” within the Western sciences has perpetuated a continuous ethnocide and annihilation of indigenous knowledge systems, as well as other non-canonical forms of expression. (Venn 2006) The incorporation of decolonizing and indigenous methodologies in social science research focusing on indigenous knowledges, including the consideration of them as part of non-hegemonic expressions of justice and autonomy , can contribute to different understandings of traditional relationships between the “human” and nature, and provide diverse and more adequate understandings of the human, as well as the inhuman and nonhuman worlds. This is especially important in the context of Western civilizational crisis⁴ as decolonizing and indigenous knowledges not only provides answers but simultaneously also questions the solutions that Western society has employed with relation to issues of genocide, humanitarian crises, and environmental crises.

I contend that indigenous and non-canonical knowledges (Walsh 2007; Harding 2008; Escobar 2007; Castro-Gomez 2007) provide an alternative to traditional homogenized and dominant Western modes of inquiry⁵ by proposing a way to imagine and re-create spaces for decolonization and provide a contribution to a larger set of interdisciplinary discussions on the process of decolonizing research methodologies which would be discussed in the following sections.

⁴ Discussions on ‘Western civilizational crisis’ have been discussed and noted by Bowden, Brett. "The thin ice of civilization." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 36, no. 2 (2011): 118-135; Ahmed, Nafeez Mosaddeq. *A User's Guide to the Crisis of Civilization*. Vol. 2. London: Pluto Press, 2010;

⁵ Note how indigenous knowledges are not the only ones that are at the “margins,” but there is considerable amount of experiences, knowledges (*saberes*), that are not granted a status of “existence.”

Introducing Critical Research Methodologies

The dominant modes of inquiry within the (traditional) Western science are based on the Cartesian model of logic, where *reason* is derived from experience validated through the senses (Henn, Weinstein and Foard 2006). This paper deals with critical research methodologies, primarily the methodologies applied to the study of environmental politics and the corporeality of race. Most of the literature dealing with critical research methodologies questions, in this context, if critical research methodologies stimulate and contribute to a decolonizing knowledge production (Diversi and Moreira 2009), which, among other aspects, entails not only a more participatory research process, but also the capacity of the researcher to include “other knowledges” produced in the peripheries of the academy. For Moreira (2009), decolonizing knowledge production refers to

The production of knowledge that makes *visceral knowledge of oppressive ideologies of domination central to scholarly discourse*, whereby theory becomes a more democratic tool of analysis and further discourse and not a barrier for those with ‘bad English,’ and whereby the researcher refrains from unilateral analysis after the fact, alone in the office, in favor of a more egalitarian *collaboration that produce knowledge that is inevitably open-ended, about possibilities of being more for more people* (185-186, my emphasis)

As Moreira expresses, scholarly discourse as it is structured and institutionalized forms part of the obstacles to conducting research that has an emancipation goal. As Denzin (2003) observes, “literature is reflexively situated in multiple, historical, and national contexts” (244). Therefore, special attention is required when the research in question is enounced from the Global North and/or from the marginal spaces. If emancipation is the goal of decolonizing knowledge production, what are the differences when producing

qualitative research from different loci of enunciation? How to perform qualitative research that has transformative inquiries, while the same time contributing to a project of emancipation (from coloniality), is one of the questions guiding this inquiry? (Denzin and Giardina 2009, 11). More importantly, how should critical research include the study of non-human personhood (and/or agency)?

Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui observed that “the colonial condition obscures a number of paradoxes” (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012, 95). By colonial condition, is understood to the This obscuring includes the absence of knowledges, and material “realities” in critical research of the contributions of the academia outside the sphere of the West.⁶ It is important to indicate within qualitative research conditions of including other forms of knowledge and other forms of evidence. This is crucial to destabilize the (accepted) silences found even within critical research.⁷ In this regard, it is of political urgency the recognition of “intellectual production from the periphery” (Grupo de Estudios Sobre la Colonialidad 1998; Grosfoguel 2006; Mignolo 2005).

For this reason, and in the context of knowledges from the South, Cusicanqui alerts readers to engage critically with the knowledge produced about the South by scholars

⁶ In this context, Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) states that “Bolivian elites are a caricature of the West. In speaking of them, I refer not only to the political class and the state bureaucracy but also to the intelligentsia that strikes postmodern and even postcolonial poses, and to the US academy and its followers who built pyramidal structures of power and symbolic capital—baseless pyramids that vertically bind certain Latin American universities.”

⁷ For a more thorough discussion on silence and language as a *dispositif*, see Seshadri (2012). Also, I discussed in Chapter 6 how contemporary indigenous literature written by women can be read as subtexts of indigenous knowledges and a socio-political critique.

located in North. This problem is similar to the one observed by indigenous scholars⁸ in both the Global North and the Global South, who share experiences under colonial discourse. As observed by McIsaac, “the existence of indigenous cosmology and its manifestation in knowledge and practice make this form of counter-hegemony alive and lived” (2000, 90). In this same vein of criticism, Francesca Gargallo in her article “*Feminismo Mestizo, Epistemología Racista*” (2009) points out that the ways privileged by mestiza women in Mexican society interpret, study and reproduce Western feminisms.

El feminismo mestizo, prácticamente todo el feminismo reconocido como tal en Nuestra América, asume sin pestañar el mandato de la liberación individual de las mujeres, sin detenerse en pensar los elementos colectivistas y relacionales de las prácticas y las teorías del conocimiento de los pueblos originarios de América.

The mestiza feminism, practically all feminisms recognized in Our America, assume without a blink the mandates of the individual liberation of women, without stopping to think of the collective elements and the relations of the practices and the theories of knowledge of the originary [indigenous] peoples for the Americas. (Gargallo 2009)

The scientific method, as a civilizatory practice, institutionalizes the Western structure of thinking in forms of what is considered scientific, the universal paradigms conceived in the West, and in making the *methodologies* employed in the social sciences, what Suárez-Krabbe (2011) calls *localismos globalizados* (globalized localisms) in the context of decolonial research methodologies. This reveals the complexities of adopting,

⁸ In the specific case of indigenous scholars from Mexico (my area of study), see Natividad Gutiérrez Chong (1998).

as social sciences researchers, the colonially and neo-colonially inherited paradigms from the center and of applying them in the peripheries (de Sousa Santos 2002; Wallerstein 1999). According to Aguiló Bonet (2009), a globalized localism “consists of a process through a specific local phenomenon—a life style, a cultural production, an specific idea or value—that is de-localized from its social and territorial original space and extends with success its sphere of influence, reaching a transnational expansions, with no borders” (12). For de Sousa Santos (2007), the dominant culture (from the center) makes and produces subordinate cultures, which received values and paradigms produced from center as universal. Following this idea, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o comments on the choices made by intellectuals, saying that “intellectuals can draw pictures of the universe and its workings to instill fear, despondence, and self-doubt in the oppressed while legitimizing the world of oppressor nations and classes as the norm; or they can draw pictures that instill clarity, strength, hope, to the struggles of the exploited and the oppressed to realize their visions of a new tomorrow” (Thiong'o 1993, 54-55, cited in Mihesua and Cavender Wilson 2004, 14).

For Gargallo, the intersections among “economy, politics, corporeality and difference” (Gargallo 2009) are translated to the research produced by non-indigenous women and acculturated mestizas that employed the *methodologies* brought by an academia grounded in “hegemonic Eurocentric paradigms” (Grosfoguel 2008). For Ramazanoglu and Holland (2009, 172), methodologies in social research refer to:

- A social and political process of knowledge production;
- Assumptions about the nature and meanings of ideas, experience and social reality, and how/whether these may be connected;
- A critical reflection on what authority can be claimed for the knowledge that results;

- Accountability (or denial of accountability) for the political and ethical implications of knowledge production;
- Each methodology links a particular *ontology* and a particular *epistemology* in providing rules that specify how to produce knowledge of social reality.

For Seale (1998), methodologies include also “the political, theoretical and philosophical implications of making choices of method when doing research” (3). According to Wenn, Weinstein and Foard (2006), there exist two aspects that are subject of debates, which are

- What counts as valid knowledge; and
- How should we acquire that knowledge?

As a response and an alternative to canonical (or mainstream) methodologies, Henn, Weinstein and Foard (2006) suggest that:

researchers need to take account of the historical, social and political contexts which constrain human thought and human action. *Such researchers are concerned with understanding how underlying social structures historically served to oppress particularly the working class, women and ethnic minority groups.* (my emphasis)

This type of research is named *critical social research*; the critical approach to social research varies from discipline to discipline but also depends on the purposes of the research. For Henn, Weinstein and Foard (2006), critical social research “should serve a particular purpose in emancipating oppressed groups within society” (27). Then, emancipation is the goal in critical social research (Schostak and Schostak 2009), which is understood that this type of research and its methodologies would offer a critique to conventional practices of social inquiry. The emancipation is from “the hierarchical and unhealthy power relationships that are held to characterize the typical research process” (Henn, Weinstein and Foard 2006, 33). If critical social research and its methodologies have a purpose for emancipation, it is important to notice the different angles from which

emancipation can be discussed. According to Henn, Weinstein and Foard (2002), in contrast to traditional researchers, “critical social researchers are committed to raising emancipatory consciousness, to the empowerment of individuals and the confronting of injustice society” (28). For Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002), “strategies for emancipation can be clouded by varied cultural conceptions of rights and duties, progress and freedom that differ in their conceptions” (35). I argue that these “different conceptions” are based not only on mere cultural understandings, but on a Eurocentrism that has permeated deeply in the social sciences. On this, Wallerstein (1997) comments that:

Social science has been Eurocentric throughout its institutional history, which means since there have been departments teaching social science within university systems. This is not in the least surprising. **Social science is a product of the modern world-system, and Eurocentrism is constitutive of the geoculture of the modern world.** Furthermore, as an institutional structure, social science originated largely in Europe. We shall be using Europe here more as a cultural [rather] than as a cartographical expression. (my emphasis)

If social science is a product of the modern world system as suggested by Immanuel Wallerstein (1999;1997), how can we integrate a non-Eurocentric perspective to the critical social research? And more importantly, if social sciences are based on Eurocentric paradigms and cosmologies, what are non- Eurocentric (social) research methodologies?⁹ For Grosfoguel (2007), “the main point here is the *locus of enunciation*, that is, the geo-political and body-political location of *the subject that speaks*. In Western philosophy and sciences the subject that speaks is always hidden, concealed, erased from the analysis” (2007, 213) (my emphasis). For Lauderdale and Harris (2008) a fundamental component

⁹ Cfr, Grosfoguel 2007; Suárez-Krabbe 2011; Dussel 1977.

of the work of Gunder Frank are his arguments and scholarship around capitalist accumulation and its connection to a naturalization of underdevelopment as a given experience for states at the semi-periphery and periphery. With this considerations, it is possible to confer a state sponsored terrorism and the construction of fear as a fundamental component of the modern State. (Oliverio 2008)

The *locus of enunciation*, for Suárez-Krabbe (2011), is relevant since the history, “the assumptions about (Western) civilization, and its attempts to impose the theory of progress” (Wallerstein 1999, 169) are inherited even in the critiques from Latin America¹⁰ to the status quo, the embedded paradigms of universalism, and more importantly, the hierarchization of the radicalism is structured within the social sciences by invisibilizing “[t]he contribution of racial/ethnic and feminist subaltern perspectives to epistemological questions” (Grosfoguel 2007,13). Brayboy, Gough, et al. (2011) refer to *epistemology* as “the ways of knowing of how peoples come to know what they know” different from *ontology*, which they understand as “how we engage the world” (Brayboy, Gough, et.al. 2011). In a more descriptive manner, *epistemology* is embedded in our processes as (social science researchers) the rituals of knowing, which include the transmission of knowledge within academia. On the other side, *ontologies* “are theories about the nature of existence. As such, they address the question of what can be known” (Pascale 2011, 3). For Alcoff (1992), the question to ponder about knowledge is “if all knowledge is ultimately dependent, at least in part, on some entities which are historically embedded, such as styles

of reasoning, theories of perception, conceptual schemes, and the like, then *isn't knowledge itself limited by and perhaps relative to particular historical locations?*" (241, my emphasis) Therefore, if epistemological concerns within academia are "particular to historical location," how can we convey the methodologies adopted by the transnational (academic) elites? How can we avoid the *epistemic violence* produced by the academic elites?

This line of inquiry is proposed by Suárez-Krabbe (2011), referring to the methodologies to be employed when making scientific arguments and propositions (including also the critical approaches, according to Suárez-Krabbe). An emphasis is placed on the particular case of the social sciences, which often focus their research on what is defined in scholarly discourse as *vulnerable populations*.¹¹ This scholarship rarely recognizes that the methodologies employed are not contributing to create a "diverse critical epistemic/ethical/political projects towards a pluriversal as oppose to a universal world" (Grosfoguel 2007, 212). In fact, the opposite is the case: there is a lack of recognition of the epistemic violence that we as researchers, engaged as actors of higher education institutions and research centers, are complicit in. For as Pascale (2010) points out, the "epistemological ground of social research developed, in part, as a legitimated form of knowledge about the 'Other' produced by and for those in power. Social research is itself a relation of power" (155). The philosophical foundations of social sciences developed alongside modern empires and the nation-state, and as such they are bound by

¹¹ It is important to notice that the idea of "vulnerable population" is a good example of a concept produced by Western scholars (and later mass-adopted) on a basis of a constructed normalcy, creating theoretical spaces of discussion of the desirable order and the production of bodies.

assumptions of dominion as well as national assumptions and experiences (della Porta and Keating, 2008). The epistemological ground of social research developed, in part, as a legitimated form of knowledge about “the Other” produced by and for those in power. Social research is itself a relation of power that produces (and is produced by) “domains of objects and rituals of truth” (Foucault, 1984).

In this case, the *locus of enunciation* in the context of creating (producing) methodologies outside the Eurocentric sphere would require accepting that Western critical perspectives and its authors have become canonical. By drawing on the work of Michel Foucault¹² as the center of the discussion, Suárez-Krabbe in her article “*Pasar por Quijano, Salvar a Foucault: Protección de Identidades Blancas y Decolonización*” (“Passing through Quijano, Saving Foucault: Protecting White Identities and Decolonization,” 2012) questions the mapping (referring to the geo and corpo-political metaphor)¹³ of knowledge production and the use of critical authors from the West, to legitimize the critiques and contributions to different disciplines, even if located in research institutions in the periphery. For Suárez-Krabbe, these *absences* are imminent to modern knowledge production within academia, the same that creates a *race for epistemology* (Chukwudi Eze 2008; Grosfoguel 2006). The imminent absences are both ontological and epistemological, while the embodiment of them is interwoven with the colonality of power. Hence, the scientific claims that have the intention to provide answers to social problems and the

¹² It is important to notice that Gargallo (2012) does not dismiss Foucault’s work or encourage his contributions to be rejected in the post/neocolonial context; she questions the use by scholars located in the (Global) South of critical authors from the Global North, as a way to legitimize their work within academia. Cfr, Suárez-Krabbe, Julia. “Passing through Quijano, saving Foucault. Protecting White Identities and Decolonization in Tabula Rasa,” No.16: 39-57, January-June 2012

¹³ See Maldonado-Torres (2004); Suárez-Krabbe (2011).

complexity of everyday life (Gordon 2006), and whose theoretical foundations and standpoints are based in Foucauldian studies, as Suárez-Krabbe emphasizes, has the risk to make silences of the knowledge production as De Sousa Santos (2007) observes.

Social scientists sometimes serve as co-producers of absences, which contribute to the establishment of a colonial discourse of supremacy based on the production of critical inquiries as well as an underlying racial superiority¹⁴, which in order to overcome it would require “shifting the geography of reason” and this in turn “implies a teleological suspension of western thought” (Gordon, 2006, 35).

The use of literacy programs in the colonial period in Latin America “influence the nature of the historical memory” (Rappaport 1993, 271). The literacy programs redefine the “cosmological, ecological, social and spatial referents as political through their inclusion in their administrative documents” (Rappaport 1993, 271). These observations are made by Joanne Rappaport in the context of indigenous populations in the Andes, and the relations that were produced by the Spanish colonial administration, which were based on the power of communication set down in writing; this is specially the case in legal documents such as land-titles, wills, royal decrees, and dispute records. The use of written records was brought by the colonial administration as “a new system of legal legitimatization of authority” (Rappaport 1993, 278). This system was not only based on the creation of advantages for the settler colonialist, but, for example, when dealing with

¹⁴ For a larger discussion on how the racialization of scholarship is experienced in Latin America, see Suárez-Krabbe (2013). For Suárez-Krabbe, the use of the discourse of human rights is a “utopia of global white elites. It is a utopia about humanity defined on the basis of a negation of the other. It is therefore an inherently racist utopia” (2013, 96). Although Suárez-Krabbe in this article does not address explicitly a question of methodologies, her argument is in the same vein of criticism, to the formation of “critical” elites within the Global North.

land titles, “the multivocality of place names and the very meaning of space were transformed as they were committed to paper” (Rappaport 1993, 83). The codification into words of corporeal experience used political, social, and religious referents “through the use of geographic and temporal space” (Rappaport 1993, 282).¹⁵ I am referring to the research made by Rappaport (1993) in the Andes (specifically in Colombia) since her referents to the ways of oral language, from Andean populations, was materialized into a legal outcome. This is not only in relation to the practicality of ordering the apparent chaos of the indigenous communities into categories but the evident need to (re)name persons (by giving them last names), (re)name places, and set new boundaries in time and space. This should be understood in relation to *how* the legitimization of human sciences and scientific knowledge-production (which has taken the place of and debunked any other forms of process of cognition) reproduces the same focus on the study of the *vestiges* of an indigenous past without considering those moments where the written and material evidence was produced by the creation of silences (Seshadri 2012) and mostly, based on the material evidence of an indigenous past. For Rappaport (2008, 1993), this evidence of *being there* also permeates in the construction and adoption of research methodologies, mostly based on Western scientific thought.

The work of Rappaport (2008; 1993) in relation to the conduction of research responds to and is part of a larger set of discussions in an array of disciplines and philosophical standings, mostly with the concern of research that draws beyond the Eurocentric paradigm. The different debates are based on the commonality of the

¹⁵ Cfr, Connerton 1989.

recognition of the insufficiency of the Western scientific methodologies and methods. I am particularly concerned with the discussions on decolonization and the ones that recognized the insufficiency of the methodologies adopted and developed within the academic sphere (Maldonado-Torres 2004; Mignolo 2002). More specifically, I am interested for the purposes of this paper in the adoption and development of methodologies that acknowledge the limits and insufficiency of Western science, in order to provide a reflection and an insight for the decolonization of methodologies within the social sciences. For Cajete (2000),

the Western science view and method of exploring the world starts with a detached ‘objective’ view to create a factual blueprint, a map of the world. Yet, the blueprint is not the world. *In its very design and methodology*. Western science estranges direct human experience in favor of a detached view. *This methodological estrangement, while producing amazing technology, also threatens the very modern life-world that supports it.* (24, my emphasis)

The use of methodologies that are outside the sphere of Western science are varied and are found on a diversity of *locus of enunciation* and the variations on the approaches to decolonization.¹⁶ For this reason, and considering the differences on the perspectives to decolonization of methodologies and research, I concentrate on the decolonization of research methodologies that not only focus on the incorporation of indigenous knowledges (Cajete 2000) but take as a standpoint the peripheral knowledges (knowledges in the margins) that have been incorporated within the social research. In this context it is important to make a special emphasis on how these “decolonizing methodologies” have

¹⁶ For a discussion on considering the self in the process of decolonization, see Suárez-Krabbe 2011; Asher 2009; Oliver 2004; De la Garza 2000; hooks, 1990; Lorde, 1984; Oliver, 2004; Pratt, 1984; Trinh, 1989.

incorporated in their research *decolonial thinking*, and mostly, the academic work of transnational scholars from the peripheries either located in the Global North or in the South, indistinctively, but considering the relations among the North and the South and the South-South relations¹⁷ (Suárez-Krabbe 2011). Gonzales (2003) comments on Pérez, stating that

a de-colonial voice is one which attempts to undo the constructions of colonizing ontologies and epistemologies. The function of such voice is to bring to awareness the functions and implication of the taken for granted realities in the colonialist discourse that surrounds us. Pérez, for instance, demonstrate the glaring absence of women from the writing about the history of Chicanos. She points out that for many years, even the idea of colonialism as the dominant force today was absent from the writing. This form of de-colonial voice is meta-ethnographic, in that that it talks about the writing of culture, and therefore establishes an abstracted representation of the issues, very valuable in raising the awareness of colonization.(80)

The decolonial voice within research methodologies is one that not only deconstructs the already-established and approved ontologies and epistemologies, but expands the scope of the anti-methodologies by including aesthetics and praxis outside the margins of the scientific standards, which include the aesthetic practices considered counter-hegemonic, for example indigenous literatures and languages (Boatca 2006).¹⁸ This is part of the process of “rethinking the human sciences” (Woodward 2009) and of

¹⁷ The South-South collaboration has been emphasized for many scholars, primarily feminist of colour, which is the case of the research of Debjani Chakravarty (2014), Manisha Desai (2007;2005) and the symposium from de Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (CLACSO) named “Sur-Sur” (South-South).

¹⁸ See also the projects on decolonization of space. For example, the *Decolonizing Architecture Art Residency* (<http://www.decolonizing.ps/site/about/>) and the Manual for Decolonization, published as part of the project, *Decolonizing Architecture: Scenarios for the Transformation of Israeli Settlements*, by Salottobuono (<http://www.salottobuono.net/projects.shtml> and <http://www.a--s--a--p.com/manual-of-decolonization>) Also the project by Teddy Cruz, Political Equator, questions the spatiality and the political implications of “mapping” in a post 9/11 era. For a more comprehensive list and examples of artistic projects on spatiality and aesthetics, see the Archive for Spatial Aesthetics and Praxis, <http://www.a--s--a--p.com/about>.

“the decentering of the geopolitical subject” (Aravamudan 2012). With this, we can consider a “bankruptcy of the epistemes/ontologies” and in some cases “anti-method militant methodologies and pedagogies”¹⁹

I focus particularly on *decolonial thinking* from Latin America and from scholars, activists and artists who are originally from this geographical location, and those who are located in different parts of the world but are working on and for a decolonial epistemic dialogue (Suárez-Krabbe 2008; Escobar 2007; Mignolo 2001). Their positionality emphasizes the relevance of discussing the decolonization of research methodologies considering the *locus of enunciation* and the *situated knowledges* (Haraway 1988). In the specific case of Latin American epistemologies (Mendieta and Castro-Gómez 1998; Moreiras 1998), either produced in Latin America itself or outside the region by scholars from Latin America, the research methodologies produced did not distance itself completely from other critiques of philosophy of science, epistemology, methods and methodologies made by feminist theorist, Critical Indigenous Research Methodologies (CRIM), Black studies, Chicana feminist scholars, postcolonial theorist, critical race studies, cultural studies, science studies. All of these trajectories and genealogies have several commonalities in relation to the critique of “androcentric, economically advantaged, racist, Eurocentric, and heterosexist conceptual frameworks [which] ensured systematic ignorance and error about not only lives of the oppressed, but also the live of the oppressors and this about how nature and social relations in general worked” (Harding 2004, 5) As Harding observes, an emphasis on non-Western knowledges is intended to

¹⁹ This concept of “bankruptcy of epistemes/ontologies” was introduced to me by Dr. Alan Gomez.

provide other cosmologies and ontologies (Harding 2011; 2006; 2004, Blaser 2013), challenging the spaces of the visible and the enunciable (Deleuze and Guattari 1995; Moreiras 1998) and the rise of an *oppositional consciousness*—as Chela Sandoval (1991) pointed out.

A growing and significant segment of Latin American scholars have devoted their work to studies of the “other,” alterity, subaltern studies, and postcoloniality. They discuss these in different realms and disciplines, including Latin American thought and decolonial epistemologies. This dialogue among the scholars has been difficult since the construction of the individual and the racialization and genderization of the Latin American subject already includes the author who enunciates, writes, and participates in the academic structure, and who not only reproduces but is also part of the world system and the attendant structures of epistemological power. As Gargallo Celentani emphasizes (2012), the scholar has to recognize herself-himself as a racialized, gendered, and nationed subject in the context of the violence implicated in the production and disciplinary practices of knowledge creation/production. Perhaps most importantly, s/he needs to recognize the *positionality* of the scholar, and the exclusion of *otros saberes* (other knowledges) and other forms of representation. For example, Gargallo Celentani (2012) refers to the exclusion, not only that women within academia have experienced, but how women who are part of academia do not respect the creative moments of the women who are not part of the academic structure; “the Latin American feminist scholars, to the female artist that have confronted and defied visually with the word, with their bodies exposed to society have been *ninguneadas*, the have made them no one [they have been treated as ‘nobodies’] by the female scholars with institutional power” (Gargallo Celentani, 2011).

The use of knowledge as power and the use of la *palabra escrita*²⁰ (the written word) as a form of subjection is not new and has been discussed from different disciplines, including activist work and artistic endeavors.²¹ This type of subjection is part of a civilizational paradigm, which encompasses the paradigm of modernity. The cultural diversity of the world has been promoted, discussed, and even accepted as a valid discussion, but “the same cannot be said of the recognition of the *epistemological diversity of the world*, that is, of the diversity of knowledge systems underlying *the practices of different social groups across the globe*” (De Sousa Santos; Arriscado Nune and Meneses 2007, xviii, my emphasis). If the practices of the different groups in the world are not recognized and (intentionally) visibilized, then said decolonization (including the research) and critical analysis of the societal problems is not even halfway to be completed, but in fact instead may end up reproducing the power structures within academic research and scientific inquiry. And even if the research complies with the institutional requirements (e.g., IRB, Belmont Report, to name a few) the decolonial endeavor is of limited value if the researcher/author does not question his/her epistemological alliances and ascriptions²² (Pascale 2001; Harding 2004; Grande 2006; Denzin and Giardina 2006; Castro Gómez, Guardiola-Rivera and Millán de Benavides 1999; Wallerstein 1999; 1997; Quijano 2000).

It is in this context of social movements in Latin America that we must emphasize the decolonization and *depatriarchalization* of the state, the de-institutionalization of knowledge and the arts, the critiques of (theories) of modernity as well as a critique of the

²⁰ In Chapter 5, I discuss and analyze contemporary Mexican indigenous literature and its connections to indigenous cosmologies and genderization of nature.

²¹ Indigenous literatures are discussed in Chapter 5.

²² Cfr, Zuberi and Bonilla Silva, 2008.

cultural imperialism and its (disciplinary practices), which demand a dialogue which brings “global cognitive justice” (De Sousa Santos, Arriscado Nune, and Meneses 2007, xviii) and a decolonization of research.

In the following section I will discuss and analyze the commitment of scholars, activist and artist for “an emancipatory, non-relativistic, cosmopolitan ecology of knowledges” (De Sousa Santos 2007, xiv). This is in the form of creating research methodologies that are part of “a collaborative, performative social science research model that makes the research responsible not to a removed discipline (or institution), but to those he or she studies” (Denzin and Giardina 2006, 35). Specifically I refer to the decolonial methodologies, based on postcolonial theories and reflections, as well as artistic contributions from a diversity of loci of enunciation.

Decolonizing Research Methodologies

The use of *decolonial thinking* (Mignolo, 2002; Gargallo Celentani 2012) for emancipatory purposes within research in the social sciences has been approached from different angles. Specifically, I refer in this section to the one approach by scholars that employ qualitative research as their method (to which I also adhere) while also using decolonizing methodologies to their research. Since “all scientific claims are relative to their paradigmatic frameworks which makes it impossible to verify or falsify any claim from outside of the framework” (Kuhn in Pascale, 2011, 140), research methodologies that adopt decolonization find a difficult path to “prove themselves” within critical qualitative research (Pascale 2010; Denzin 2009; Wenn, Weisntein, and Foard 2006). Thus, in the context of postcolonial and subaltern studies in Latin America, this contests the idealistic

perception that modernization and secularization has been achieved as a civilizatory (almost global) endeavor. It is not the “death of man,” or the critiques to the end of the configuration of the *modern subject*, nor the end of history (Fukuyama 1992), as postmodernism assumes, that evidences the need for a different science and alternate worlds of knowing, existing, and naming. For Mendieta (1998), postmodernism makes a redemptive territorialization and de-territorialization under the same terms of space and time of modernity, not allowing and nullifying the naming, the enunciation of anything that was outside the project of modernity. The topologies, chronologies and cartographies of knowledge belonging to the project of modernity (including its different interpretations) (Walsh, 2007; Mendieta 1995; 1998) are contested by postcolonial theorists, and as discussed by Sandro Castro-Gomez, (1998) this is a critique of the dominant role of knowledge and reason, including the systems of expert knowledge for the configuration of geopolitical relations.²³ As Ortega (2011) observes, these critiques are “responses to the disciplinary crisis and the failure of metanarratives,” which are not new for Latin America (271).

There is a rupture within Latin American social sciences in relation to the research produced and the research encouraged to be conducted and written. This epistemological and ontological breakdown (Mendieta 1998) is in relation to the paradigm of modernity and its legacy as an ideological apparatus in Latin America. Hence, conducting social research from a Latin Americanist postcolonial perspective results in more than a methodological discussion of the social science research, instead emphasizing questions of

²³ Cfr, Wallerstein, Immanuel. 2004. *The Uncertainties of Knowledge* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

the power exercised over the subjects of the research. It is not only a matter of compliance with the ethics of research (Denzin 2003) but on the disciplining of the bodies within the margins of the research process.

Decolonial Thinking and Social Science Research

In order to discuss how the social research is based on a *decolonial methodology*, it requires first a discussion of a decolonial perspective. According to Grosfoguel, (2011) the decolonial epistemic perspective need to consider the following conditions:

- a) Expand the “canon of thought,” including the Left Western canon.²⁴
- b) A truly universal decolonial perspective cannot be based on an abstract universal (one particular that raises itself as universal global design), *but would have to be the result of the critical dialogue between diverse critical epistemic/ethical/political projects toward a pluriversal as opposed to a universal world.*
- c) That decolonization of knowledge would require taking seriously the epistemic perspective/cosmologies/insights of critical thinkers from the Global South, i.e., thinking from and with subalternized racial/ethnic/sexual spaces and bodies.

The colonial discourse, as previously stated, conditions the social sciences and humanities in postcolonial sites as part of “a process of systematic fragmentations which can still be seen in the disciplinary makeup of the indigenous world: bones, mummies and skulls to the museums, art work to private collectors, language to linguistics, ‘customs’ to anthropologists, beliefs and behaviors to psychology” (Smith 2012, 29). Thus, the decolonial thinking in Latin America challenges the Eurocentrism (Dussel 2000)

²⁴ For Left Western Canon, I refer to mostly hegemonic, critical theorists. Some of the scholarship in the Global South has adopted the Left Western Canon as the basis for their critical approaches. On the other hand, feminist scholars, such as Yuderky Espinosa Minoso and Ochy Curiel, have critiqued this perspective by exposing the relation of epistemological dependency involved. Without excluding the Global North’s intellectual contribution to the development of the Global South’s critical thought, the South’s dependency on what has been produced (including critical perspectives) has perpetuated a dependency that has prompted and allowed the existence of neglected knowledges.

institutionalized in the curricula, in the mapping of territories that are researched and appropriated as new conceptualizations of the unknown²⁵ and the interpretation of non-Western cultures. As expressed by Smith (2012) “the term research is inextricable linked to European imperialism and capitalism” (2). Thus, in order to challenge the established paradigms in social research, scholars using decolonial methodology must question and challenge the normalization of truth and reality, which are linked to the epistemological foundations of social research (Pascale 2008; Denzin 2003).

I argue that the development of decolonizing methodologies needs to respond to a Latin American context and acknowledge that a process of decolonization “does not mean a total rejection of all theory or research of Western knowledge” (41). Hence, my analysis for a decolonial methodology is informed by the work of indigenous scholars; decolonial feminist perspectives, such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), Marie Battiste (2000a; 2002), Sandy Grande (2004; 2008), Gregory Cajete (1999), Angela Cavender Wilson, and Michael Yellow Bird (2005), specifically their discussions of Western research and appropriation of indigenous knowledges.

Knowledge and the Political Ontological Question

Within decolonial social science research and the incorporation of non-human actors and non-hegemonic political ontologies is the question of how to incorporate them in social science research and integrate them into concepts of justice and autonomy.

²⁵ See Blanco Wells, Gustavo (2009) for a discussion on *La Patagonia Chilena* and the making of special identities and the mercantilization of the landscape through an identity related to narratives of the unknown and the discovery of a mythical region.

The presence of non-human agents in the “political life of humans” implied an array of different perspectives from the recognition of a simple agency to the value of the non-human agent in contraposition to its human counterpart (Lamberti 2014, de Castro 1998). Hence, non-human agency, personhood, and its material relations find a fruitful space for discussion within environmental justice, genderization of nature, linguistic rights, and other instances where justice cases involve intangible and non-human entities and non-human matter, which can include territories, places, neglected spaces and geographies.

What is different in cases dealing with *ontological conflicts* (Blaser 2013) is where the coloniality of power manifests on the hegemonization of a “single reality out there,” as commented by Blaser. Hence, there is the relevance of describing and connecting “other” experiences and ways of being beyond an ethnographic account of certain people. For example, in Chapters 3 and 4, I discuss the visuality of political ontologies outside the coloniality of power in relation to an ontological construct in Latin America, such as mestizaje (discussed on Chapter 2). Therefore, if within environmental justice conflicts exists *ontological conflicts*, we can say that the effects of colonialism in structuring a specific type of unequal modernity for both the Global North and the Global South may result in direct confrontations, *material* consequences, and the reenactment of discourses of development, science, and technology.²⁶

Discussing the *intangible* in the context of this research (and as a continuum to similar research) is in the intersection of both environmental justice movements and the knowledge produced and disseminated by both environmental activists and people

²⁶ The material consequences of mestizaje are discussed more extensively in Chapter 2. For a discussion on the political ecological consequences and its intersections of mestizaje with corporeality.

considered experts in their area of research, specifically in relation to gender, the environment, indigenous cosmologies, and non-human personhood (de la Cadena 2010, Kirksey, S. & Helmreich 2010, de Castro 1998).²⁷ For some, *expert knowledge* is presented as one of the highest manifestations of certainty and veracity, validated through the scientific method. One major characteristic of expert knowledge is that it is interpreted as a neutral entity, aside from any political interest. For example, a recurrent “colonial encounter” (Asad 1975) with the *intangible* and non-human personhood is in cases where indigenous cosmologies are in the midst of developmentalist projects. Different from other types of resistance, indigenous environmental movements open up a discussion on the “modern ontological assumption” (Blaser 2013) of the hierarchies of the experiences and knowledges of non-imperial/settler societies. The relation of nature and gender is discussed throughout this research, and it is founded on ecofeminist perspectives, precarization of life and labor, feminist perspectives on science and technology, as well as knowledges based on field research. As part of a framework to study “the human” and the use of the term within environmental justice research, I have centered my discussions on how anthropocentric perspectives have created a space of contention within the political economy of capitalist societies.

A connection for social justice research, the intangible, and non-human personhood is the incommensurability of different realities within the modern/colonial/heterosexual/capitalist/patriarchal system, as Lugones (2013) describes it.

²⁷ It is important to notice that as part of the discussions on emancipation and autonomy of marginalized populations, there is an oversight on Afrocentric knowledges in Latin America.

Particularly, I see these discussions in a broader discussion within a decaying world system. Regarding the presence in global politics of non-humans, the work of Cudworth and Hobden (2013; 2011) has pointed out the necessity of a deeper and expansive understanding of the consequences of defining “the environment” separated from “the human,” since its implications are also reflected in international environmental conflicts. For some scholars and activists, these critical perspectives *beyond the human* are a contestation to anthropocentric perspectives, founded mainly on the premise of a hierarchical relationship of human over savage, the same perspective that allowed the foundation of settler colonial societies and the domination, displacement and relationships of subordination by imperial states²⁸ (Youatt 2014).

The Intangible, the Human and Non-Human in Justice Research

Different conditions of domination define the approaches by which social scientists define what is being researched, and in other cases if it is “worth” researching. While social science, in pursuit of justice, is grounded on theories of freedom and autonomy, Hames-Garcia (2004) presents a useful critique that can help to build a framework for a decolonial research methods that include non-human personhood. I base my approach and framework on how to delineate a research project that has the intention of the pursuit of justice through discussions on the relationship of subordinate perspectives (Hames-Garcia 2004, xlvi) or subordinated knowledges²⁹ with critical dominant perspectives, mostly considered

²⁸ These arguments are later explored in Chapters 3 and 4.

²⁹ Subordinated knowledges are also connected to the denial of the existence of other forms of life, experiences, etc.

expertise and *expert knowledge*. They have a different standing within the social sciences, since they are considered valid and more prone to certainty than research based on the experiences of people and knowledges that have been constructed from liminal spaces.

One of the main concerns with decolonial research is to provide a series of *uncoverings* by explaining the *political ontologies* that are contested in social conflicts. For this reason, in this research I explore the connection of a non-human entity, such as the maize and its relations to an intangible *presence* such as *mestiza*.³⁰ Hence, engaging in *decolonial research methods*³¹ must integrate questions of non-human personhood, and how these are part of a critical approach to the construction of “the human” and the consequences for social science research.

In this research, I ask how non-human presence and personhood is framed, discussed and defended. There are certain conditions that are needed in order to engage in a decolonial research that includes unconventional agents. I present certain conditions that I have found useful and appropriate to conduct social justice research while also incorporating non-human personhood.

Expert Knowledge and the Constitutive Other

³⁰ One of the axes of this research is the function of *mestizaje* (and its neglected parts of indigeneity and Blackness).

³¹ I believe that a methodological ground on decoloniality and the study of the intangible would prompt discussions on how to provide methodological grounds within social science research for the study of the less visible, the purposely ignored and denied, including what has been discarded. The problem with the study of the intangible and non-human personhood, besides that is not easily recognizable, visible, palpable (but yet people live in and for it), is that the process of recognition itself becomes a matter of a political ontology.

Before *expert knowledge* (Miller 2001; Jassanoff 2004) acknowledged the environmental crisis and questioned the use of natural resources and the massive waste generated by production of unnecessary goods while producing material “necessities” (Harvey 2005), the communities who shared a history of occupation by colonialism and settler colonialism (Morgensen 2011) alarmed about the continued ethnocide and ecocide, the imposition of economic systems, the re-creation of spaces and geographies, the delineation of populations into races, and the delimitation of natural spaces by claiming sovereignty, had already created ways to survive (Escobar 2007; Fanon 2007; Césaire 1972). By *expert knowledge* it is understood as the knowledge created through the idea that it is scientific expertise that has served to name *things* and *beings*, the classification and enunciation of the *self*, and the construction and delimitation of the *individual*.

An example of how expert knowledge functions within the *coloniality of power* is the case of La Patagonia as a (made) mythological terrain, an inhospitable territory, the last frontier of the *American Continent*. La Patagonia was made to be a space where “the human” can encounter wilderness and a “natural” frontier. I used this example based on the work of Blanco Wells (2009), *La Reinención de la Patagonia: Gente, Mitos, Mercancías y la Continua Apropiación del Territorio* (The Reinvention of La Patagonia: People, Myths, Merchandise and the Continuous Appropriation of the Territory), in which he provides a discussion on the making of La Patagonia as a territory that has been a subject of Western interpretations in different contexts and the use of scientific expertise to define and classify the natural space; it was described in the form of scientific discoveries of its

natural space and description of the Patagonian culture³². For Blanco Wells, the “globalization of La Patagonia” includes the appropriation of different zones for fishing and establishing a salmon industry; this division of the land was state-mandated (since 1920), as the government distributed and gave away the land to fishing companies.³³ The scientific expertise, in the case of the fishing companies, is the one based on paradigms of development, but also on the colonial discourse of the making of productive land of the inhospitable, and the use of resources available in the region. A similar case is the process of “greening” La Patagonia by using programs of privatization of some areas, with the intervention of foreign expert groups of natural conservation. According to Blanco Wells, the presence of scientist hired by the interest groups (both Chilean and foreign) is based on the mercantilization of La Patagonia to promote its tourism, through the use of a untouchable, private space, separate from the human, and preserved through scientific expertise. The *expert knowledge* is validated through Western scientific methodologies, and reaffirms the appropriation of land (in the case of La Patagonia), foreign policy (mapping and making cartographies of danger), and the establishment of international organizations based on scientific expertise to solve and assist in global problems (Miller 2004).

Expert knowledge is commonly used to address risk and crisis (Beck 1992) from peace and ethnic conflict to drug wars; expert knowledge from the West has for some

³² According to Alan E. Gomez, these Latin American critiques “this echoes the literature on the US American west, the myths and mythmaking, as well as some of the counter-narratives” and “It becomes a place (historiography on the west) where the democratic fascist dialectic works out – white supremacy anti-blackness coupled with a divine, benevolent, not so humble democratic Christian zeal” (Gomez 2013).

³³ This division is in the region of Aysén, in the Chilean side.

authors intensified matters of domestic and global security (Jasanoff 2004) but has expanded to other crises such as pandemics, forcibly displaced people, and the “taming of the unknown by the state” (Aradau and Van Munster 2008, 29). Thus, the construction of the idea of disorderly behavior is attended by and analyzed through the lens of expert knowledge, which delineates and classifies those manifestations of chaos. Also, the classification of alternative or non-orthodox narrations and oral histories of historical accounts and happening is reflected in the use of orality (*la oralidad*) and *testimonio* (Beverly 2000; Moreiras 1998; Cusicanqui 1990) in Latin America has been expressed as a counter-narrative of the expert knowledge in deliberations about the veracity of mostly embodied experiences of state violence. (Smith 2012)

The privatization of life through scientific expertise, as expressed by Smith (2012), is one of the uses of science through claiming advances for the entire society. As observed by Vandana Shiva (2005), “life” is valued and framed under the assumption that societies are structured under a free market economy, and that the democratization of science is through the use of the same paradigms (Castro-Gómez 1996).³⁴

Definition of “Human” and Non-Human Life

The definition and classification of human and non-human life by using expert knowledge involves the debunking of non-Western views of the environment and nature through a Eurocentric logic. The purpose of developing a decolonial methodology is to not only evidence the colonial discourses of the exercise of power; but also, as Alejandro Haber

³⁴ Although I focus in this chapter (and in this research) on indigenous peoples of the Americas, it is important to notice and recognize that Afrocentric perspectives in the Americas have been relegated. For example, see the work of Lewis Gordon (1997; 1995a; 1995b; 1983).

(2012) suggests, it is needed to “un-discipline the methodology,” mostly through the inclusion of non-academic intellectual endeavors.

Some considerations to keep in mind and reflect upon while engaging in critical social science research are the following:

- The conceptualization of the *human* is part of a masculinist, patriarchal, colonial perspective.
- To critically apply the term of *human* in decolonial and/or postcolonial theory.
- Consider the material and corporeal implications of a system that imposes a concept of “the human.”
- Include a discussion on decolonial feminist perspectives that allow non-human actors and non-conventional subjects of research.

In the next chapters, I present a study and discussion on how indigenous cosmovisions (and cosmopolitics) and socio-environmental depredation are interwoven in anthropocentric perspectives of developmentalism, commodification of nature, genderization of the economy, and state-sponsored terrorism. With this, I offer an explanation and a proposal to understand the complexity of socio-environmental conflicts and its relation to the modern/colonial system.

Chapter 2

Mestizaje and Race in Mexico as a Paradigm of the Body

To write about *mestizaje* requires inquiry into questions fundamental to paradigms upon which discourses surrounding race and culture in the Americas have been built. This is not an easy endeavor, primarily because it opens up a set of queries for both the writer and the audience that includes questioning of the subject of inquiry itself, the human experience, and the embodied experience of patriarchalism and oppression. The success of *mestizaje* in the Mexican case is a success more by omission than erasure. If the body is something tangible and real, some bodies are endangered and naturalized, while others are placed as the embodiment of a progression toward a perfected body, the *difference* of the body, and “its projection of its boundaries” (Grosz 1994, 117), its limits, its deficiencies and its inscriptions. The embodiment of coloniality in Mexico is represented through the ideology of *mestizaje*; for *mestizaje* the body is the material representation of a new cultural product (Grosz 1994, 23). A critical analysis of *mestizaje* is mostly based on the material conditions of Mexican society (and other parts of the American continent) and the power relations based on racial and ethnic differentiation. The *body* as a primary center of this critical analysis, yet at the end of these queries a question remains, namely: after all these critiques and discussions, what is to follow? Is there something *substantial, palpable and sensible* in/from *mestizaje*? In this chapter I will provide some answers to these questions as a starting point for a more transdisciplinary discussion; I will also discuss and critique some of the most fundamental paradigms about corporeality and *nature*, and about *mestizaje* and indigeneity. This inquiry seeks to open a dialogue between the established disciplines of scientific modernity and the so-called “non-scientific” knowledges.

In the first part of this chapter I begin with a discussion about how *mestizaje* in Mexico has played an essential part not only in the nation-building processes and the endurance of a settler-colonial order, but also in the mediation between the nation and the production of the body—or, as Susan Bordo points out, the “practical body”, which “operates as a metaphor for culture” (Bordo 1989, 13) and praxis in the later settler-colonial state.³⁵ In the second section of this essay, I incorporate the scholarship on material feminisms, the so-called *material turn* (Alaimo 2008, 2010; Hekman 2008; Grosz 1994), into the discussion of how the body of “*la mestiza*” has been theorized in the *absence* of any significant conceptualization of *mestizaje* that would recognize the African (and/or Black) presence in the Mexican national imaginary. The recognition of “African” presence in Mexico not only challenges the concept of *mestizaje* that has already been placed under scrutiny (Moreno Figueroa 2007), but reclaims a revision of the fundamental pillars of the Mexican nation and its symbolic pride concerning an “indigenous past” that concomitantly executes and banishes its indigenous presence (Gutiérrez Chong 2001), while also seeking to erase the legacies of slavery. It is necessary to consider the “body” and *mestizaje* as central paradigms that constitute Latin America’s (post) coloniality and the creation of racial paradigms (Mignolo 2000; Moraña et al. 2008, 2; Quijano 2008). In the third part of this essay I discuss how the process of erasure of the corporeal representation accompanied a deeper and more aggressive process of “vanishing” through *castellanización*,³⁶ a complex and continuous process that, as Montemayor (2008) notes, has consisted in various forms

³⁵ Important to notice that the establishment of a settler-colonial state to which I refer in this essay is not limited to social and political institutions, but also includes the establishment of scientific paradigms.

of domination through acculturation, subjugation, and genocide. At the end of this essay I present as a conclusion a set of questionings about the materiality of *mestizaje* and its consequences in the *material world* (considering the *material turn*) and the possibilities of engaging in an academic endeavor that recognizes the different existences and absences where the academic underpinnings have not been sufficient, and when the space of apparent inexistence does not allow the re-creation of new concepts and ideas. The more the human experience is recognized to be complex (Gordon 2008), the more pressing the need is to welcome back the peripheral memories and to locate the *body* within the material relations.

The *Mestizo* Body: Materiality and Race

As a starting point, I draw on Rosario Castellanos's novel, *Balún Canan* (1957). In a rather revealing passage, the *criolla*³⁷ daughter of an *hacendado*³⁸, after spilling the milk over the table at breakfast, expresses her desire to drink coffee like her indigenous *nana*, and is met by the following response from the latter: “*You are going to become an india.*” The girl's reaction is fear: “*Her threat overwhelms me. Since tomorrow morning, the milk will never be spilled again*” (Castellanos, 1995, my emphases). Being overwhelmed by a potential transformation from *criolla* to *india* (as a result of drinking black coffee) reflects the racial dynamics at the time of the Mexican Revolution, much of which persists to this day in Mexico and many other parts of the Americas.

³⁷ *Criolla* and *criollo* are the Spanish terms used to refer to persons of exclusively (or very predominantly) European ancestry born in the Americas.

³⁸ *Hacendado* refers to a landowner of large properties. The term is historically associated with privileged groups of settler colonizers that held (sometimes still hold) large estates.

This potential change from *criolla* to *india*, while fictitious, represents and re-creates³⁹ what is rendered unimaginable under the dominant order: a corporeal transition from a *criollo* body to an *indigenous* body. The very possibility of this transition results in an overwhelming threat not only to the bodies involved but to those ‘*rostros negados*’—the denied faces (Bonfil Batalla 1989) that sustain the haciendas with their labor but are denied the spaces for recognition and emancipation within the *haciendas*, a system that sustains the reproduction of the *hacendados* and their kin. What is intriguing and worth discussing is that Castellanos is situating the reader in a ground that is common to those who are inheritors of the colonial condition: the fear of “becoming” *india*, of the transformation, the connection, and the conversion to an indigenous body. It is this questioning of the production of bodies that concerns material feminists and postcolonial and subaltern studies, which is crucial in the establishment of an interdisciplinary dialogue that deconstructs the discourse-reality dichotomy, in other words, a dialogue that “redefine[s] the materiality that informed socialist feminism in discursive terms” (Hekman 2008, 86). In the case of postcolonial studies and subaltern studies, there is not an unified voice about the insufficiency of postcolonialism, subaltern studies, and the critiques from within. As Chowdhry and Nair (2004) suggest, postcolonial studies have spent too much time on an emphasis on traditional neo-Marxist scholarship that emphasizes the role of the “underdevelopment” and “peripheralization” of the Third World and the global distribution of wealth as the factors perpetuating the already-existing differences between the sectors of the global economy. In the case of *mestizaje*, a non-state possibility (Chowdhry and Nair 2004) is the body as the *primary subject*, the genderization and sexing of the corporeal, the

³⁹ Guillermo Bonfil Batalla in “México Profundo: Una Civilización Negada.”

naturalization, and *thingnification* of the human are subjects of inquiry for postcolonial and subaltern studies and new materialisms (material feminist and/or the material turn).

The postcolonial question centers on the “subaltern” as the pillar for its analysis (Guha 2001), emphasizing their “*thingnification*,” as Aimé Césaire points out. This is reflected in that through coloniality, “cultures [are] trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary possibilities wiped out” (Césaire 1972, 21). For Césaire, the process of destroying cultures is akin to that of building a nation; for him “the nation is a bourgeois phenomenon” (Césaire 1972, 57). For Natividad Gutiérrez Chong, on the other hand, the nation is based on domination of the colonial elites over other civilizations, creating national myths sustained by an educational system (Gutierrez Chong 2001) and a set of historically manufactured “facts” that support the establishment of a settler-colonial elite.

The “mestizo race” and “mestizo” identity (Castellanos Guerrero and Sandoval 1998) emerged as a colonial category along with the caste system, or *sistema de castas* (Tirica 2008), in which the mestizo “occupied a distinct juridical and fiscal identity within the colonial administration and were ambiguously positioned with respect to prevailing notions of purity, understood here as a matter of both race and religion, a matter of ‘limpieza de sangre,’” (237) or purity of blood. Eventually, the caste system was formally dismantled through a shallow process of de jure “independence” (Bonfil Batalla 2010). What followed was a new racial national project within the settler-colonial state, a project

built on the creation of three categories formed with the intention to function as racial identifiers: *criollo* or *blanco*⁴⁰, *india/indio*, and *mestiza/mestizo*.

The use of *mestizaje* is not limited as a metaphor for the *body*—it is an embodiment of the process of colonization and a somatization of corporeal inferiority (Césaire 1972; Fanon 1968; Alonso 2004). This operates through a racialization of the *pueblos*⁴¹ (Montemayor 2008) that goes beyond a mere concept that embraces “mixed-race discourses” (See Moreno Figueroa 2007); it creates spaces of epistemological and ontological negation (Montemayor 2008, 32) that transcend certain space and time limitations.

These paradigms have been shaped by the process that O’Gorman identifies as “the making,” i.e., the Eurocentric manufacturing of the discovery of America (O’Gorman 1998; Montemayor 2008). This process provided Europe a place at the center of global cartographies, which constructed its identity as an idea derived from a higher degree of reason. This “instituted modernity” is reflected in “the cartography, history, law [and] theology [which] contributed to define both American otherness and modern (colonial) rationality” (Moraña et al. 2008, 8). This Eurocentric and patriarchal rationality (Sandilands 1999, 24; Quijano 2008; Castro Gómez 2008; Montemayor 2000; Guillermo Bonfil Batalla 1995; Dussel 2000) in this case refers to the type of knowledge, and the epistemology of that knowledge that “was made globally hegemonic, colonizing, and that purportedly overcame other previous or different conceptual formations and their

⁴⁰ “*Blanco*” is Spanish for “white”.

⁴¹ *Pueblos* can refer concomitantly or separately to villages, cultures, and peasant groups or indigenous groups, or peoples that may be also of mixed race. Discourses concerning “pueblos” can be varied, complex, and differentiated according to context and with regard to the power relations involved.

respective concrete knowledges” (Quijano 2008, 197). These processes permeated and have had a direct connection to the coloniality of power and its exercise in the humanistic sciences⁴² (see Said 1994); they too have defined the non-Western cultures as receptors of the knowledge and innovations of Western culture (Castro-Gómez 2008). According to Quijano (2008), the coloniality of power is constituted by “the classification and reclassification of the planet’s population, an operation in which the concept of culture (primitive, stages of development, Europe as the norm) and an epistemological perspective from which to articulate the meaning and the profile of the new matrix of power from out of which the new production of knowledge could be channeled.”⁴³

In other words, the coloniality of power defines the order of things (Foucault 2012), i.e., their classification—in this case, a racial/ethnic classification (Quijano 2000, 342). The Eurocentric hegemony for Quijano is exercised through a capitalist rationality, including a geocultural experience, embracing the measure, quantification, and naturalization of the classification and experiences within this Eurocentric rationality. The material relations that were naturalized within the capitalist framework were based on a classification of the bodies. For Quijano, Latin America has been a site where thinkers and activists have contested this Eurocentric form of producing knowledge, the most well-known critique being initiated by Raul Prebisch’s concept of center and periphery (1971; 1981), which later became widespread and expanded by Immanuel Wallerstein (world-systems analysis) (1999). In these perspectives, the peripheries were the colonized sites (some of them with

⁴² For a discussion of the relation of humanistic science and Orientalism and the relationship of it with Western hegemony, see Said 1994; Dussel 1995.

⁴³ Castro-Klaren 2008, 133, Cf. Mignolo 2000.

reminiscences of their colonial past, in the form of settler colonialism) and the dynamics were set within political economic relations. The peripheries, according to Wallerstein (1999), would result in labor providers and eventually reinforce their dependency on the center (core nations). This perspective—along with the dependency theory of such other authors as Andre Gunder Frank (1996), Theotonio dos Santos (1970; 1974; 1990; 2010), Cardoso and Faletto (1979), and Furtado (1976; 1984; 1998)—represented a breaking point in the paradigm that enabled Latin American economists to perceive the “mode of production” and geopolitics as relations within the realm of the material, where the exercise of power is directly related to the division of labor. For Quijano (2000), it is necessary to emphasize the body as the center of the material and to problematize the construction of knowledge and its normalization:

Sugiero un camino de indagación: porque implica algo muy material, el ‘cuerpo’ humano. **La ‘corporalidad’ es el nivel decisivo de las relaciones de poder. En la explotación, es el ‘cuerpo’ el que es usado y consumido** en el trabajo, y en la mayor parte del mundo, en la pobreza, en el hambre, la malnutrición, en la enfermedad. Es el ‘cuerpo’ el implicado en el castigo, en la represión, en las torturas y en las masacres.

I suggest a way for inquiry: because this implies something really material, the human “body.” **The “corporeality” is the decisive level of power relations. Within the exploitation, it is the “body” that it is used and consume in the job,** and for the vast majority of world, the same happens with poverty, hunger, malnourishment and sickness. It is the body that is implied in the punishment, repression, tortures, and massacres. (380) (my translation, my emphasis)

The “body” for Quijano (1999; 2000) is an essential part of the mode of production and the subjectivities that derived from it because “The body was and could be nothing but an object of knowledge” (Quijano 2000, 555). The traditional (mostly Latin American)

perspectives on material relations are challenged in Quijano's later work (1999, 2000), in which, in addition to critiquing the Cartesian logic (separation of reason/subject and body) and the production of the *nobody*, he expands his own work by pointing to the need to focus on the subjugation and production of bodies. Several authors have previously focused on the *body* as the center of inquiry, such as Foucault, Beauvoir, Fanon, Césaire, Cisoux, and de Lauretis. However, within the discipline of Latin American political economy, Quijano's argument has been groundbreaking, representing a collapse of the definition of and approximation to the problem (echoing Deleuze) of the *material relations* (mostly defined by the material relations, engaging in different dynamics of power), where social classification, controlled labor, the creation of a patriarchal system, control and the making of nature, the human and the non-human were analyzed under a delimited problem and paradigm.

What Quijano (2006) proposes is similar to the new materialisms or material feminisms, in which the material feminisms (based on the Marxist perspective of the modes of production) and the new materialism/material turn expand the feminist perspectives on material dialectics and “reconstructs the feminist discourse of the body” (Bordo 1989, 2008). The emerging models of material feminism redefine the body as the locus only of cultural production—by integrating new problems, material feminism centers the human body as the locus (Alaimo 2010) but expands it by integrating nonhuman agents (and redefining agency) into the making of the world. As Alaimo (2011) points out:

A material feminist critique would point out the gender dichotomies lurking in Ballard's mind/body dualism **and examine how the wish to be free of the vulnerable (mother's) body betrays an epistemology that distances and supposedly protects the masculine, transcendent knower from the realities,**

complications, and risks of the material world. The fantasy of masculinist knowledge, of control over the depths of the ocean, relies upon the projection of corporeality onto the womb-like submersibles where their umbilical-cord tethers. (281, my emphasis)

The mind-body dualism is treated by Quijano and Alaimo in different realms as a strategy to bring new intellectual resources for deconstruction. For Grosz (2002), however, the new strategies and projects for a deconstruction

must bring with them **new intellectual resources** to be used in such a labor – new concepts, arguments and conclusions. Concepts need to be as inventive as the strategies they engender, and **they need to wrench terms from previous regimes and alignments of domination for we cannot always rely on the terms provided by dominant discourses to do the radical work of the transformation of the old and production of the new** (463, my emphasis)

A critique of *mestizaje* now moves from what may appear as only questions of identity politics to a critique of how the traditional perspective of historical materialism has eluded the body. What makes it interesting and innovative for material feminisms is the possibility to form a conjunct dialogue around the refiguring of the bodies, moving away from the conception and the making of the body as repository and inert matter (Grosz 1994) to centering the corporeal as a vibrant matter (Bennett 2010).

Notably, the conceptualizations of *mestiza* and of nature have both been subject to a constant remapping of their paradigms; both concepts are sites of contestation, centers of discursive change that produce elusive clarity and constant changing of discourses, bodies, and organisms (see Barad 2008).

These processes are not limited to the annihilation of the body, culture, and any reminiscence of other civilizations (Césaire 1972); through them, the body seems to

encounter *nakedness* “as an ethical performance of vulnerability the allied, mutual vulnerabilities of human/animal/environment” (Alaimo 2010), where the colonial encounters permeate not only relations among humans but also those among human, animal, and environment. In this matrix, “*indio*,” “nature,” and material relations are the product of a colonial apparatus; they are “matters in the process of becoming” (Barad 2008 140). In the same vein, “nature” is framed as a malleable concept produced by the colonial discourse, resulting in “Eurocentric forms of thinking and knowledge production” (Grosfoguel and Cervantes Rodriguez 2002, xi). This is what enables the colonial condition—that is, the *coloniality of power* (Quijano 2000)—in which Eurocentrism is imposed and presented as rational and coherent. The consequences of the *coloniality of power* in relation to nature and the body are reflected and experienced in the different ways that matter finds its place within different discursive formations (Mignolo 2000).

Mestizaje, Race and the Construction of the Body in Postcolonial Mexico

The daughter of the *hacendado* in *Balún Canán* (Castellanos 1995) has no name and neither does her indigenous *nana*. Both emerge as *rostros negados*, or denied faces (Bonfil Batalla 1989) within the colonial discourse, as abstract racial categories. As Quijano (2000) points out, this defines discourses of power, especially as they translate into discursive constructions of race, gender, and labor relations, all of which influence relations in postcolonial sites. What is so intriguing about the *Balún Canán* excerpt with which I opened this essay is the possibility of change from one race to another, or the possibility of experiencing life through an indigenous body. The fear expressed by the *criolla* girl in *Balún Canan* must be taken as an embodied manifestation of the coloniality

of power (Quijano 2000) that permeates the material conditions of the colonized, being at the same time part of the colonial rationale. As Aimé Césaire writes in his famous play, *The Tempest*, about Caliban, the slave, who when talking to Prospero, refers to the lies that the latter has been telling to Caliban as lies that have sought to impose a demeaning construction of Caliban's "self":

Prospero, you are the master of illusion. Lying is your trademark. And you have lied so much to me (lied about the world, lied about me) that you have ended by imposing on me an image of myself. Underdeveloped, you brand me, inferior, that is the way you have forced me to see myself I detest that image! What's more, it's a lie! But now I know you, you old cancer, and I know myself as well. (Césaire, *The Tempest*, 1958)

The recognition from Caliban that Prospero was lying to him, and that every narrative told to him was part of the coloniality of power is similar to what Rosario Castellanos is communicating in this particular moment in *Balun Canan*: the *criolla* girl recognizes the sole possibility of becoming not the other, but the one in constant danger of erasure—this is what the girl sees in her nana's reflection. The context of *Balun Canan* is the Mexican Revolution, a part of which was driven by the aspiration to name and recognize the marginalized, so as to recover what was lost under the rule of the elites and to promote a fair distribution of land and water. The *criolla* girl's fear is to be like the ones against whom her family of *hacendados* fought, to be identified as indigenous and to be identified with the *indios* who are conceived by the dominant discourse as a disposable subject that falls outside the boundaries of the acceptable (Hidalgo 2006, 88). The fear of being an *india*, of

losing her *criollez* (criollity), resides in the recognition of how the *indigena* is situated in the “designated place” within a colonial structure of power (Fanon 1968, 18).⁴⁴

What Aimé Césaire and Franz Fanon invite the reader to realize is that the native (*l'indigène*) is an immobilized being, and that “the first thing that the colonial subject learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits” (Fanon 1968, 15).⁴⁵ After this understanding of the designation of its place, Fanon directs the reader to a process of realization, a discovery from “the colonized subject who discovers that his life, his breathing and his heartbeats are the same as the colonist’s.” This is a process by which the colonized “discovers that the skin of a colonist is not worth more than the ‘native’s’”⁴⁶ (Fanon 1968, 10). This process of discovering the colonial subjugation suggests not only a reflection from the colonized (as Fanon names it) but also a change in the ways in which intellectual practices and organized academia have been thinking about “the colonized” and the “subject of colonization,” including their relations with the corporeal world.⁴⁷

The Material Turn within the Study of Indigeneity and *Mestizaje*

It is my purpose in this essay to engage in questions of how *mestizaje* developed into not only a concept denoting a process of racial construction, but also necessarily and almost implicitly an enunciation of *indigeneity* as its counterpart (Taylor 2009). In this section I make special emphasis on the construction of “la mestiza” as not only a conceptual

⁴⁴ I use Castellano’s work, *Balun Canan*, and Aimé Césaire’s, *The Tempest*, as exemplars of two ‘non social science’ texts that deal with questions of colonial heritage, racial discourses and internalization of colonial discourses.

⁴⁵ “*la première chose que l’indigène apprend, c’est a rester a sa place, a ne pas dépasser le limites*” (Fanon 1968, 18)

⁴⁶ In Fanon 1968, text in French: “sa vie, sa respiration, les battement de son coeur son les memes que ceux de colon. Il decouvre qu’une peau de colon ne vaut pas plus qu’une peau d’indigène” (Fanon 1968, 13).

⁴⁷ See Hames Garcia 2000.

site or an intellectual exercise, but as a vivid experience—as Alaimo describes, an experience of the “flesh” (2010). As Hames-Garcia (2008) points out, the concept of race has “blurry boundaries, changes over time and from place to place, and produces ambiguities and indeterminacies.”⁴⁸ Those “indeterminacies,” according to Hames-Garcia, open up a new possibility to engage in inquiries about the meaning of race beyond arguments denying the “existence of race” and reductionist arguments (such as those of Walter Benn Michaels’). For Hames-Garcia, to argue that “race is real” results in a more fruitful theoretical discussion and may lead to an emancipatory exercise.⁴⁹ The *material turn* (as a point of understanding the “materiality of race”) contests traditional perspectives of historical materialism, which reproduce the “traditional forms of corporeality” (Grosz 1994) where material relations are established by terms of (only) human relations. The human is by itself a finished *matter*; in the case of identity politics, gender and race are positional and material (Alcoff 2006). If our human bodies are *matter* in constant change, then to address racial identity as a valid point of departure it is necessary to recognize that race is a construction, as well as our material self. While the material turn or new materialisms do not deny the power relations that have defined human beings in terms of races, gender, and sexes, these constructions are not less real for being a byproduct of this social constructions. Gruffydd (2008), using the example of global political economy and colonialism, demonstrates how a social organization and structure of power materialize

⁴⁸ For a discussion on the material turn and material feminisms, see Alaimo and Hekman (2008).

⁴⁹ The “emancipatory” exercise I am referring to here, in relation to Hames-Garcia’s (2008) contribution to the study of “race” within the “material turn,” refers to the work of Anibal Quijano (2000) and Mignolo (2000) about the colonality of power and the colonial difference. I take Laclau’s discussion on “emancipation” within the context of the colonial difference. For Laclau, “emancipation presupposes the elimination of power, the abolition of the subject/object distinction, and the management without any opaqueness or mediation- of communitarian affairs by social agents identified with the viewpoint of social totality” (2007, 1).

inequity and the endurance of race in the structures of international order. Social inquiries about agency, sovereignty, and power in relation to race have been limited to traditional perspectives of discourse analysis and deconstruction as methods, finding its limits to an iterative deconstruction of race.

The concept of *mestizaje* in the context of Mexico has been discussed from different perspectives and disciplines. The role of *mestizaje* within the nation-building process has been studied by Mexican scholarship in many areas, including contributions to the social sciences, but also by Mexican scholars with different approaches that challenge the dominant standards of what qualifies as “valid knowledge,” “scientific-based” knowledge, and “scientific” contributions. The construction of nature and race as concepts incorporated in the discussion of *mestizaje* varies and has been changing from a traditional and profoundly examined anthropological view of *mestizaje* to innovative inter- and trans-disciplinary perspectives, such as in gender and women studies programs and their research centers, e.g., the *Programa Universitario de Estudios de Género* at the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM)*.⁵⁰ This is also the case in grassroots questionings of how the idea (concept) of *mestizaje* slowly but aggressively erodes the indigenous identity as well as Afro-descendants roots⁵¹ to the point that the *indio* is diluted in *mestizaje*

⁵⁰ I refer specifically to the efforts of the PUEG to incorporate and problematize the discourses of gender and race within and outside academia. Cfr, Belausteguigoitia, Marisa. (edit) 2009. *Güeras y Prietas: Genero y Raza en la Construccion de Mundos Nuevos*. Difusion UNAM. Mexico D.F. Also, the Summer Course on Feminist Theory at Colegio de Mexico as part of the Programa Interdisciplinario de Estudios de Genero, PIEM (Interdisciplinary Program on Gender Studies) is a good example.

⁵¹ The Universidad Autónoma de México’s (UNAM) program, “Mexico, una Nación Multicultural” (Mexico a Multicultural Nation), has hosted some events in relation to Afro descendant roots in Mexico, but grassroots or civil organizations such as Mexico Negro, Afro Mexico and Africa A.C. have been building a strong organizational basis and a transdisciplinary community of activists and scholars from Mexico, Central America and South America to discuss Afro-descendant presence and the negation of black roots in the official history and on certain social movements.

and the black is made plainly absent—if mentioned at all, is an empty signifier, since slavery and ethnocide are not part of the national collective memories, constituting another form of visibly erased absence⁵² (Vaughn 2001).

Taking in consideration that *mestizaje* (as well as *indigenismo*) is a shifting ideology and concept, it is necessary to analyze the genesis of *mestizaje* and the (continuous) making of *la mestiza* as part of a larger, continuous but shifting establishment of state policies; but more importantly, it is crucial to understand how ideologies have been sustained (with shifts) and reinforced, sometimes without any identifiable state policy (Tarica 2008). To analyze the history of how *mestizaje* became a dominant ideology as the national construct, it is necessary to study the genesis and development of *indigenismo*, and its influence in building a Mexican State that sustain its national pride and identity on the value of a “mixing of cultures” without any mentioning of the many violent encounters (Tarica 2008). This has been done by using a modernist nationalist discourse (resembling Manuel Gamio’s idea of “making a nation”) that *mestizaje*, a form of multicultural celebration⁵³ of how the nation, becoming “indivisible,” can host a “multicultural integration based on its indigenous peoples which have been inhabiting the country since

⁵² For example, Garcia Canclini in “The Future of The Past” (See his book *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (1995)) discusses the construction of a cultural patrimony in Mexico, and the acclaimed project to host it, the Museum of Anthropology and History in Mexico City. For Garcia Canclini, national myths are sustained, enhanced, and constructed through this museum, which is intended to reflect Mexicanness. In this museum the memories of the glorious Mexican past are preserved in a “modern architectural package,” that is, the building that represents the modern discourse hosting the past and constructing a national patrimony; “it resorts to the monumentalization and nationalist ritualization of culture” (Garcia Canclini 1995, 120).

⁵³ Cf, Zizek, Slavoj. “Multiculturalism, or the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism” *New Left Review* 225 (1997): 28-51.

even before the conquest took place and who have lived according to their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions” (Mexican Political Constitution, Article 2).

There is no core national identity, nor is there a depository of Mexicanness; the national identity is normalized through direct politics such as *indigenismo* and *national myths* (Gutierrez Chong 2008), which have established and founded history and situated permitted (collective) memories. As de Sousa Santos (2007) suggests, the line that divides the real from the unreal, the legal from the illegal within the colonial zone, “compromises discarded experiences,” which eventually would form a specific social territory: “the colonial zone” (de Sousa Santos 2007, 48). Since the colonial zone (within the coloniality of power) delineates the limits of recognizable knowledge, a “massive epistemicide has been underway for the past five centuries, whereby an immense wealth of cognitive experiences has been wasted” (de Sousa Santos 2007). The wasted knowledges also include the creation of new paradigms such as law, science, and morality within the colonial territory. As Robinson (2007) comments, the “scientific thought exists within historical and cultural matrices” (62); following de Sousa Santos and Quijano, this “science” is a belief of systems interlinked to the state, including a political economy (Robinson 2007). The regulation and emancipation in colonial sites, and the sense of practices that represent change within the same racialized discourse of political change and political economy would result in a tainted sense of legality and a false sense of emancipation and agency (Saldaña-Portillo 200: 43). The more recent Political Constitutional amendment in 2001, which included the recognition of indigenous peoples as the inhabitants before colonization, was a more effective way of making the racial construction to reproduce

itself; that is, through an ideology that is reproduced from “inside out” to manufacture the perfect(ed) citizen.

The normalization of a constant evolution to a *mestizo future* makes everyday life’s *corporeal experiences* of racial formation part of “the real,” and the “reality of everyday life does not require additional verification over and beyond its simple presence” (Berger and Luckmann 1990, 23). The body politic in Mexico experiences *mestizaje* and *indigeneity* in several different ways, with variations on the relationships with the State. The relationships that the Mexican State has conformed with the “Mexican citizen” is that of a relationship circumscribed by a shallow multiculturalism promoted by some academic units in public universities and by public institutions⁵⁴, which is based on a problematic relation with the sovereign, global capital, and the rationality behind the normalization of a multicultural nation based on identity politics, racial categorization, and the promotion of an acceptable difference within the nation state. This process of making a multicultural nation is part of what Aida Hernandez Castillo (2004) discusses as *neoindigenismo*, a change that encompasses the structural reforms of the state and “the re-creation of old modernizing policies covered as a new discourse that combines the exaltation of the cultural diversity with programs to form ‘human capital’ and to boost the development of businesses of indigenous communities” (Hernandez, et al. 2004, 10). These reforms are part of the marketing of *indigenismo*. Gutierrez Chong locates this moment of *neoindigenismo* and *mercadoctecnia del indigenismo* (marketing of indigenismo) in former Mexican President Fox’s use of a rhetoric of easiness, simplicity, and joking in their

⁵⁴Since 2002 a strong emphasis in interculturality and multiculturalism from the Mexican government has been present in public policies and the creation of academic units and programs in public universities.

solutions to problems (by arguing that he could solve in 15 minutes the problem with the Zapatista movement in Chiapas) (Gutiérrez Chong 2004, 30). Before the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) arrived in the presidency (2000), the *indigenismo* (*indigenismo oficial*) under the PRI functioned as an ideology of acculturation, with a set of complex laws and institutionalization of the indigenous culture, under a discourse of developmentalism (*desarrollismo*). The use of a rhetoric of a “pluricultural” and “pluriethnic” nation in the presidential speech in 2001 established a “new relationship between the State and the indigenous people and the national society based on cultural diversity” (Presidential Speech-National Program for the Development of Indigenous People 2001-2006). The “new relation” is not new for the PAN, as it is retaken from the Acuerdos de San Andrés (February 1996) without any specification or clarification of what this new relation would entail. Since 2001, several institutions were created and reformed, including the participation of indigenous legal scholars, philosophers, and anthropologists as directors or decision makers.

What seemed to be a decision that was part of this pluricultural nation collapsed when the Interamerican Bank and the World Bank continued financing projects for the development of indigenous communities in rural areas without consulting the communities. The mega projects for dams and the lack of fundamental constitutional changes disappointed the believers in the new democratic government of the PAN. In both *indigenismo* and *neoindigenismo*, the constant is that indigenous communities are created from within the State, and representations of the indigenous presence come from the state, the visible bodies, the tangible not only proclaiming sovereignty over their land but their bodies as part of the Settler/Sovereign power (Wilderson III 2010, 165).

As Carlos Montemayor (2008) discusses in *Los Pueblos Indios de Mexico*, it is necessary to understand how Mexico came to be a nation based on racial formations and the delimitation of who is to be included and who is to be forgotten and disappeared⁵⁵ based on a modernist paradigm of national unity. Most of the authors situate the beginning of *indigenismo* (which eventually created a space for a definition of the ideology of *mestizaje*, including within Mexican scholarship) after the Mexican Revolution when the Mexican elites needed to create new categories outside the *sistema de castas* (Graham 1990) and where the new racial categories received “the imprimatur of science” (Graham 1990, 2). With this tone, *indigenismo* in Mexico emerged from the Revolutionary Mexico (1910-1920); with eager enthusiasm, intellectual elites formed rational scientific discourses about racial and social theories. As discussed by Saldaña-Portillo (2011), what is not recognized is that the same intellectuals that formed a group of contention against foreign intervention and advocated for “a normative theory of human transformation and agency” also ascribed themselves to the same “mode of progressive movement” and an “imperial genealogy of reason” that emanated from the colonial powers⁵⁶ (Saldaña-Portillo 2003, 6; 301). Such was the case of Manuel Gamio, Jose Vasconcelos (*La Raza Cosmica*), Alfonso Reyes (*Visión del Anahúac*), and Alfonso Caso, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, the last one being one of the most important intellectuals who developed classical Mexican anthropological notions of *mestizaje* and *indigenismo* as part of the *Partido de la Revolución Institucional* (*PRI*). Before the colonial encounters, the Mexican territory was manufactured much like

⁵⁵ This is echoing Gordon’s discussion on hunting; Cf, Gordon 2008.

⁵⁶ Gomes (1998) discusses the same process as described by Saldaña-Portillo, in the case of Guyana in the study of power elites and “new dimensions of economic structure.” Cfr, Gomes 1998.

the idea of the American Continent.⁵⁷ The making of America is essential for Quijano (2000), who states that:

America was constituted as the first space/time of a new model of power of global vocation, and both in this way and by it became the first identity of modernity. *Two historical processes associated in the production of that space/time converged and established the two fundamental axes of the new model of power.* One was the codification of the differences between conquerors and conquered in the idea of “race,” a supposedly different biological structure that placed some in a natural situation of inferiority to the others...The other process was the constitution of a new structure of control of labor and its resources and products. This new structure was an articulation of all historically known previous structures of control of labor, slavery, serfdom, small independent commodity production and reciprocity, together around and upon the basis of capital and the world market.

The “idea of race,” as explained by Quijano, has been essential across the Americas to build subtypes and to organize mass populations in racial categories for the purpose of appropriation of their lands (David Harvey refers to this as “appropriation by dispossession”)⁵⁸ and the establishment of a settler-colonial state. The creation and emergence of a settler-colonial state and the Settler/Sovereign power (Wilderson III 2010, 167) “is imposed rather than consensually constructed; equal moral status is denied on the basis of their putatively closer connection (as “savages” or “barbarians”) to the state of nature; coercion rather than agreement is the norm” (Mills 2011, 38).

In the context of this essay, I refer to a colonial state, drawing from Mills’s (2011) discussion on the racial state, as well as Quijano’s (2008) discussion on the colonial(ity) of

⁵⁷ Considering the violence of mapping (see Montemayor 2000) I will refer in this essay to the American Continent, following the no less aggressive European tradition on naming six continents: America, Africa, Australia, Oceania, Asia, and Europe. I have found this tradition more comprehensive as it does not purposely divide the American Continent on supposedly “geographical knowledge.”

⁵⁸ Cfr, Harvey, David.

power and discussions on the neocolonial and postcolonial state as an entity imposed by force, which eventually would create its own forms and channels for its narratives of power, engendering different subjectivities and discourses of human agency embedded in metanarratives of imperialism, capitalism, anthropocentrism and patriarchy (Jung et al. 2011; Robinson 2007, 63; Saldaña-Portillo 2003).

The establishment of the colonial state in the Americas required a “mapping” of the exploration. Before the arrival on the “American continent,” the conquest or expansion of the Spanish Crown was “mapped” in a manner akin to the several trips that were part of the imperial expansion. The maps guided Christopher Columbus on his passages to the “Nuevo Mundo” (New World) or the “West Indies.” The “mapping” of what Columbus thought was the West Indies was based on the maps by Paolo dal Pozzo Toscanelli, who sent a *mapamundi* to Columbus in 1474. This was after a mistake was modified; in fact, the *mapamundi* experienced several modifications and updates. In 1507, for example, Martin Waldseemüller modified the *mapamundi* and the result is what has been distributed as the accepted geographical globe, showing “the world.”

For Carlos Montemayor to understand the material conditions of indigenous population (*pueblos indios*) in Mexico (and I would add that this includes the corporeal condition and the embodiment of racial categories), the “discovery of America” was an “invention,” as Edmundo O’Gorman states in his underrated book, *La Invención de América* (1958). In it, O’Gorman exposes the construction of maps and paradigms that justify and advocate the politics of subjection and oppression to indigenous populations, as well as the construction of language.

According to Castro-Klaren (2008), O’Gorman’s work is similar to the one proposed by Edward Said, since “reading Orientalism produced in students of Latin America ‘the shock of recognition’: an effect that postcolonial theory claims, takes place in the consciousness of postcolonial subjects as they assess their experience of *coloniality* in comparison with other colonial subjects” (131). Mignolo (2009) believes O’Gorman redefines the understanding of maps by “dismantling five hundred years of colonial discourse” of the discovery of America (101). What was being challenged was both the discourse as understood in the linguistic turn, and the discourse discussed and later developed by the material feminists such as Karen Barad, who defines discourse as such: “it is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enables what can be said. Discursive practices define what count as meaningful statements” (2008: 137). In the context of the coloniality of power, the colonial discourse according to Klor de Alva (1992) refers to

the ways of talking, writing, painting, and communicating that permitted ideas to pass from one discourse or bounded register of signs codes and meanings to another in order to authorize and make possible the ends of colonial control and the strategies of resistance and accommodation to it (16)

According to Quijano, “America” is constituted as a model, in which “race” is constructed by building new types of social relations; that is, “the category of race produced new historical social identities in America—Indians, blacks, and mestizos—and redefined others. Terms such as *Spanish* and *Portuguese*, and much later *European*, which until then indicated only geographic origin or country of origin, acquired from then on a racial connotation in reference to the new identities” (Quijano 2000, 534). These identities were constituted in “‘America’ where the first space/time of a new model of

power” with a “natural position of inferiority” becomes the norm; this includes a set of coherent universal principles that contains—as mentioned earlier—two processes (race as a construct and a new form of labor relations), both embracing “the body,” where the new patterns of power (that is, the “coloniality of power”) entails “a configuration of race, gender and ethnicity” that forms “a new form of global capitalism” (Quijano 2010). Moreover, without America there is no Western Europe, and without slavery and the servitude of America, there is no European capitalism and industrial capitalism (Quijano 2010). As for *coloniality* in the context of Latin America, Quijano and Wallerstein note that “coloniality was an essential element in the integration of the interstate system creating not only rank order but sets of rules for the interactions of states with each other...” (Quijano and Wallerstein 1992, 551). In the colonial state, “race represents all the appearance of stability” from within the coloniality of power—race is order and reason, where racial categories invented new subjects. In this same line of thought, Cedric Robinson (2007) comments in relation to the creation of the Black: “at one and the same time the most natural of beings and the most intensively manufactured object” (Robinson 2007, 4). This argument can be seen in light of a materialist approach, since the colonial state is an imposition, a forgery (borrowing from Robinson): the Settler/Sovereign power manufactures a racial regime and its corporeal embodiments (Wilderson III 2010).

The social and economic interactions in post-Independence Mexico (1821) were defined by a racialization of the relations in the settler-colonial state (now Independent Mexico). Independence ended formal colonialism but not coloniality (Mignolo 2009); the caste system was abolished, but the racialization of labor or economic relations remained.

Since the caste system was abolished as a way to “regulate” the interaction of the population, the purpose of the new independent state was to incorporate liberal ideals into the process of construction of an identity that embraces two worlds, the European and the indigenous, giving as a result the “mestizo identity” and as another reiteration of ways to regulate the interaction of populations. As part of the racial project in Mexico, and with the end of the caste system, labor relations were racialized as part of the ideology of *mestizaje*. The mestizo identity eventually erased the idea that a mestizo body is changeable, and equated its capacity of transfiguration by miscegenation (the most classical approach) and classification of the “offspring.”

A more complex development of the idea of *mestizaje* is the detachment from the body as an illusion of this constant becoming—that is, of a transfiguration of the body through culture. The labor or economic relations and discourses of productivity and progress created spaces of possibility to transgress indigeneity and form a mestizo national culture. Then, Eurocentric values of labor substitute the caste system by discourses of material possibility. The discussion about the material relations within the labor and economic relations is twofold. First, economic relations in post-Independence in Mexico can be analyzed under a traditional perspective of materiality, i.e., as ideologies of material wealth, exploitation, and subjection of the worker (substituting the castes system by a class system). Second, the relation between body and culture within *mestizaje* is established by the corporeality, the materiality of the body: the mestizo identity and its possibility to “transgress” and trespass racial thresholds by “performing” *mestizaje*, producing and nullifying corporeal possibilities.

As Knight (1990, 74) argues, the concept of mestizo as an ethnic category is subjective since it is based on a process of acculturation, making racial (and/or ethnic) categorizations difficult to identify for a particular body (Knight 74). According to Hale (2010):

La concepción de México como nación mestiza es producto de los años porfiristas. Antes de la reforma la nacionalidad se concebía en términos criollos, una visión compartida por José María Luis Mora y Lucas Alamán.

The conception of Mexico as a mestiza Nation is a product of the years of the Porfiriato.⁵⁹ Before the reform, nationality was conceived in *criollo* terms, a vision shared by José María Luis Mora and Lucas Alamán.

Hale (2010) asserts that the search among intellectuals and government officials of a national identity was a constant since the Mexican Independence. This search was in contraposition to the colonial institutions. In the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), Justo Sierra, who has been an integral part of nationalist myths and represented as a hero for the Mexican educational system, proposed a positive view of the process of assimilation of the indigenous population. For Sierra, the mestizo was an “improved” version of the *indio* (Miller 2004, 28; De la Cadena 2000; Hale 2010, 323). For the Mexican liberal thinker, Leopoldo Zea, a major concern for the Mexican nation was modernization, which would be achieved through economic modernization. A process of *mestización* was necessary for modernization (Hale 2010, 372), which Knight describes as a process of adoption of European values, making *mestizaje* a socio-cultural process that

⁵⁹ The term known as Porfiriato refers to the 35 years under the regime of Porfirio Díaz.

makes a subjective relation the *indio*/mestizo status within the Mexican national identity (1990, 74).

Indigenismo, Nonbody and the Materiality of Race

The most well-known influential process that fostered and established the idea of *mestizaje* is the institutionalized “*indigenismo*,” which “has participated in transforming native populations into subjects of state control” and has been used as “an instrument of the broader historical project of exploiting indigenous labor, appropriating indigenous lands and transforming indigenous cultures in order to better subordinate them to non-Indian rule” (Tarica 2008, xii). In the case of Mexico, *indigenismo* was promoted by Manuel Gamio. In his book *Forjando Patria* (1961) he expressed a desire for an *indigenismo* that promoted “the incorporation of Indian communities into the national society of modern Mexico” (quoted in Brading 1988, 74). It is important to say that Gamio expressed a desire to preserve the artistic nature of the indigenous population while recognizing the “backwardness” of the indigenous civilization, as is evident in the following passage:

The extension and intensity that folkloric life exhibits in the great majority of the population, eloquently demonstrates the cultural backwardness in which the population vegetates. The archaic life, which moves from artifice to illusion and superstition, is curious, attractive to be incorporated into the contemporary civilization of advanced, modern ideas, which, if stripped of fantasy and traditional clothing, would contribute in a positive manner to the conquest of the material and intellectual well-being to which all humanity ceaselessly aspires (quoted in Brading 2008, 84).

The relation in the invented American continent with space and time, consisted also in the relations between “the body and the nonbody” (Quijano 2000, 554) in the context of

the Eurocentric perspective; the “nonbody” did not have a soul that under a traditional Christian perspective meant “not a *ser de razón*” (being of Reason), for whom pain and suffering is allowed given a lack of soul. “The body, by definition incapable of reason, does not have anything that meets reason/subjectivity” (Quijano 2000, 555). For Gamio in post-Revolutionary Mexico, the “nonbody” is the indigenous populations; that is, the “indio(s) vivo(s)” (Chong 1999) are the ones in necessity of slowly disappearing through acculturation, being preserved only as reminiscence within the boundaries of institutionalized memory. Gamio understands the *indio* as a rational being with deficiencies (for example, their “wilderness”) that could be subsumed into a more glorious past through the arts (and other humanities) and most importantly through an understanding of pre-Columbian civilizations using social sciences, such as anthropology, that studies with scientific rigor.

The most well-known intellectual in charge of disseminating the idea of *mestizaje* is José Vasconcelos with his book *La Raza Cosmica: Misión de la Raza Iberoamericana* (1979). His work has been analyzed in several contexts, mostly around his idea of “a unique race,” which was nationalist and continental. For Vasconcelos “the *indio* has no other door to the future than the door of modern culture, and no other path than the path already traced by the Latin civilization” (Vasconcelos 1924). The discourse of modernity is almost an expression of a sacrifice that the *indio* (*india*) needs to experience “for a greater good,” which is (or would be) the Mexican nation, and following Vasconcelos’s rationality also “for the good” of “Latin” America. This would eventually evolve into a modern project that would allow this “cosmic race” to emerge as unique among other races. Vasconcelos’s work is partly a reaction to the positivist thought of the likes of August Comte, Herbert

Spencer, and Charles Darwin, which according to Vasconcelos influenced the “científicos porfirianos”:

Habían dejado atrapados a los positivistas dentro de la imaginación racial de las teorías europeas. Los intelectuales mexicanos ‘[han] sido educados bajo la humillantes influencia de una filosofía concebida por nuestros enemigos [...] A partir de esa situación hemos llegado a creer en la inferioridad del mestizo, en la desesperanza del indio, en la condena del negro y en la decadencia irreparable del oriental’ (Stern 2000, 62)

The anti-positivist movement in Mexico was fundamental for the establishment of humanism in Mexico (Kubitz 1941). The “Ateneo de la Juventud” was founded in 1909 as “a learned society aimed at propagating classical and modern culture” (Hurtado 2010,83). This group was a reaction against positivism in Mexico (Hurtado 2007, 82). By 1907 we see in Mexico a shift from the positivist movement (in the times of the Porfiriato it was known as “los científicos”). This was being advocated by a group of intellectuals—including Antonio Caso, Ricardo Fómez Robelo, José Vasconcelos, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Alfonso Reyes and Jesús Acevedo—who sought to foster a shift to a more intensive cultural activity (and cultural openness to the humanities).

The main purposes of this group were “the renovation of the last artistic expressions and ideological trends from Europe. This group tried to connect literature with academia” (Krauze 1990, 47). The Ateneo de la Juventud formed the *Savia Moderna* magazine and established a set of “Conferencias” where the group discussed the establishment of educational institutions (such as the Universidad Popular) with the intention to open them to the general public. The humanism that was fostered against positivist thinking and the work by Vasconcelos about a “cosmic race” marked a significant change on how social

scientists and humanist perceived the human condition in reference to racial categories. As Miller comments, “the reference to race as ‘cosmic’ shifted the semantic weight from the material to the spiritual, from corporeal to aesthetic *mestizaje*, not race in the biological sense but as an attitude” (Miller 2004, 29). The *cosmos* that is presented by *mestizaje* is one of self-preservation of the matter “that counts,” the aesthetic of *mestizaje* is situated within an understanding of the cosmos as the universal, the “known,” and the explored (or the waiting to be explored) territory. The “cosmic race” that Vasconcelos proposes is one surrounded by mysticism, through the idea of the configuration of a mixed race that inherits the knowledge of indigenous and non-European ancestors; but at the same time it represents an idea of transcendence and “knowing” through the body. The mysticism behind Vasconcelos’s *raza cósmica*, as Miller suggests, made a difference in (perhaps even conditioned) the conceptualization of the *indio/india*, making her/his indigenous race antagonistic to the mestizo-cosmic race. This humanist endeavor of bringing *mestizaje* as a drastic shift from the corporeal experience (the focus on the “body” as the tenant of race) to a more ethereal experience where the idea of *mestizaje* “that at once incorporates Indian difference as a source of historical and cultural pride, and yet subsumes it into a sum that is greater than its Indian and Spanish parts” (Saldaña-Portillo 2002, 294). The mestizo for Vasconcelos is “always directed toward the future—the mestizo is a bridge to the future” (Vasconcelos 1926, 83). This invokes the possibility of transcending the material world through a *mestizofilia*, a concept defined by Basave Benitez as “the idea that the phenomenon of *mestizaje*—the mixture of races and/or cultures—is desirable” (1992,

13).⁶⁰ The work of Basave Benitez, *México Mestizo*, analyzes in a form of critical historiography how Mexican nationalism—along with the Europeanized Mexican intelligentsia—has been built around this cult of *mestizaje*, locating *mestizofilia* as the ideology influencing an ethnonacionalism, where the body of *los mestizos* was formed by each one of the *pueblos* that existed (Vasconcelos 1958, 903; 909).

Vasconcelos framed an ideal state of being, supposedly based on a superior explanation: apart from the biological, the corporeal is intended to be left apart to the quest of a unified Latin civilization, because the *indio* would arrive at a promised land through *mestizaje*. This hybridism, according to Vasconcelos (1958), would foster a fraternity, “a national sentiment, a unification through blood.” It is important to notice that Vasconcelos was looking to influence the minds of the mestizos, as commented in his work, *The Latin-American Basis of Mexican Civilization* (1926):

I have started to preach the gospel of the mestizo by trying to impress on the minds of the new race a consciousness of their mission as *builders of entirely new concepts of life* (Vasconcelos 1926, 95, my emphasis)

The process of *mestizaje*, then, according to Vasconcelos, entails changing *the matter* (echoing the work of material feminists such as Elizabeth Grosz, Susan Bordo, Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad, among others), the corporeal, to engineer and to modify it in order to re-create the perfect(ed) citizen, by a rational process of eventual progression toward a fraternal (literally, relations by blood due to the mixing) nation where this “cosmic race”

⁶⁰ The *desire* within the racial discourse of nationhood in Mexico is a constant and permeates not only Mexican society; irrespective of the geographical location of certain bodies, a desire exists to belong to Europe by the idea of *Iberoamérica*, a sense of belonging to a transatlantic unified identity.

enhances the “Latin” American cultural emancipation (by unrecognized eugenicist and ethnocidal principles) (Basave Benítez 1992, 135). For Vasconcelos:

Modern scientific theories are in many cases like the religious creeds of the old days; simply the intellectual justification of fatalities of conquests and of commercial greed. If all nations then build theories to justify their policies or to strengthen their deeds, let us develop in Mexico our own theories; or at least, let us be certain that we choose among the foreign theories of thought. (Vasconcelos 1926, 96)

The reminiscence of positivist thought is evident in Vasconcelos with his reference to Mendel and Leclerc du Sabon to understand how this hybrid—that is, the *mestizo* (as a negation of the *indio*, the negro and the *criollo*)—would create superior values and bodies. Although Vasconcelos, established a negation or nullification of non-mestizo bodies, it is within these lines that I find a common ground for a discussion of how the idea of *mestizaje* did not separate its paradigms from the corporeal as intended and promoted. Miller (2004) maintains that Vasconcelos’ concept of *mestizaje* did separate the corporeal from the metaphysical, since, for Miller, *mestizaje* indeed brings a new culture and is a form of eugenics, a *blanquemento*, and an exoticization of the body. It seems that Miller ascribes her arguments to the traditional perspective of *mestizaje*, which was restricted to miscegenation. The separation of the corporeal from the metaphysical supports the Cartesian idea of “the tangible,” which pushes *mestizaje* (both as a theoretical concept and as an ideology) to a point that only recognizes corporeality; in other words, evident signs and material manifestations would be considered as valid, while “less-structured thoughts, less rigid categorizations” (Anzaldúa, as quoted in Bost 2008, 352) are dismissed, reproducing and using the same method to which Miller is opposing.

Corporeal Contestations: the Mestizo Body and the Material Turn

To recognize that *mestizaje* is about eugenics and miscegenation does not entail a recognition of the volatility of bodies (Grosz 1994) and their porosity. Bodies are boundless and connected to other human and non-human matter. Indeed, the body is central for *mestizaje*. As mentioned before, the coloniality of power (Quijano 2000) hosts the idea of *mestizaje* and *mestizofilia* in relation to the body. As Quijano explains, the division between body and reason was (and has been) essential for the subjugation resulting from the coloniality of power. Quijano believes that this separation is a “new dualism,” where a “radical separation produced between *reason/subject and body* and their relations should be seen only as relations between the *human subject/reason and the human body/nature*, or between spirit and nature” (Quijano 2000, 554, my emphasis). It is in this dualism that Quijano (2000) posits the mystification of progress and modernity. This dualism is the center of the developmentalist paradigm (Saldaña-Portillo 2003; Adamson 2012), which makes the body as an object of knowledge, a Europeanized knowledge that is translated to a relation of domination and exploitation (Quijano 2000, 555).

If the purpose of Vasconcelo’s *mestizaje* was an effort to overcome a positivist approach to racial dynamics and differences, his “cosmic race” was a new racial ordinance, a “biological metaphor” (Saldaña-Portillo 2001, 407) for progress and modernization of the nation from within the body of its citizens. The inscription of the corporeal nationalisms (Bost 2008, 361; Barad 2001,2003; Alaimo 2010; Braidotti 2003;2006), according to De la Cadena, is reflected in the idea of an institutionalized *indigenismo* (as previously discussed), which praises the past and appropriates the term *mestizo/a* as an overcoming of the boundaries of the past.

The corporeal has been retaken as the center of feminist inquiry by material feminists, who propose a return and simultaneous constant becoming to the body as the center for inquiry, as an “embodied subjectivity” (Grosz 1995), or an embodied experience within the coloniality of power that “draws attention and intervention in current theoretical debates about the body” (Horner and Keane 2000, 5). Corporeal nationalism calls into question both the “body” and its transcendental persistence. The cultural formation was one with the ultimate purpose to “incorporate the indian” (Gamio 1926), while changing her/his behavioral practices since “from a purely materialistic point of view, cultural contacts have taken place, but when these are not accompanied by amalgamation with abstract cultural concepts, they are merely superficial and artificial” (Gamio 1926, 121). The cultural amalgamation that Gamio and Vasconcelos promote (and until today official *indigenismo* still promotes) establishes a space of questioning, since this amalgamation resides in the body according to the discourse of *mestizaje*, even if it is directed to be a cultural quest; the use of the corporeal as a way to improve the national culture is therefore taken as necessary (Basave Benitez 1992; Saldaña-Portillo 2001). The center of contestation is the body; this is a constant where the “indian identity does not disappear with mestizaje. Rather, mestizaje depends on it for its self-definition” (Saldaña-Portillo 2001, 409). It is in this context that the new materialism (Coole and Frost 2010) converges with Quijano’s concept of the coloniality of power, in a way that both theoretical propositions are making a critique on the approach to the construction of races and the designation of space/time relations on bodies within coloniality. According to Grosz, “the body is not opposed to culture, a resistant throwback to a natural past; it is itself a cultural, the cultural, *the product*” (Grosz 1994, 23, my emphasis).

I assert that it is possible to articulate a discussion on the coloniality of power (and postcoloniality) and the material turn, especially the work on material feminisms. This material turn is urgently needed: as Alaimo and Hekman point out, “the material turn in feminist theory opens up fundamental questions about ontology, epistemology, ethics, and politics” (Alaimo and Hekman 2008, 7). This theoretical endeavor again places on the matter the relevance it has in “shaping society and circumscribing human prospects” and “the place of embodied humans within a material world” (Coole and Frost 2010, 3). The emergence of new materialisms, including that of material feminism, necessitates and in fact conditions an understanding for the context of the politics of the body to change the tendencies to deconstruct race as a product of the Eurocentricity of knowledge, culture and history that simultaneously produces and imposes negative images of non-Europeans (Hames-García 2008, 319).

There is an insufficiency in the understanding of “the body” through a cultural paradigm (Alaimo 2008) without the incorporation of the non-human (or more-than-human as Alaimo suggests) agents. At the same time, any technology of the body (from its surveillance, its disappearance to its complete annihilation) that influences the way we construct and make sense, meaning of a supposedly linear understanding of corporeal representations, has to consider the cultural paradigm. As Hames-García points out:

The well-discussed, linked dualisms of modern Western thought are but one enduring legacy of the coloniality of power: reason/body, culture/nature, superior/inferior, male/female, white/black, north/south. (2008, 319)

The central dualism in this context is the separation of the body from the mind, which equates the body with nature (Grosz 1994; Hames-García 2008), creating an ontological

basis for a division between nature and reason, as well as body and rationality, in a sense that the “natural” is dismissed as a center of contact between human corporeality that is more than human nature (Alaimo 2008, 238). This is because an anthropocentric rationality understands nature as separated from the human, which is influenced by Cartesian dualism that “establishes an unbridgeable gulf between mind and matter,” building a path for concepts of subjectivity and knowledge (Grosz 1994, 7). For material feminist scholars, the normalization of nature is a feminist issue, and biological determinism can be approached from different angles (Birke and Asberg 2010) since material feminism, referred to as “new” material feminism, distinguishes itself by providing a critique of the initial ontological conditions that separate nature from culture (Hird and Roberts 2011, 110). The material feminist engagement with matter embraces the critique of the normalizing gaze of race. It also embraces a critique of biology by engaging with the materiality of the body (Bordo 2008; Alaimo 2010; Grosz 1994) and, as aforementioned, its subordination and formations, making race an embodiment of the hierarchies within the realm of “the real.” Within the dualisms and oppositions—male/female, and mind/body—the body is closer to the female and to nature. Braidotti (2011) asserts that “the body subjectivity and to the specifically human capacity to be both grounded and to flow and thus to transcend the very variables—class, race, sex, gender, age, disability—that structure us” (25). The idea of “race” as a differential is part of the dominant forms of reason, where “concepts of rationality have been corrupted by systems of power into hegemonic forms that establish, naturalize and reinforce privilege” (Plumwood 2002, 16), by creating rationalist dualisms. According to Plumwood (2002) this is a way to organize the world: “establishing gender and racial supremacy were so influential in nineteenth century

colonial science...” (Plumwood 2002, 49). The “race” in the human body is inscribed as natural, having material consequences beyond the realm of the “real” world and the material as defined by historical materialism.

Part of the process of knowledge construction is the creation of dualism(s) in relation to nature and reason where a dialectical image of nature is presented as disorder. In the material turn, the biological is at the center, since by looking to natural classification it is “possible to establish the system of identities and the order of differences existing between natural entities” (Foucault 1994, 136). As Merchant (1989) points out, nature has been associated with several female images, an anthropomorphization that is reflected in the way science constructs the “natural” as a reflection of the dialectic relationship of male/female and culture/nature. The New World and the process of “discovery” built an image of the wild, where “voyagers brought back reports of wild, desolate, chaotic lands hostile to human settlements” (Merchant 1989, 131). The native populations and its territories “became symbols of the wilderness and *animality* that could gain the upper hand in human nature” (1989, 131). As such, the image of the “animal” as a counter ontology to the colonizer European identity imposed and transferred to the colonized population(s), constructed a civilization that, in the case of Mexico, departs from the traditional and well-established premise that anything related to indigenous populations has a fundamental ontological difference from the European civilization, a relationship with nature defined in this case as wild, irrational, and lacking in understanding of what is needed to become modern.⁶¹ The discourse of *mestizaje* in Mexico as part of the process of producing bodies

⁶¹ Cf, Dussel, Enrique. 2001.

in *becoming mestizos* has a transnational influence. Across the Americas, mestizaje as an ideology is similar in the context of its glorification of the mixing of cultures (De la Cadena 2000), where the sovereign erases, incarcerates, and excludes from life those bodies that are “insufficient” and “undesirable.” That is, bringing to life the mestizo body requires a contraposition of *what is not a mestizo*: that which is not indigenous, European, or Black.

The memory of slave trade and Black presence in Mexico not only has reached the geographies of Mexico but is erased when talking about “the Mexican body” (and can be extended to the migrant body to the USA) as a finished byproduct of a (post)colonial nation. The making of “humans” and “humanity” in post-Revolutionary Mexico inherited the Judeo-Christian tradition of nature as disorder that could be overcome and managed through human reason (Merchant 1989, 164; Harding 2006, 45). The secularization of the State in Mexico fostered an almost obsessive compulsion to base statist decisions on the gaze of the sciences, importing ideas of a civilizational ideal based on a positivist argumentation. A scientific discourse was used to describe racial differences based on biological differences.⁶² This eventually evolved into eugenicist practices (Stern 2000).

The ultimate goal of statist decisions on racial formation based on a scientific discourse proceeded from the a biological discourse that made it possible to define not only the humanity of the subject but also her/his place within Mexican civilization (Stern 2000).

⁶² As mentioned before, during the Porfiriato (1870-1910) a strong emphasis on the scientific method as a pillar for the nation building process was adopted in certain areas, mostly on racial classification. The establishment of a eugenics scientific method—the “mestizo” theory—went beyond the mystical cosmic race and materialized in scientific discourse, influencing the foundation of the Comité Pro Raza en Mexico, the Sociedad Mexicana de Eugenesia. It is important to notice that Vasconcelos’s “cosmic race” and the group of scientist working on a scientific eugenics worked in different realms (humanities and life sciences) but both groups based their arguments on a mixture of races in such a way that the State with the help of its citizens would obtain a perfect (and productive) citizen. Cf, Stern 1999.

The work of Beatriz Urías Horcasitas in *Historias Secretas* Certain practices were considered as irrational, animalistic, and primitive within the scientific discourse. Humanism in Mexico also re-defined the racial discourse by searching “a full transcendence of the human” (Wolfe 1998, 39) by creating an innovative and anti-positivist approach to re-define humanity, simultaneously (as a result) reproducing the same ideals of modernity, social progress and corporeal enhancement by a mixing of races (Sexton 2011). Then, with the purpose of modernization, a sentiment of nationalism was gestating along with the appraisal of the Western sciences as a pillar to establish a nationalism based on the exclusion of bodies and the application of expert knowledge.

Corporeal Articulations and Inscribed Surfaces of Excluded Bodies

The use of the discourse of *mestizaje* reproduced racial difference and the exclusion of bodies by differentiation not only through the rational/irrational and culture/nature binaries, but also through a patriarchal (and anthropocentric) system rooted in Eurocentric epistemologies that shaped the culture/nature dialectic by adopting the concept of nature as feminine and in need to be tamed and controlled in order to procure the nation. The desire of a perfected body as a continuous quest for setting the boundaries of the corporeal in contestation with the indigenous body is part of the “cosmic race,” the mestizo as a constant becoming. The mestizo is supposed to recognize its limitations; it *needs* (naturally) to form a hybrid. The hybridity that *mestizaje* represents is one of eroding indigenous ancestry, a form of ritual around the conception of a new human, making the womb the corporeal space of hope. At the same time, the “Mexican woman” in nationalist movements, as Emma Pérez comments, is placed as nurturing mother yet a contested place

where it was expected for her to serve as a corporeal foundation of the Mexican nation and her political participation is conditioned by the patriarchal system (in the form most of the times by her male counterpart) (Pérez 1999, 219). The figure of La Malinche as the concubine of Cortés, according to Taylor (2009), is the female contact with the European counterpart as an exemplar of the mestizo culture as the Virgen de Guadalupe as a model of the sanctity and submission. Both female figures constitute the nature of femininity in the nation-building process: the Virgin Mary as the foundation of Catholic faith by representing a brown skin sanctity with indigenous features, and La Malinche as the “reluctant mother of the nation [which] has an alter-ego relationship with the Virgin of Guadalupe” (Taylor 2009, 94). Taylor pointed out, echoing Octavio Paz, that La Malinche is the image of the mother of *mestizaje*. As a passive woman who is the genesis of a *mestizaje* and who has intimate contact with the European settlers, La Malinche is not only the embodiment of a colonial encounter by giving a mestizo offspring, but is the image of a cultural *mestizaje* and the acceptance of an “inevitable” bodily encounter. Paz suggests an image of La Malinche as:

a representation of the violated Mother, it is appropriate to associate her with the Conquest, which was also a violation, not only in the historical sense but also in the very flesh of Indian women. She loses her name; she is no one; she disappears into nothingness; she is Nothingness. And yet she is the cruel incarnation of the feminine condition. (Paz in Taylor 2009)

While this perspective of La Malinche may result in a totalitarian image of the Mexican woman, La Malinche is not a mother, nor does she represent the perfect(ed) motherhood in Mexican dominant discourses of motherhood and gender construction. It does, however, represent a “cultural metaphor of mestizaje” (Saldaña-Portillo 2003, 210)

by providing an image of a complex reality; while La Malinche represents a betrayal (by accepting her partnership with Cortés), she also represents an intimate space of a denial of the indigenous female-bodied identities by placing La Malinche's body in a violent intimate relationship, by which the *india* body is placed in a long-term administration under the gaze of *mestizaje*,⁶³ her body being a repository of settler colonialism and a site of contestation.

The corporeality of female bodies in Mexico as part of a (continuous) nation-building process creates dialectic relationships. It is also important to emphasize one of the most forgotten relationships: *mestizaje* erases the history and memories of slavery, the slave trade, and Black presence in (post)colonial Mexico (Vinson III and Vaughn 2004).

The erasure and negation of Black presence in Mexico is an essential part of the discourse of *mestizaje*, understanding that “discursive practices produce rather than merely describe the subjects and objects of knowledge” (Barad 2008, 137). The racial structure that *mestizaje* has built as “meaningful statements,” i.e., the corporeal representations of a mestiza, does not relate to her slave past. Nor does it claim an indigenous identity; instead it appeals to a mestizo identity, all as part of discourses of “knowing” and “being” (Barad 2008) in the Mexican nation, ascribing to Afro descendants in Mexico a denied corporeal representation: they *exist* within the boundaries of Mexico but live under a negated existence. The question is: how does one reconcile a slave past, a violent *mestizaje*, when one does not exist? What is one to do with this “complex system of permission and

⁶³ Cf, Hekman 2010 and Grosz 1995.

prohibition” (Gordon 2008, 17) that denies—and even erases—corporeal representations and manifestations?

An approach to the body, as matter under the lens of material feminisms and in the context of *mestizaje*, invites a questioning of the corporeal representations of the *mestiza* and *india* as fundamental categories of Western heteronormative culture (Chong 2008). The traditional perspective of *matter* influenced by Cartesian thought defined matter as a corporeal substance easily to measure and identify, emphasizing that matter was bounded. The matter for Descartes was passive and portrayed humans as rational, capable of exercising agency. I would venture to state that *mestizaje* within colonality is a discourse that can be defined as that which “is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enables what can be said” (2008, 137). Hames-Garcia (2008) proffers that the “act to perform” and represent through knowledge is what has distinguished validated knowledge from non-scientific knowledge, as Quijano asserts. Colonality is a structure of power with elements such as sexual and gender conceptions; control and the division of labor; appropriation and control over resources and products; justified violence and authority; and intersubjectivity and knowledge (Quijano 2000, 555). Discursive practices define what count as meaningful statements (Barad 2008, 137). Matter, within the *coloniality of power*, can have different forms, since matter is potentiality, a becoming (Colebrook 2008; Barad 2008).

The ideology of modernity resonates in the institutionalization of valid knowledges, ways of knowing, and knowledge systems, as well as the creation of laws and norms, and their inscription on bodies. As Restrepo describes, “modernity is violence and imposition, its hands are tainted with blood and any rhetoric of salvation can hide the

corpses and the chains on which it is built on” (Restrepo 2011, 129). The process of *mestizaje* has been treated in Mexican scholarship from a shallow critical perspective, emphasizing the aggressive and violent past. Only few scholars recognize how *mestizaje* has a deeper influence than cultural identities, affecting the way history and time linearity is perceived as real. As Alaimo explains, regarding nature and corporeal feminisms, “nature, as a philosophical concept, a potential ideological node, and a cultural repository of norms and moralism, has long been waged against women, people of color, indigenous peoples, queers, and the lower class” (Alaimo 2008, 239).

What we know about the world, and how we come to know, is interrelated with what we understand and define as being. The separation of ontology from epistemology “assumes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse” (Barad 2008, 147). The incorporation of non-Western logics and “ways of being” into the discussion of materiality and *mestizaje* has found the most fruitful space for discussion and acceptance within social movements and non-institutionalized educational centers in Mexico.⁶⁴ Also, part of the Cartesian dualisms is the role of reason/nature dualism, construct-determined hierarchies of rational/irrational, including “those who perform manual as opposed to intellectual tasks.” (Plumwood 1993, 47) The limitations of Western radicalism are endemic to Western civilization (Robinson 2007); the racial ordering in (post) colonial Mexico is explained as a logical consequence of nation(al) building, and ideology of *mestizaje* is understood as a painful and violent but “necessary” process of evolution toward the bettering of society, including death by

⁶⁴ See Guitérrez Chong 2001.

ethnocide, forced disappearances, and environmental racism.⁶⁵ Ruth Gilmore's concept of racism sheds some light on how to perceive racism or the racial discourse (within coloniality of power). She defines racism as the "state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (2007, 28). If *mestizaje* denies the corporeal representation of certain bodies, then ethnocide and forced disappearances may not be as evident.

The multiple killings and ongoing ethnocide in the Mexican territory (not only of Mexican citizens but Central American and Afro-descendant migrants)⁶⁶ has been masqueraded as a human rights crisis or defined as problems proper of a "failed state".

The naturalization of a discourse of dominion (Plumwood 1993, 51) also includes the perception of *terra nullius*. As Pateman points out, this perception is of one where "the territory is empty, vacant, deserted, uninhabited, *vacuum domicilium*, it belongs to no one, *is territoire sans maître*, it is waste, uncultivated, virgin, desert, wilderness" (2008, 36). I would argue that part of this *terra nullius* is the dominion over not only the territory (as nature), but also the visibility of the corporeal of certain subjects (as natural). It seems that traditional social science approaches have not been effective in producing "visibility" or

⁶⁵ Cf, Casper 2009. For Casper, "race, in particular, is crucial to an articulation of necropolitics, with racism historically functioning to regulate the distribution of death. Life is subjugated to the power of death, marking necropower and necropolitics as necessary concepts to grasp changes in the contemporary world of terror" (2009, 27).

⁶⁶ Consistent with the discourse of national security, immigration from Central America has been treated as a problem threatening not only the political and economic order but also the cultural stability of a nation that since its origins has been corrupted by colonization. In this chapter, I argue that the anti-immigration discourses against Central American immigration are significantly correlated to the continuation of hate and ethnocide against indigenous peoples in Mexican territory. The source, I contend, is the anti-indigeneity and racial organization established since colonial times. Currently, I am working on a conference position chapter on this topic titled "De-colonizing National Security Policies: Non-State Actors Resistance to Immigration Laws and Anti-Migrant Actions, the Case of Central American Migration in Mexican Territory."

the basic ability to recognize that the denial of certain bodies is endemic to social inquiry. The black communities in Mexico are not recognized by the State as part of the African Diaspora, nor are they officially recognized as “black” within the official census; their material “death” was announced by the discourse of *mestizaje*. As Sexton points out, “blackness is a kind of invisibility” where “you are anonymous to yourself,” a negation (2011, 38). To speak about blackness, Sexton (2011) believes, requires to conceptualize not as a shared culture but as the condition of statelessness. This is similar to the study of African Diaspora in Mexico. According to Olliz-Boyd (2010), this has to be linked to a broader discourse; that is, to questions of the presence of black heritage in Latin America as well as the process by which the memories of slavery have been erased from national memory. Olliz-Boyd contends that to recover the memories of slavery requires not only a deep restructuring of the social fabric but also a reassessment of the epistemological basis of our concepts of nation, state and racial/caste categories. The process of anti-blackness in Mexico found a fruitful ground within the discourse of coloniality of power, which displaced and sought to legitimize the disappearances of indigenous communities (or *pueblos*) as well as their knowledges, under a façade of progress and unification of the national identity (Gutierrez Chong 2008).

Both Afro-descendants and indigenous pueblos have experienced disappearances of their corporeal representations. With the *presence* of contemporary indigenous writers in the Mexican public sphere⁶⁷ (that is, they are visible within the discourse of coloniality of power) and with the experiences from the neo-Zapatist movement (Gutiérrez Chong

⁶⁷ To name a few; Natalio Hernández Hernández, Mikeas Sánchez, Feliciano Sánchez Chan, Petrona de la Cruz, and Carlos Armando Cruz Ezk.

2004), the voices of indigenous people have attracted the interest of both activists and researchers in the social sciences and humanities. Despite the fervor the neo-Zapatista movement has caused, the presence of indigenous intellectuals in academic settings is limited and guarded as a place for radicalism within Western logic formations. As Comandante from Tacho the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) stated in a communiqué in 2001:

los malos gobiernos nunca reconocen nuestra existencia, ni mucho menos nuestras formas de organizarnos que son conocimientos milenarios. Así pasaron los más de cinco siglos y no pudieron acabar con nosotros y el día de hoy les decimos que ya nunca permitiremos más un México sin nosotros los indígenas.

The bad governments never recognized our existence or our *ways of organizing* that are millenary knowledges. More than five centuries have passed and they cannot destroy us and today we tell them that we will never allow them to have a Mexico without us, the indigenous.

The use of a discourse of recognition of “the existence of the indigenous peoples” implies a transgression of the Mexican nation, as the indigenous writer Natalio Hernandez Henandez points out: it is necessary to “transcend modernity and other cultural contexts, without giving up the root, the origin, the self-identity, the cultural matrix” (Hernández Hernandez, 1998, 181-182). The contribution of indigenous writers and intellectuals (mostly in the humanities) during the post-EZLN uprising (1994) brings questions not only of political inclusion and human rights but also of the discourse of inclusion in academic communities by writing without the measurement of Western logics and Cartesian dualisms.⁶⁸ The work of indigenous intellectuals who remember and want their work to

⁶⁸ Cf, Hernandez Hernandez 1987; 1998; Silko 1996; Adamson 2012.

resonate with their *nocolhua cuicate* (our ancestor singers) opens a fruitful intellectual path to find a common ground between material feminisms (including *posthumanism*) and indigenous contemporary writing, which has found also a transnational site for activism and indigenous and non-indigenous writers.⁶⁹

In 1990, the organization México Negro (Black Mexico) was founded with the intention to organize the Costa Chica region (Guerrero state). The organization has been hosting events in collaboration with intellectuals, artists, and activists from the Caribbean, Africa, and the United States of America. The intention to form a collective of Afro-descendants or Afromestizos (in order to recognize their shared indigenous past with the Guerrero state) is to unite the area of Costa Chica with other Afrodescendant communities in Mexico, but mostly to form a dialogue based on *Négritud* (echoing Césaire). The vast majority of Afro-descendant spaces for visibility and dialogue are the independent *Congresos* (congresses) such as the *Primer Encuentro de Pueblos Negros* in 1997. Similarly, civil organizations and community activist have founded and contributed to the establishment of a museum of Afro-Mestizo Cultures in Guerrero⁷⁰ to preserve the memories of the invisibilized black communities in Mexico.

Chapter Conclusions

Because death does not hurt; what hurts is to be forgotten. We discovered then that we no longer existed, and those who govern had forgotten about us in their euphoria of statistics and growth rates. (Subcomandante Marcos)

⁶⁹ Cf, Hernandez Hernandez 2005; Montemayor 2001.

⁷⁰ Cf, Lewis 2012.

In this chapter I have delineated a framework for the discussion of *mestizaje* using different theoretical perspectives, from the material turn, Latin American critiques of coloniality (i.e., Quijano), and critiques of Cartesian dualism and its influence in denying corporeal representations. To say that matter is a potentiality and a becoming (Deleuze and Guattari 1988) creates a space of reflection and possibilities for emancipatory practices (within and outside institutionalized academia), a discussion that needs to relate to the discourse of coloniality of power since the denial of corporeal representations of indigeneity and blackness in (post)colonial Mexico entails the absence of any visible account and recognition of the slave past in official Mexican history (and institutionalized memories, i.e., national museums). The existence of different ontologies require, besides, a critical theoretical endeavor, to write the stories of haunting, as Gordon (2008) suggest: the “ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigation, it can lead to that sense site where history and subjectivity make social life”. (Gordon 2008, 8)

The “modernization” of the Mexican nation as a patria (emphasizing the Latin etymology, *pater*: padre, father) has permeated into Mexican academia by sometimes even rejecting indigeneity and blackness, as a protection and defense of Mexicanness as an integral part of a nationalism. This same forgery responds to the coloniality of power in a masquerade of benevolent social science research, activism or public policies.

What is needed is to challenge *mestizaje* as a discourse of coloniality and to move from the essentialisms and reverences attributed to Western social sciences and humanities,

and instead incorporating decolonial thinking, recognizing the negation of knowledge systems and transgress *mestizaje* by transforming the consciousness of (colonial) materiality. As Bouaventura de Sousa Santos asks in *Beyond Abyssal Thinking* (2007): “how can we fight against the abyssal lines using conceptual and political instruments that don’t reproduce them?” It is in the lines of the abyss represented by modern knowledge and modern law (de Sousa Santos 2006, 2) that de Sousa Santos situates a period of epistemological transition that would recognize the necessity to incorporate to our analysis a “cognitive global justice” (de Sousa Santos 2010, 29). This cognitive global justice at the same time presents a critique to cosmopolitanism and a “self-reflecting undertaking” (de Sousa Santos 2006, 18), which would require a critique from within subaltern studies and postcolonial studies. Sometimes from within the scholarship of resistance critical inquiries create peripheral memories and foreign and alien bodies—in other words, histories are uniquely embodied (Mortimer-Sandilands 2008).

The centering of the human body and its trans-corporeality (Alaimo 2010, 15) responds first to the need to reconsider the body within feminist theory (Alaimo 2010). The material turn proposes the endeavor to emphasize “the material interconnections of human corporeality with the more-than-human world, and at the same time acknowledging that material agency necessitate more capacious epistemologies” (Alaimo 2008, 238). The epistemologies derive from an inquiry that includes a critique of the essentialism of the matter, and the traditional opposition of nature-culture (Alaimo 2008).

As delineated in this chapter, a discussion of the convergences among the material turn and decolonial thinking in relation to the ideology of *mestizaje* and anti-blackness put

in evidence that the alienated bodies are intended to perish; *mestizaje* conditions the indigenous body to its disappearance, as well as *mestizaje* is a precondition for black-negation. As expressed by Torres and Whitten, Jr. (1998), to study the African Diaspora in the Americas is to trace down the connections with structures of domination and the traditional material relations (political economy); but at the same time, Torres and Whitten, Jr. state that structures of domination in former colonized territories reproduce reification, which “occurs when people consciously read symbolic, religious, moral or ideological properties into categorical social relationships, as though these properties actually existed” (1998, 24). The reification of these relationships need human bodies and other matter as evidence of *existence*; the same is true with the absence and nullification of blackness and indigeneity. The mestizo is predisposed to “heal [sic.] a wound in civil society” (Wilderson III 2010, 300) and prepares the spaces of Black negation, and Black death.

The creation of spaces of connection and distention are not based only in a *difference* that is tolerated but “necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic” (Lorde 2000, 54). Lorde asserts that the interdependence of mutual differences would enable us to “descend into the chaos of knowledge and return with true visions of our future” (Lorde 2000, 54). To envision a future requires a recognition of the hauntings of Black negation that are part of a spectacle (Wilderson III 2010; Martinot and Sexton 2003) of violence, a subtle efficiency (Martinot and Sexton 2003, 173) to create not only vacant spaces within conceptual paradigms, but nonexistence which “means not existing in any relevant or comprehensible way of being” (2015, 115). A critique and analysis of *mestizaje* that is made within the same boundaries of traditional conceptual instruments will lead to a series of unfruitful efforts and innumerable questionings of the

“material conditions” of the “periphery” or the “fourth world.” To incorporate material feminisms into the study of *mestizaje* and Black negation (as intrinsic within *mestizaje*) puts in evidence that the system of oppression extends to the *corporeal* (and the *transcorporeal*), since “the self is corporeal, woven into a larger fabric of history, culture and power” (Alaimo 2010, 86). Grosz (2002) believes the new strategies and projects for deconstruction

bring with them **new intellectual resources** to be used in such a labor – new concepts, arguments and conclusions. Concepts need to be as inventive as the strategies they engender, and **they need to wrench terms from previous regimes and alignments of domination for we cannot always rely on the terms provided by dominant discourses to do the radical work of the transformation of the old and production of the new.** (463, my emphasis)

Relying on Grosz, a call is needed for new intellectual resources and in order to avoid the “uncritical use [and study of] of *mestizaje*” (Lovell Banks, 2006, 204). This needs to be based upon the recognition of the relationship between decoloniality and antiblackness as one of a dialectic relationship. The *material turn* calls for a new understanding of the body and the engendering of materiality, recognizing the need to invent and transform concepts from “previous regimes and alignments of domination. The patterns of “dominance-submission” (Minh-ha 1986) are perpetuated through oblivion of Blackness in Latin America, and the *material* conditions that this making of the *nonbody* brings for indigeneity, making it easier to dispossess not only palpable resources. All this is an iteration of the “making of the world” by settler-colonial knowledge systems.

Chapter 3

Indigeneity, Legality and the Embodiment of Maize: An Eco-feminist Approach

In this chapter I delineate and discuss how expert knowledge (EK) interacts with social activism, in specific socio-ecological activism in times of crisis. As discussed in Chapter 4, the body politics of the intangible, in cases of environmental justice are a key component to understand socio-ecological conflicts and how the modern/capitalist/patriarchal system (Lugones 2006) works in relation to the making of nature and women as a source for resources, objectification and treatment of both women and nature as “dead matter” (Merchant 1980). In this chapter, I discuss how ecofeminism in Mexico has been developed and have found particular ways to approach cases of

environmental justice. Furthermore, I rely on decolonial theory, since it responds to a necessity for a theoretical exercise that is upfront with the necessities of critical social science research and that intend to provide a project of emancipation.

I then present an analysis of the case of transgenic corn in Mexico, relying on eco-feminist discussions (especially from Latin America and other Global South spaces) and as discussed on Chapter 2, focusing on how material feminisms, decolonial theory and decolonial feminisms approach the topic of transgenic maize and its connections with other socio-ecological conflicts, such as; epistemological hierarchies, gender violence, forced disappearances, unpaid domestic and care labour. (Werlholff 2012; 1997a, Federeci 2006, Merchant 1980)

The case of transgenic maize in Mexico has been approached by social scientists from different perspectives. In the case of ‘maize’ and its connections to ancestral knowledge, this perspective has developed two approaches. First, it can be used with a simplistic perspective which implies that indigenous traditions and cultures are being romanticize, and at the same time disregarding the material implications and seriousness of indigenous cosmologies. This perspective does not provide an alternative solution to agribusiness nor modifies the assistentialist and dependency discourse which has been common among civil organizations, state organisms, and some international non-governmental organizations. Second, the existence of critical perspectives that are not limited to the incorporation of ancestral knowledges and practices as a mere description of certain groups. These emphasize how indigenous knowledges and cosmologies have been relegated, ostracized and purposely ignored. Under this perspective, several decolonial

practices can take place, for example indigenous community based approaches, alternative justice systems and revitalization of indigenous languages and cultures.

The second perspective is one who understands “maize” simply as a crop, which also can be a market commodity. This perspective can be seen as one who relies its arguments on a traditional perspective of market economies and commodity exchanges. In addition, this perspective can include a critique of trade, unequal exchange and a critique to neoliberal capitalism, neo-imperialism and the making of “underdevelopment”. (Fenelon 2012) What this perspective can offer is a global approach to inequality, imperialism and dispossession, which can incorporate a discussion on how indigeneity intersects to questions of gender, sexuality, nature/culture divide, among other topics. (Hames-García 2013, Fenelon 2012) As Bookchin (1987) states:

In our discussions of modern ecological and social crises, we tend to ignore a more underlying mentality of domination that humans have used for centuries to justify the domination of each other and, by extension, of nature. I refer to an image of the natural world that sees nature itself as ‘blind,’ ‘mute,’ ‘cruel,’ ‘competitive,’ and ‘stingy,’ and seemingly demonic ‘realm of necessity’ that opposes ‘man’s’ striving for freedom and self-realization. (50)

The third approach, is one that embraces different perspectives, both from the validation of the scientific community through the use of *expert knowledge* as reliable and valid knowledge, and from the incorporation of perspectives outside the scientific community, such as indigenous knowledges, indigenous cosmologies (in its different expressions, for example traditional medicine, poetry, performance, among others). Also, this type of perspective allows the incorporation of critiques to market oriented societies and the relations within it.

For this chapter, I interviewed environmental feminists, scientists, environmental activists, lawyers and community members that live in Mexico, and work on issues of environmental justice struggles and alternative socio-ecological projects. My analysis, theoretical recollections and discussions are based on this. In addition, I conducted participant observation in Mexico City, Oaxaca City and Teotitlán del Valle, Oaxaca. I participated in community forums, and in activities with women's collectives. This field research has informed this chapter as well as the rest of the entire project.

This chapter serves as an entry point to discuss how 'the environment' is studied, understood and interpreted with regards to social problems in Mexico. Furthermore, I provide a discussion on how expertise (or expert knowledge) is politicized and genderized.

The Global South and the Modern/Colonial/Capitalist/Heterosexual/Patriarchal System

In this research, I refer to the Global South and Global North as two geopolitical divisions that distance itself from the inheritance of the Cold War, where the denominations of First World, Third World were composed and structure as a set of hierarchies. As Harding (2008) mentions on her choice of Global South/North:

North/South became the favored way to refer to the industrialized/non-industrialized societies of the world more than a decade ago in the context of the United Nations conference on environmental issues held in Rio de Janeiro. This contrast replaced "First World/Third World," which was rejected as an artifact of the Cold War, and "developed/underdeveloped," "haves/have nots," "West/Orient" and earlier shorthand ways of referring to the effects of five centuries of European and North American imperialism, colonialism, capitalist expansion, and the diverse other local politics which have bequeathed us contemporary global social relations (235).

Hence, that the construction of paradigms of modernity accompanied the processes of industrialization, imperial expansion and imposition and development of different forms of oppression. Hence, that the knowledge reproduced in the Global South intends to disrupt the dominant ideologies of the Global North around justice, autonomy, gender equality, sexuality and alternative practices to the norm, presented as a grounded alternative to a diverse populations, including the ones in the Global South.

The embedded paradigms of universalism, and more importantly the hierarchization of the radicalism is structured by invisibilizing “the contribution of racial/ethnic and feminist subaltern perspectives to epistemological questions” (Grosfoguel 2008) The reproduction of the same scientific paradigms in Latin America have been embedded within social science research that circumvents concerns of justice and autonomy.)

The inclusion of indigenous cosmologies, alternative socio-environmental perspectives in the counter-hegemonic movements against resource extraction which according to Raúl Zibechi (2003) are a result of neoliberal policies and plans implemented in the 80s in the Americas. As noted by Manuela Boatca (2016); “Latin American dependency theorists [...] viewed underdevelopment as the result of the long history of colonial domination in Latin America and described the economic situation of postindependence in the region as ‘neoimperialism and as neodependence,’ that is a continuation of colonial policies.” (368).

Is not a coincidence, that outside the Americas, Bolivia and Ecuador are attracting attention because of the social movements that have gestating, separated from the

traditional proletariat, labour union movements which according to Zibechi focus exclusively on traditional labour relations, and respond to the neoliberal practices. By 2006, more movements in Latin America rose from different parts of society making different connections from states sponsored violence and autonomous communities, for example the *Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca* (APPO) (Popular Assembly of the Pueblos of Oaxaca) in Mexico, which is one of the exemplary movements representing autonomous communities, having their own means of subsistence, autonomous and collective government. (Esteva 2007)

These type of iconic movements, for Zibechi (2003), have three trajectories of work for their mobilizations; mostly demands for autonomy and at the same time to demand the rights that were lost in the process of privatization, massive industrialization, and loss of rights which were acquired through the process of massive mobilizations and negotiations. As expressed by Zibechi (2003):

[they] work for the revalorization of the culture and the affirmation of the identity of their people and social sectors. The politics of affirmation of ethnic and gender differences, that is an essential role within the indigenous and women movements, starts to being valued by the old and new poor people. Their de facto exclusion from citizenship seems to be pushing them to look for another world from their own positionality, without losing their particular characteristics. To discover that the concept of citizenship has only any sense unless there are excluded people, has been a painful lesson from the last decades. Hence the current dynamics of the movements have been towards overcoming the concept of citizenship, which was useful for two centuries to whom needed to contained and divide the dangerous classes. (186)

By making visible the possibility to imagine alternatives to mainstream approaches to nature, gender and relations of oppression, more interconnections are uncovered, including *other* ways to communicate and act in environmental justice struggles. Social

context, either violent or non-violent environmental conflicts, determines how the conflict is going to be managed. (Lauderdale and Cruik 1993, 180-181) With this in mind, it is possible to explore under what conditions *scientific expertise* and environmental activists strategize in times of crisis.

Eco-feminism and Environmental Thought in Mexico

It is a difficult situation to pinpoint the beginning of environmental feminist thought in Mexico. To do so, it would be necessary to equate and identify eco-feminism in its different manifestations and interpretations under the framework of eco-feminisms, both from the United States and Europe, mostly a genealogy if you will. For ecological feminism is understood as a feminist and an environmental ethics that includes a comprehensive approach to understanding “the twin and interconnected dominations of women and nature is at best incomplete and at worst simply inadequate”. (Warren 1993, 81) In any of its different forms -liberal, radical and socialist- ecofeminism has been concerned with human relations and nature, as well as interpreting the interconnectedness among humans and legal systems, patriarchalism and capitalist patriarchy and the possibilities for its restructuring. (Merchant 1989) The ecofeminist paradigm is defined by Janis Birkeland (1993) as:

A value system, a social movement, and a practice, but it also offers a political analysis that explores the links between androcentrism and environmental destruction. It is an “awareness” that begins with the realization that the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western Man’s attitude toward women and tribal cultures or, in Ariel Salleh’s words, that there is a ‘parallel in men’s thinking between their right to exploit nature, on the one hand, and the use they make of women, on the other. (18)

In Latin America, environmental eco-feminist movements, are not always labeled as ‘eco-feminists’ and literary works are not conventionally labeled as “nature writing”. (Gebara 2003) Instead, critiques of capitalist development, land alienation, pauperization

and proletarianization in Latin America found a place within feminist perspectives. Coming from a long and almost identitary tradition with traditions such as Marxist, Neo-Marxist, Frankfurt School, Liberation Theology, a space to discuss the processes of marginalization on women and its interconnectedness to care and reproductive labour and the positionality of women within the capitalist society. (Mies and Werlholz 1998) Due to the intellectual dependency of some academic sectors in Latin America to the Global North, several theories and scholarly contributions have arrived faster than others.⁷¹ The work of Vandana Shiva and Silvia Federici have been well received in Mexican scholarship and activism. The visit of Vandana Shiva in 2014 to Mexico was in the context of massive mega projects and environmental destruction, including the introduction of transgenic maize in Mexico, her visit was supported by scholars, activists and more importantly for the civil organizations that work closely in topics related to food sovereignty, environmental depredation and state accountability. At the same time, an increased interest for peasant agriculture and agroecology has been visible in the advent of an ecological crisis and potential food scarcity. Together, small cooperatives, association of peasants, activists, scholars (and scholars-activists) have been working since the North American Trade Agreement (NAFTA) towards a movement and concrete strategies that cross disciplines and geographies.

Ecofeminism is sometimes called *perspectiva de género* (gender perspective) meaning that certain topics can include a perspective of gender and sexuality without being feminists. One of the most prominent exponents of eco-feminism in Mexico, is Hilda Salazar Ramírez who has been working on the interconnectedness between gender and

⁷¹ This has been discussed in Chapter 2.

environmental justice in Mexico through the *Red de Género y Medio Ambiente* (Rgema) (Network of Gender and Environment) and the civil organisation *Mujer y Medio Ambiente A.C.* (Women and Environment). Influenced by international conferences such as the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit (1992), and later the formation of a forum in Mexico named “Forum of Civil Society towards Rio 92”. Although this forum encouraged activists and scholars after Rio 1992, and introduced topics such as “women and work”, “women and consumption”, these did not speak to the interests of the women of the South who were focused on topics of community development, proletariat struggles, toxicity and environmental catastrophes⁷². (Salazar Ramírez et.al. 2010, 336) The emphasis on the struggles was one with a regional emphasis and social context, and the urgency to attend cases that place the urban and mostly rural populations at risk. In the context and preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing 1995), *Mujer y Medio Ambiente*, a civil organization in Mexico, invited more than 300 women, 80 civil organizations from 18 states of Mexico. The result was the elaboration of *La Agenda Verde* (The Green Agenda) a document that served as a guideline and background for the constitution of the *Red de Género y Medio Ambiente* (Rgema) (Network of Gender and Environment).

This network serves as a “space for the permanent interlocution between non-governmental environmental and feminists organisations, which [since the beginning of Rgema] have started a dialogue with the relevant government agencies”. (Blanco Lobo 2006, 91-94) The results of these networking strategies have been fruitful on connecting

⁷² For example the group called “Grupo Antinuclear de Madres Veracruzanas” (*Group of Antinuclear Veracruzans Mothers*)

environmental activists throughout Mexico and abroad by sharing experiences and finding commonalities and connections on the cases they are dealing with. These connections have incidence on governmental sponsored research and sponsorship around topics of water and gender, and public policy. As Salazar Ramírez et.al. (2010) comments, the limitations to the interaction with governmental agencies and institutions is due to the lack of understanding of what 'gender' constitutes, and how this is part of the political life of people. Other actions of the Rgema have been successful, by integrating gender perspectives to governmental institutions and programs.

It is possible that a high reliance on the state and its institutions limits the action for decolonial and depatriarchal practices. Hence, environmental conflicts are a sign of a failed project, the postcolonial state. It can't be denied that while programs like Rgem serve a function within the specific paradigm they are operating, they do not offer a project for freedom, justice or liberation from the byproducts of the postcolonial state. This include questions around patriarchy, anthropocentrism, and the functioning of the modern/colonial/capitalist/patriarchal world system (von Werlhof 1997b; Lugones 2010; 2007).

The Emergence of Ecofeminism from Below

In a town named Huitzo, which is located about 30 minutes away from Oaxaca City, exists a collective of women who are working towards community building, traditional medicine, and self-managed projects (*proyectos autogestivos*). The name of this cooperative is *Unitierra Huitzo*, and is related to Unitierra-Oaxaca City. This organisation, Unitierra is a community based project that intends to de-professionalized

education as well as depart from state sponsored and private educational institutions. The difference is that this collective is run by women and has a different approach to the needs of the community. My first visit with them was in relation to eco-techniques. I asked if they identify themselves as ecofeminists, and the reasons why they are interested on having a space for the community. The group of women, are dedicated to self-reliance through economic projects, and the employment of eco-techniques at their homes.

Although Unitierra-Huitzo works at a local level, it brings to question what is understood and theorize as eco-feminism in places like Mexico, since this organization works from a community based approach and responds to the necessities (immediate and long-term) of the community. Different from Rgem, and other civil organizations the group of women at Unitierra-Huitzo, have an approach to gender, that recognizes the need to separate themselves from state institutions and that the coloniality of gender functions in a distinctive way. As Lugones (2010) comments; “unlike colonization, the coloniality of gender is still with us; it is what lies at the intersection of gender/class/race as central constructs of the capitalist world system of power. Thinking about the coloniality of gender enables us to think of historical beings only one-sidedly, understood as oppressed.” (746) Therefore, the projects at Unitierra-Huitzo revolve around an idea of autonomy from the state and from a traditional heterosexual arrangement of family. The idea of *paths to autonomy* and of *communitarian feminism* are core ideas to the Unitierra-Oaxaca and Unitierra-Huitzo. (Ornelas 2004) Influenced by the 1994 Zapatista movement and from critical perspectives to capitalist development, publishing collectives at Unitierra-Oaxaca have published texts both from the Global South and Global North, including Bolivian feminist activist, Julieta Paredes (2010), Spanish author Casilda

Rodrigañez, among others. With the introduction and distribution of different works, academic (or not) through organizations that are based on communalism, is possible to see and foster a decentralization of the ways knowledge is concentrated in academic circles.

A critical piece to understand an *ecofeminism from below* is how it is built based on the daily experience of men and women. For example, Unitierra-Huitzo and the group of women who founded it, are working within the social context of Huitzo. The immediate needs of the community are attended, for example by incorporating eco-techniques to houses, and creating self-managing programs (*proyectos autogestivos*) that ensure a long term sustainable projects of living.

The question remains if Unitierra-Huitzo, an all women organization, can be defined as an eco-feminist group? Since it is on its early stages of formation, it is difficult to say where the organizations is going. But in a small scale, these women are challenging coloniality of gender including an eco-feminist perspective from below. Considering their positionalities as mestiza women in the town of Huitzo, departing from the economic, social and spiritual needs offered by the modern/colonial/capitalist/patriarchal system is a starting point of a potential eco-feminist project. These acts are in small scale and they depart from an institutionalized ecofeminism.

Most of the people who participated in Unitierra-Huitzo, are self-identified mestiza women between the ages of 30-50 years. For Lola Santo Olalla, a participant in Unitierra-Huitzo, one of the key components of this organization is their focus on indigenous knowledges and non-Western forms of healing. For Lola, this group of women have offered a de-centralized space in Huitzo, a small town in the state of Oaxaca.

The challenge for this organisation has been to attract young people to the workshops, and new exchange students and professors. The incorporation of new programs on nutrition, and projects of community projects are working on influencing the ways knowledge is being transmitted and reproduced. As Gebera (1992) comments; “working on epistemology is not just a matter of trying to influence the process of transmitting knowledge; it is working toward changing the hierarchical power structure itself, which continues to propagate itself in the underlying structures of our society and, in consequence, of our knowing” (21). The potential changes that Unitierra-Huitzo can bring to new ways of knowing is through a *communitarian feminism* that serves as way to recognize *otherness* and to organise the society and life itself. (Cabnal 2010; Paredes 2010; Espinosa Miñoso 2009)

It is possible to say that Unitierra-Huitzo engages in some sort of transnational feminism based on the exchange of experiences they are fostering with feminist groups from Mexico, Europe and the USA. For Desai (2005) transnational feminism is the process of connections and exchanges among women in different geopolitical locations.

Although there is not a direct participation in global forums (as other feminist activists in Mexico and Latin America) the people who participate in the activities promoted by Unitierra-Huitzo, have been fostering virtual and on-site exchanges with students, scholars, activists and people interested in projects that allow “distinctive political and cultural resources [...] that can sometimes advance the growth of knowledge.” (Harding 2006, 153) Moreover, Unitierra-Huitzo rather than presenting as a group of women in need, they offer an expertise apart from the (Western) scientific gaze. It is possible conceptualize and theorize about ecofeminism from below that focus on local and

indigenous knowledge systems challenging what counts as universal knowledge.
(Appleton, et.al 2011; Hess 2007; Perez Aguilera and Figueroa Helland 2011)



Image 1. Unitierra Huitzo

Other groups by indigenous and mestiza women that have been working ‘from below’ towards environmental justice and defense of the land and women’s rights are the *Red Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas: Tejiendo Derechos por la Madre Tierra y Territorio* (National Network of Indigenous Women: Weaving Rights for Mother Earth and Territory) (RENAMITT) and the *Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas* (National Coordinator of Indigneous Women) (CONAMI). Both organisations have been active in coordinating efforts throughout Mexico to vinculate and find convergences among the different groups of indigenous women in Mexico. Also, consiwdering that the defense of the land and women rights are not a separate issue, the RENAMITT

recognizes the different experiences of indigenous and non-indigenous women in Mexico and how their oppression is also linked to dispossession and a system of oppression .

These civil organisations are not the only ones working towards the defense of territory and women's rights in Mexico. These type of organisations, such as RENAMITT and CONAMI, are ones that can form alliances among different groups of women and have the potentiality to build a larger community of activists and scholars that from 'from below' with this, and along the work of feminist scholars in Mexico, it has been in recent years to raise awareness about the connection of dispossession, gender and self-determination.

The Conflict of Transgenic Maize in Mexico

As a result of agribusiness and the Green Revolution in Mexico (as the rest of Latin America) and after an increment in production between 1950 and 1970 (Esteva and Barkin 1980, 60) the agricultural sector in Mexico fell onto an oblivion, and privatization of public services as well as the rapid involvement of the country on trade agreements, which displaced local farmers, causing a massive exodus to other parts of Mexico and to the USA, mostly. The Green Revolution failed to deliver what it was promised; an increased on agricultural efficiency, alleviate poverty and prevent scarcity. These assumptions bet on a project that based on the inclusion of a technocratic projects, including the modernization and industrialization of the agricultural sector. (Bartra 2008; Pichardo González 2006; Hollifield 1998)

In the case the introduction of transgenic crops in Mexico, is a conflict that has its beginnings in the fast modernization of the agri-business in Mexico. (Pichardo González 2006) As discussed on Chapter 2 and later in Chapter 4, the politics of the material resurge and are more evident when dealing with rescinded, discarded corporeality and matter. Thus, rural areas in Mexico are treated as discarded sites and at the same time as places for exploitation as a result, the connection between dispossession and elimination of traditional ways of life.

The first experiments with transgenic corn in Mexico were in 1993, across different regions of Mexico. After the suspension from 1998, the Mexican government decided to allow again transgenic maize since 2009. (Peralta and Marielle 2009, 445) Along with transnational corporations, the Mexican government created the necessary conditions to promote and encourage the re-introduction of transgenic crops in Mexico. (Peralta and Marielle 2009; Fitting 2011) The connection to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to counter state violence movements, such as the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) and smaller groups of resistance.

In the case of transgenic corn in Mexico, exists challenges in communicating indigenous cosmologies and in deploying indigenous knowledges in environmental justice struggles and conflict, especially in relation to the dominant culture and its hegemonic epistemology. I focus specifically on the case of transgenic maize in Mexico and the strategies used by activists, scientists, peasants and civil organizations to stop the introduction of transgenic maize in Mexico. This case, can be approached from different “communicative channels”, either science, legal or culture and art channels. Considering that this case is not exclusive to indigenous peoples, it opens up a discussion on the on

socio-ecological crises connected to the domination of nature and women for the sake of amassing capital. As pointed out by Robert L. Heilbroner (1985) the capacity to “amass capital” is related to the question of power. For Gunder Frank, capital accumulation is one of the key components for underdevelopment and how hegemony serves its purpose as an ideological tool. The values and interests of the dominating class are reproduced and embedded within the structure of society and culture (Oliverio and Lauderdale 2015; Lauderdale and Cruit, 2014). Then, the ideas that dominate the concept of progress are reproduced and perpetuated through an unconscious argument of truth and valid discourse of Eurocentric modernity (Oliverio and Lauderdale 2015, 191).

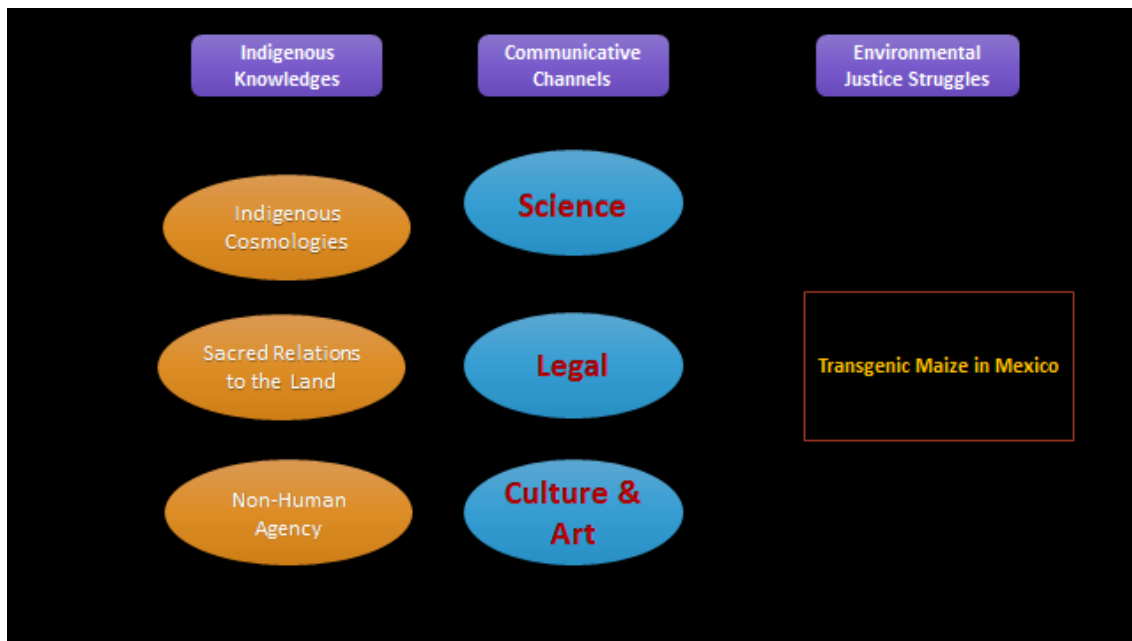


Image 2. The Communication of Environmental Conflicts and Movements

In the case of transgenic maize in Mexico, “politics of nature” are at play and have found a different set of complications. For example, different groups have argued

the relevance of maize for Amerindian people, based on indigenous knowledges and traditions.

The key point of these interventions is the risk of arguing for an unrecognized and undervalued ‘sacredness’ of indigeneity, as a remnant of *indigenismo* in Mexico. As shown on Figure 1, the case of transgenic corn in Mexico engages non-human agency, indigenous knowledges and cosmologies. I have identified three communicative channels that activists, scientists and civil organizations use to strategize around environmental justice struggles in this case, transgenic maize. These legal, scientific and cultural channels help to translate, communicate environmental conflicts and crisis, in this case transgenic maize. In this section, I discuss how a legal recourse and scientific expertise work with environmental activists under different paradigms and social contexts. Also, in Chapter 4, I discuss the how artistic representations, such as bioart serve as a different explanation to the question of the non-human personhood of maize.

The Construction of Expertise vs. Informal Expertise

One of the postcolonial myths that was brought by settler colonialists is the myth of epistemological superiority. The case of transgenic corn in Mexico has been contentious among environmental activists, scientists, legal scholars and certain sectors of civil society. This case is an example on how the study an environmental conflict that is embedded in questions of race, class, nationalism, indigeneity and scientific ethics. One of the first encounters with the aspect of expertise in social (justice) forums was in 2006, at the Permanent People’s Tribunal (PPT) held in Mexico City. Although the theme of the sessions I attended were on migration and forced displacement, several groups rely on

lawyers and social scientists to address their struggles, and present them at the PPT. In addition to this, *expertise* was recognized beyond the scientific validation and certification when community members and activists presented their cases as testimonies of their experiences on their communities.

The use of *testimonio* as a component to build community based knowledge and memories was key in making their cases. As Paredes (2010) suggests, part of a feminist communitarian feminist project is to focus on memory and its revitalization. Following this idea, testimonies that served as a way to revitalize collective memory also find a place within environmental justice struggles.

The case of transgenic maize is one related to ‘core values of the Mexican state’ as some environmental activists have commented me. In addition, Elizabeth Fitting in her book; *The struggle for maize: campesinos, workers, and transgenic corn in the Mexican countryside* (2011) explains how the expertise of scientists in considering the risks and benefits of genetically modified (GM) corn is heard by the state, as a valid recourse. In her book, based on interviews and field research in Mexico City, in the states of Oaxaca and Puebla, Fitting explains the ways scientists have interacted with peasants, and activists. Her work is a detailed research on the politics around transgenic maize in Mexico, expert and scientific knowledge as well as the connection of a threat to food sovereignty. Also, Fitting links the decaying status of the Mexican agricultural sector to massive displacement and forced migration. (Fitting 2011) While this study focus in a detailed account of the arguments around the introduction of transgenic maize in Mexico it is based on an assumption of the cultural and market commodity value of maize.

Hence, it is possible to read the conflict of transgenic maize under decolonial feminist perspective and propose an understanding of the conflict also as an *ontological conflict*.

(Blaser 2013, 2009)

The assessment of risk in the case of transgenic maize in Mexico (Fitting 2011) has a relation with the perception of modernity as the ultimate paradigm of progress.

Nevertheless, Claudia Von Werlholf (2013) points out:

Considering alternatives to modernity is arguably the major taboo in the global North. As long as no concept of patriarchy that addresses the “deep structure” of modernity is acknowledged, particularly as regards the dramatic perversion of the world (view) over not only the last 500, but the last 5000 years, the coming collapse will not be comprehensible, despite being an object of unquestionable immediate experience. (70)

Then, patriarchy, modernity and colonialism are part of a *progression* towards a diffuse myth of realization as a modern civilization. Hence, the risk of transgenic maize is calculated under the idea of effects to humans and their counterpart, nature. Also, the risks of GM maize are calculated based on material and economic consequences, such as dependency on imports and an eventual loss of food sovereignty. (McAfee 2008)

For Adelita San Vicente Tello, president of the civil organisation Fundación Semillas de Vida, A.C., “maize is an identitary reference, an element that is an identity like the Virgin of Guadalupe. As others have said, maize and humans have a close relationship, since from creationist myths to the way we use maize, we have it in our genes.” (March 26 2016, Skype interview) A reference to the inscription of maize within human and non-human bodies is essential in decolonial discussions since it connects human corporeality to the land, to indigenous cosmologies and to non-human presences and personhood. The question is how maize is understood as part of a non-human world.

As Catriona Mortimer Sandilands (2006) asks: “How can we understand the human body as a particular site of perceptions of, and interactions with, the more-than-human world? How can we describe the relationship between body and mind, or between experience and reflection, in organizing human experiences of the environment?” (267)

Maize is life; transgenic maize is not maize, it is anti-maize, anti-person, death. If maize is an essential component for indigenous cosmopolitics is the recognition of non-human personhood, how mestizaje influence, and reconstructs relations that happen outside the sphere of mestizaje? Then, neoliberal practices go in hand with the conflict around transgenic maize in Mexico. Therefore, a critical component of this critique is to seek to know the ways mestizaje (as an organizational social principle) is embedded in politics of death or necropolitics in a postcolonial setting.

In a series of sessions at the Permanent People’s Tribunal in 2013 in Mexico City, it was discussed environmental devastation, the rights of indigenous peoples, violence against maize, and food sovereignty. In one of the sessions, a presenter stated that food sovereignty is related to the rights of indigenous peoples and their autonomy. Moreover, he stated that the introduction of transgenic maize to indigenous peoples’ lands would be a genocide, since this implies that their livelihoods would be compromised. The assessment of the risks that transgenic maize have implied heavy scientific research, mass mobilizations by peasant organizations and civil society. However, the experiences and testimonies that have been heard are the ones based on scientific knowledge, even if later are dismissed as inadmissible or incomplete.

The Union of Scientists Committed with the Society (UCCS) is one of the key scientific organisations to research and distribute information around transgenic maize

and other environmental devastation. For scientist and member of the UCCS, Antonio Turrent Fernández, the question about transgenic maize in Mexico is one related to the privatization of nature, and corruption with the Mexican government. (Turrent, interview January 6, 2016) Also, scientific knowledge is dismissed when goes against the introduction and approval of transgenic maize. (Turrent, interview January 6, 2016) This challenges the arguments regarding expertise as more privileged than other types of knowledges. (Fitting 2011)

Therefore, the existence of different relations between academic and scientific groups and activists are defined by the nature of the conflicts and the state interests. Then, considering a “postcolonial science and technological writing” approach and other knowledge traditions and perspectives is possible to see a dialogue between to distinctive forms to perceive *reality*. (Harding 2006, 52-57) In the case of transgenic maize, testimonies of scientists are listened and considered as valid, while (environmental) activism is deemed as unstable, unreliable and with lack of substantial arguments. (San Vicente Tello, 2016; Turrent 2016) As Harding (2006) comments, there exists a way to bring together other sciences with Western sciences. Then, with this it is hoped indigenous knowledges can be integrated into a discussion with the same level of credibility.

As part of the meetings of the UCCS and in the context of the urgency of topic, in 2014 and attended by more than 400 researchers, scholars, government officers, students, peasants and Mexican agribusiness people the mentioned that *biodiversity of maize is a threat to human rights*. The UCCS presented this argument based on their studies and meetings around biodiversity and the risks implied with the introduction of

transgenic maize. The risks mentioned are from an agroecological perspective as well as pointing that Mexico is a *center of origin* of maize. (Turrent 2014)

This argument is essential for the class action against the Mexican state and private corporations. By naming biodiversity as a matter of human right implies the recognition of cross contamination and the incapacity of scientists, governmental organisations and ‘lay’ people to control the movement and seeds. In an article named; *Scientist in a Pro Transnationals Alliance?*, Elena Álvarez Buylla a member of UCCS states that “[we] scientist must do a rigorous science and guided by the values of knowledge as well as a profound comprehension, prevention and solution of the grand social, health and environmental problems” (Álvarez Buylla 2016, 6) Although scientists and other experts have the intention to be neutral and apolitical entities in the discussion of transgenic maize, as previously discussed in this chapter and Chapter 1, scientific arguments in environmental struggles are valid, while the testimonies of the people are dismissed and ignored.

Expert Knowledge, Social Action and *Demanda Colectiva del Maíz*

The first of its kind, the *Demanda Colectiva del Maíz* filed a class action suit on July 5th of 2013 to federal courts in Mexico:

The federal courts to declare that the planting of transgenic maize will affect the human right to preserve, utilize and participate of the biological diversity of different types of native maize, also the risks that are generated over the rights to food, to health and the rights of ordinary people; all of this with the purpose that [the federal courts] deny the permits to plant transgenic maize (Demanda Colectiva del Maiz 2015)

The 53 plaintiffs of the class action, are peasant organizations, non-governmental organizations, and environmental activists. The accused parts in this class action are:

the Secretariat of Agriculture, Livestock, Rural Development, Fisheries and Food (Sagarpa), Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources (Semarnat), and the entities asking for permits to allowed the commercial sowing of transgenic maize, including: Syngenta Agro, Dow Agrosiences de México, PHI México (Pioneer-Dupont), Monsanto Comercial, Semillas y Agroproductos Monsanto all of them have petitioned permissions to have pilot and experimental plantations of genetically modified organisms (GMOS) of maize. (*Demanda Colectiva del Maiz*, 2013)

As part of this collective action, several other civil organizations have taken as one of the primordial actions the conflict of the introduction of transgenic maize in Mexico as a matter of nationalism, protectionism, national identity, anti-interventionism, and some other organizations have called this actions a way of *neo-colonialism*. (Chavéz 2015)

One of the main arguments of the class action, *Demanda Colectiva del Maíz*, is the human right to preservation, sustainable use, equal and just participation in the biological diversity. According to Réne Sánchez Galindo, one of the lawyers for the class action, the legal recourse was one of the most effective ways to stop the corporations to take over “el campo Mexicano.” (Sánchez Galindo, interview March 22nd 2016) One of the arguments use in the class action is the (human) right to biodiversity and “ecological equilibrium”. The class action bases on several related laws, such as the Law for Biosecurity of Genetically Modified Organisms (LBOGM), General Law for the Ecological Equilibrium and Environment.

The case of the *Demanda Colectiva del Maíz* requires a reflection on the “social distribution of expertise” (Harding 2008, 75-97). The class action has brought attention to other mobilizations including *Sin Maíz No Hay País* (Without Maize there is no Country) one of the most well-known movements against transgenic maize in Mexico. For some scholars this movements is one that claims “environmental citizenship” and makes

emphasis in democratic processes. For Richard (2012) maize can be interpreted as a political object, since “the revalorisation of native maize and of the role played by its campesino and indigenous ‘stewards’ is a good example of this process. [...] In contrast to traditional Northern conservationist movements, the Mexican food sovereignty movement emphasizes the redress of social inequalities as one of its central aims” (73) While emphasizing on social inequalities, it is possible to question whose country Sin Maíz No Hay País is referring to. Then, the question remains if the concept of ‘environmental citizenship’ is applicable in postcolonial states where citizenship itself is conditioned by parameters of belonging to mestizo identity.

What the *Demanda Colectiva del Maiz* attests is that a legal action was in fact, effective to show that legal expertise is a recognized practice to state officials and scientists too. In an interview with Rene Galindo, one of the two lawyers involved with the class action, I asked him about indigenous rights. He commented that this view was limited in the scope of the class action, since this perspective would only cover indigenous territories and eventually transgenic seeds could not be ‘controlled’ or ‘retained’ from going to non-indigenous territories. Although the legal recourse is accurate and have worked to stop transgenic maize in Mexico, it is an uncritical perspective of indigeneity and reproduction of the idea of a unified nation-state through mestizaje. The legal and scientific expertise use for the class action does not mentioned indigenous rights, it does mentioned the human right for biodiversity and laws that protect ‘Mexican citizens’. It is hard to imagine that this class action can be extended to every person living in Mexican territory, since indigeneity has been relegated to a quasi-citizenship.

To Conclude: Eco-Feminism and Environmental Conflicts

In this chapter, I have presented a preliminary discussion on how expert knowledge and expertise is perceived and treated in the case of transgenic maize. I propose a framework to study and discuss environmental conflicts by integrating a decolonial feminist perspective and the presence of non-human personhood. While the class action was successful in stopping the private corporations to continue planting maize in Mexican territory it offers a temporary recourse.

The idea of eco-feminism from below was conceptualized from my field research in Mexico City, Oaxaca city, Teotitlán del Valle and Huitzo in the state of Oaxaca. It is possible to convene eco-feminist perspectives from the Global South and Global North with knowledges from ‘below’ that are worked, communicated and reproduced within communities. This eco-feminism from below can offer a grounded perspective on the embodiment of environmental struggles as well as a better possibility to engage in indigenous cosmopolitics.

Chapter 4

Bodily Politics of the Intangible and Non-Human Personhood: Indigenous Cosmologies and Developmentalism

Our fields now are the scenes of ruin and disaster, victims of indiscriminate commercial opening, genetically modified crops, the ambitions of the multinationals; this has consequently caused the forced migration of millions of our brothers and sisters who, in the words of my grandfather, 'have to leave in order to remain'

Bety Carino testimony at the U.N. before her killing in 2006

On May 3rd of 1991, a pesticides and fertilizers factory named “National Agricultural Company from Veracruz, LLC” (*Agricultura Nacional de Veracruz, S.A.*) exploded and caused a major natural and human disaster, resulting in deaths and long-term consequences for both human and non-human people. This disaster is considered the third worst pesticide industrial explosion after Bhopal (Wright 2010). It involved “19 thousand liters of methyl parathion, 8 thousand liters of paraquat, 3 thousand liters of 2, 4-D, fifteen hundred liters of pentachlorophenol and unknown quantities of malathion, benzene hexachloride, and lindane” (Wright 2010). The event was reported as one of the “worst environmental [crises]” in Mexico and linked to corruption and transnational corporations. The explosion of the pesticide plants caused a “mushroom of pollutants” in the air and several people immediately reported being sick. The civil organization *Afectados por Anaversa* (formed in 1995) was founded by the people affected by the socio-environmental disaster. This organization reported 5,000 deaths related to the Aversa disaster, and others reported cases of cancer, fetus malformations, questioning the *legality* of the pesticide

industrial plant, and its relationship with governmental corruption. Until today, this case has been treated as an environmental disaster (Torres, Espinosa and Alvarez 2007). In 2006, a group of *ejidatarios* of the ancestral lands of Atenco in Texcoco protested against the new international airport, resulting in attacks by federal police, three deaths, and seventeen women sexually assaulted; additionally, several protesters were beaten, injured, arrested, and later imprisoned. As of March of 2016, the airport project is still in dispute, and on March 8th of 2016 it was announced by the minister of the Secretary of Communications and Transportation (Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes) that the ultimate decision over the airport project was left to the federal government. The resistance has been more difficult as a consequence of the confrontation and imprisonment of activists (some of whom are still incarcerated) and the fear instated by the state-sponsored violence, as pointed out by America del Valle⁷³, one of the prominent public figures of the *Frente de Pueblos en Defensa de la Tierra-FPDT* (Front of Pueblos in Defense of the Land). Her family has been involved with the FPDT, fighting against developmentalist projects in Atenco and for the liberation of the incarcerated activists, who received a prison sentence of 67 years, and other activists each received 31 years, for protesting against the airport project and defending their communal lands. In the confrontation, 26 women were sexually attacked and 11 of them presented their case at the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. Their testimonies present a narration of the events, as well as an emphasis on the state-sponsored gender and racial violence that has been common in socio-environmental protests.

⁷³ Interview with America del Valle in January 26th, 2016.

In the case of Anaversa, Angus Wright in his book, *The Death of Ramón González, The Modern Agricultural Dilemma* (2010) mentions, in relation to Anaversa, “this highly politicized issue brought charges and countercharges of exploitation or political gain on one hand, and repression of data and protests on the other” (Wright 2010, 319-320). The case of Anaversa and its consequences have been denied and obscured by the government, with only sporadic news appearing in the media, linking deaths of people with corruption of governmental agencies.

The power dynamics entangled in environmental crisis and the assessment of risk has been a concern after the Industrial Revolution among Global North scholars. For example, Ulrich Beck’s *Risk Society: Towards A New Modernity* (1992) is one of the foundational works (within Western scholarship) to study the consequences of massive developmentalist projects, and scientific innovations and the consequences in the social construction of identity and the assessment of the consequences of modernist projects. As Lash and Wynne (1992) comment:

Beck unusually broad-based approach to social constructions of risk and identity in late industrial society would be potentially a rich basis to examine these questions about the sources and social dynamics of forms of reflexivity with which to transform the project of modernism. (7)

In a similar fashion, Sheila Jassanoff’s work (2011; 2009; 2004) is based on the assumption of the symbiotic relationship of society and science, and how and under what conditions can science be part of a complex *democratic process*. Differently, in the work of Latin American decolonial scholars, such as Edgardo Lander (2006;1998), Walter Mignolo (2000), and Latin American feminists such as Karina Bidaseca (2012; 2011;2010),

Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso (2014; 2009;2003), Ochy Curiel (2007;2003), and Rita Segato (2007; 2002), there is a distinctive postcolonial perspective on gender, sex, and race, and their relation to the production of knowledge and the “colonial and Eurocentric knowledges” (Lander 2000). The emphasis of postcolonial theory has the purpose to notice the consequences of settler colonialism into the established and imposed organizing principles for both the Global North and the Global South.

These two cases—Anaversa and Atenco—exemplified what can be called the *politics of the intangible* and the dismissible (similar to what Giorgio Agamben mentioned as “bare life”). We may ask at this juncture: how did postcolonial and decolonial scholarship perceive and conceptualize risk, crises and catastrophes, considering the incorporation of non-hegemonic political ontologies?

In this chapter, I discuss how political ontologies of the intangible and the non-human are embedded in environmental politics and conflicts. To do so, I discuss the case of Wirikuta, the sacred place of pilgrimage for the Huichol people in the state of Nayarit and the threat of displacement, pollution, and environmental depredation that mining corporations have brought to Huichol indigenous lands. In particular, I look at how the presence of non-human personhood was integrated within this environmental struggle. Also, the case of Wirikuta shows how different channels to communicate indigenous cosmologies and environmental activism vary depending on the positionality of the actors involved. The second case I discuss (more extensively in Chapter 5) is how *transgenic maize* in Mexico has been a contested space of ideological confrontation of political ontologies, where intersections of indigeneity, coloniality of power, capitalist

accumulation intersect. I look at an opposite approach to Wirikuta, where non-indigenous perspectives provide a critique of what implies the presence of transgenic maize in Mexico. By analyzing the art exhibit *Bioartefactos: Desgranando Lentamente un Maiz* (2014) (Bioartefacts: Slowly Threshing a Maize), I discuss how non-human presence is interpreted, recorded and explained through bioart.

Given the foregoing, I provide an analysis of how different approaches (indigenous and mestizo) create “new worlds” and alternatives to the reality presented. As Blaser comments:

The rationality of the demands depend to the degree by which they are aligned with the reality as it is. In other words, the fundamental question to make to these demands is how they are based on the reality or not. And who determines this alignment: universal science. No to be surprised that indigenous peoples have to go with an army of experts every time they have to present their demands. (2015, 5)

One of the primary concerns and objectives of this chapter (and Chapter 5) are the politics around the presence of non-human personhood, indigeneity, i.e., approaches based on modern critiques to socio-ecological problems, as well as activists’ efforts and combination of strategies rooted in both scientific claims, arguments, and bottom-up knowledge, especially in cases of overlooked life.⁷⁴ The role of “science” as a

⁷⁴ See for example the project of Humanities for the Environment project (HFE) (2013-2015), which had a project on “life overlooked.” As stated on the HFE, “the aim of this project is to disseminate local ecological knowledge and build the human dimensions of ecology back into the ‘portfolio’ of what we know about individual species. Each portfolio is created by ‘citizen humanists’ who are well informed by scientific data, and examines ‘overlooked’ or common ‘backyard’ species such as the scorpion, the shrimp, the herring, the creosote bush, and the Columbine flower, to name a few examples” (HFE, 2015). As this HFE project states, many lives have been *overlooked*, which can be extended to both human and non-human (and more-than-human) forms of life. For example, environmental pre-settler knowledge is associated with a type of knowledge that is dismissed as folklore, and although Iberian settlers (together with French and German colonies) experienced a syncretism with indigenous cultures (and later with Afro descendent slaves), the wrongly called “mixture of cultures” was a one-way appropriation by settler cultures of both territories,

paradigm of modernity has an incidence on how nature is perceived and argued within different disciplines. This chapter serves as a critique, in a general sense to modernity, in relation to the modern/capitalist/colonial system (Grosfoguel 2000).

The apparent incommensurability between the indigenous world and the world being imposed over the people at the margins, the appropriation of natural resources, the dispossession of ways of life and its relation to anti-systemic resistance have brought scientists, environmental activists and ethnologists to consider a dialogue within the framework of *pluriverses* that recognizes the multiplicity of “views” that also include non-human actors in the realm of politics. (de la Cadena 2010; Carrillo Trueba 2006) The relationship of the struggle for indigenous people’s rights with global politics of human rights as well as traditional ways of living (including indigenous law) is pointed out by Lauderdale (2008):

One of the most interesting features of indigenous peoples is their substantive reliance on the interrelatedness of nature. Today’s call for, and acceptance of, global diversity is indeed limited when it is built within the constraints of modern nation– states, which often view diversity as deviance if it does not conform to modern norms and definitions. This is not to suggest that traditional indigenous can provide all the answers to current environment problems; however, it can provide us with ideas about how to improve our questions and, therefore, improve our potential to provide more equitable, less oppressive structures from which to approach numerous problems

cultures, people and knowledges. This was extended to several forms of knowledge, including traditional medicine, anatomy, astronomy, gastronomy, mathematical models, and literatures, among other forms of knowledge. Thus, “life overlooked” is also a matter of dismissed forms of “being in the world” (echoing Heidegger’s work).

The ideas that indigenous knowledges can provide are essential for systemic change. The idea of less oppressive structures that Lauderdale points out are based on a reconsideration of the solutions or alternatives for indigenous peoples that have failed to achieve their purpose. Most of them, proposed by non-indigenous peoples, and with a target to maintain the structure as it is, with minor revisions and changes.

Considering that developmentalism has been widely discussed by scholars who criticize the ways development has been a myth within the discourse of the creation of a World System. With this, by discussing Gunder Frank's work in relation to hegemony and domination within World Systems research, Oliverio and Lauderdale (2015) point out that "to understand hegemony and appreciate its impact on the world system, it is important to explicate factors beyond economy, even when these factors appear to be paradoxical" (190). Then, indigeneity and hegemony (as well as domination), cohabit in a conflictual space, where exploitative relations are normalized, and paved with the destruction of indigenous ways of life. (Yagenova and Garcia 2009)

Indigenous Knowledges vs. Mining Development: The Case of Wirikuta and Non-Human Agency

In the newspaper *El Xinantecatl*, dated December 26th of 1897, in the front page appeared an article titled "La Raza Indígena," written by the *Escuela Nacional de Artes y Oficios para Señoritas* with the purpose of communicating the situation of the indigenous communities in different parts of Mexico. This boarding school was intended to be a full immersion for both mestizas and indigenous women, where they were instructed a variety of subjects, like math, physics, chemistry and home caring activities such as cooking,

laundry, sweeping, and “all other activities to make [the students] good housewives” (*La Raza Indigena*, 1897). The instruction to indigenous girls was made separately, and taught in their “own language,” procuring that their costumes do not lose their “humbleness nor acquire the habit of luxury that they would not be able to maintain once they go to their paternal home” (*La Raza Indigena*, 1897). The article then continues to show the readers from a position of benevolence and condescension the situation of indigenous peoples by claiming that:

Here in the territory exists a large number of indigenous peoples that inhabit the Altos of Nayarit. The conditions of this poor *indios* is one of the worst; suspicious by nature, run away from white people and just yet it has been made possible that some of them, when their misery brings them down, they go down to the towns to get jobs as peasants, since their activities such as fabrication of ropes, cheese, hammocks etc, are so miserable that they do not provide the necessary for their lives, even if this [their lives] is too frugal and their necessities are insignificant.

The article continues to provide educational and vocational instruction for indigenous peoples, referring to the Coras and Huicholes peoples (based on the state of Nayarit) as in need of “assistance” in order to survive. Although not explicitly mentioned in this article, an underlying meaning is present in this text: the presence of a more advanced civilization and a mestizo population that participates more easily within the dominant society. The “frugal lives” and “insignificant necessities” that are mentioned have been recurrent discourses of modernity and institutionalized multiculturalism.

In a text by Alejandro Lipschutz (1937), published in the magazine of the *University of Mexico* (Universidad de Mexico) in an article titled “*The Fundamental Problem of the Hispano-American Countries: As Observed by a European Wiseman Naturalized Chilean*,” mentions how *mestizaje* in the Americas served as a *leveling order*,

in order to falsely proclaim the same access to resources, education, and advancement for the general population. In his article, Lipschutz questions the biological determinism of defining indigeneity and the mestizo population as “races” with peculiar biological traits. For Lipschutz, factors such as accelerated aging and their poor health are due to colonialism and the establishment of a settler colonial state (Lipschutz 1937, 19). Contained in this almost unknown article by Lipschutz is that *mestizaje*, and corporeality (as discussed in Chapter 2) is grounded in an intellectual tradition that includes constructs of race, gender, and ethnicity under the pretense of domination and annihilation. Since it is not possible to point out at a concrete thing or entity that represents *mestizaje*, it requires to discuss the different manifestations of it. This would include a discussion on what *mestizaje* (as a civilizational project) obscures and denies.

In the project named *Huicholes and Pesticides*, published in 2002, *Pesticides, Tobacco and Health: The Huichol Day Laborers, Mestizo Laborers and Communal Landowners in Nayarit, Mexico* presents a quantitative study based on an assessment of 448 people (of which 161 were Huicholes) who worked on the tobacco plantations in Nayarit. This study was made after “video documentation of the living and working conditions of tobacco indigenous migrant workers and ejidatarios in northern Nayarit, Mexico” (Diaz Romo and Salinas Alvarez 2002, XLIV). The exposure to organophosphate and carbamate pesticides among the workers exposed the use of child labor (exploitation). This publication is part of a larger project that includes a website, a short documentary, and other publications about the toxicity of the pesticides. For Lilia America Albert (2002), a conjunction of a lack of legislation on pesticides started before the signing of the North American Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. The use of synthetic pesticides in the

Mexican agricultural sector was supported by higher education institutions, which promoted the Green Revolution as a solution to foster market profitability and bring modernization to the Mexican agricultural sector (Pichardo Gonzalez 2006; Aboites 2015).

In this particular study, *Pesticides Tobacco and Health* (2002) the toxicity of the participants' bodies was assessed through questionnaires and physical exams, which documented the history of migration of workers and general inhabitants of the area. This study concluded that although the population in this area was getting sick, the researchers could not find a correlation between their illnesses and their exposure to pesticides. However, they could establish a correlation between the exposure of the chemicals and their health problems, which "are aggravated by limited access to health services, malnutrition, illiteracy, monolingualism and low income" (Diaz Romo and Salinas Alvarez 2012, XLVI). Thus, the workers' bodies became polluted and acquired a level of *toxicity*. As Alaimo (2010) comments:

The existence of toxic bodies, both human and nonhuman— however clichéd, however repressed or denied— still mixes things up. Since the same chemical substance may poison the workers who produce it, the neighborhood in which it is produced, and the web of plants and animals who end up consuming it, the traffic in toxins reveals the interconnections among various movements, such as environmental health, occupational health, labor, environmental justice, popular epidemiology, environmentalism, ecological medicine, disability rights, green living, antiglobalization, consumer rights, and children's health and welfare. The traffic in toxins may render it nearly impossible for humans to imagine that our own well-being is disconnected from that of the rest of the planet or to imagine that it is possible to protect "nature" by merely creating separate, distinct areas in which it is "preserved." (18)

The exposition to toxic material, although not exclusive to indigenous peoples, is recurrent in marginalized populations. The global crisis of modernity is manifested in

different forms, rendering *life*, both human and non-human, vulnerable. As Acquille Mbembe (2003) asks:

Is the notion of biopower sufficient to account for the contemporary ways in which the political, under the guise of war, of resistance, or of the fight against terror, makes the murder of the enemy its primary and absolute objective? War, after all, is as much a means of achieving sovereignty as a way of exercising the right to kill. Imagining politics as a form of war, we must ask: What place is given to life, death, and the human body (in particular the wounded or slain body)? How are they inscribed in the order of power? (12)

Similar (and complementary) to the question proposed by Mbembe, discussions around decoloniality, non-human personhood, and indigenous cosmologies explore how the human corporeality and non-human personhood is contested in postcolonial territories. In the following pages I discuss and present the case of Wirikuta, mining corporations, and non-human agency.

In 2013 the Supreme Court of Justice of Mexico (SCJN) issued a ruling determining that the mining operations in Wirikuta, Mexico needed to be stopped, respecting the right of the Wixarika (Huichol) people. Wirikuta is considered sacred by the Wixarika, because it is the destination of a holy and traditional pilgrimage. The mining company responsible for the natural depredation, pollution and corruption was not held responsible for the damages, making the SCJN decision not binding, and presenting a jurisprudence that did nothing to repair the damages or stop other like projects. To have a sense of the problem represented by the presence of mining companies (most of them Canadian) in indigenous land in Mexico as well as in other parts of the world, we must look at the history of displacement, slavery, genocide, and environmental depredation that has accompanied mining operations since their beginning in the New Spain in the 16th century (Baez-Jorge

1996; Boyer 2012). The number of mining projects in Mexico has not decreased and they are part of the megaprojects that have accompanied the construction of the Mexican economy and culture since the beginning of the Mexican Republic. According to the ranking by Behre Dolbear, Mexico appears as the 5th place to invest in mining projects, due to the efficacy, facility and fiscal regime that the federal government gives to mining companies (Behre Dolbear, 2012 Ranking of Countries for Mining Investment, or ‘Where not to invest’). Until today, the SCJN decision stopped the mining operations in the specific area prescribed by the court but extensive mining operations are taking place elsewhere as one of many megaprojects.

Let us consider what was different about the specific case of Wirikuta. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) claimed that the indigenous “pilgrimage connects the wixáritari with fundamental elements of their culture, heritage that has been transmitted generation to generation and this is essential for their sense of belonging.” UNESCO also recognizes that the mining projects represent a real threat to aquifers that are “linked to their ceremonial practices” (E/C.19/2013/1.). The use of disruptive environmental practices goes beyond a mere reading of the environment as an entity larger than our connections among humans, or the interpretation that everything that serves as a ‘natural’ resource for later use for the convenience of a given civilization.

The impact and damage of mining companies to indigenous people and to mestizos in the region of Wirikuta illustrates more than the lack of legal instruments to protect the land and the inhabitants. In the case of the SCJN decision, the mining operations stopped, as indicated in the jurisprudence of the case, and the decision was made to ameliorate the

social movements and the publicity of the case. Thus, there is a need to discuss the case of Wirikuta under the light of the politics of matter (Stengers 2005; 2010), placing at the center of the discussion non-human presence and human interaction within the environmental conflicts and crisis. The inclusion of indigenous cosmopolitics (de la Cadena 2010) is central to new materialisms, environmental justice and an understanding of why legalistic and conventional intercultural approaches have missed or failed their objective (Walsh 2006).

The case is considered exceptional due to the ruling of the Supreme Court of Justice in Mexico in 2013, which recognized the rights of non-human subjects, not only as a traditional adscription to indigenous rights, but as a recognition of the existence within a juridical discourse of a more-than-human world, all within the context of environmental depredation by mining companies.

In Mexico there exist at least fourteen ‘social conflicts’ derived from mining operations. These conflicts are related to the death of environmental activists, forced displacement, intoxication, and devastation of the ways of life of indigenous, mixed-blood (mestizo), and non-indigenous population. In this chapter, I suggest a discussion under the lens of the politics of matter (Stengers 2010), including indigenous cosmopolitics (de la Cadena 2010) and new materialisms (Alaimo 2008) with a decolonial perspective (Quijano 2000, Lugones 2010) in the context of the SCJN decision in Wirikuta and the (re-) emergence of indigenous cosmopolitics in the realm of politics (Walsh 2006).

In this section, I suggest a discussion under a post-humanist critique that includes indigenous cosmopolitics (de la Cadena 2010) and *new materialisms*. I delineate the

possibilities of incorporating discussions of the *politics of matter* (Stengers 2010) that includes debates concerning the construction of the environment, spaces, and territories (Ellison, Martinez Mauri 2009), and its relation to the defense of life that needs to be saved versus the life that is neglected. This discussion includes the disappearances and massive violence against activists in the area, mostly indigenous people, and specifically indigenous and mestiza women. I argue that the Wirikuta case is a place to critically discuss developmentalism, and the violence that is intrinsic to dispossession, especially the embodied violence against racialized women. It is important to learn and to ask further questions in this case, such as how the law interacts with non-Western cosmologies in defense of sacred places and how environmental activists, indigenous communities, and lawyers argued under their situated knowledges for the defense of Wirikuta.

Politics of Matter, Indigenous Politics

In the case of environmental depredation and megaprojects, legal scholars in environmental and human rights law, such as Angeles Hernandez (2014), consider that the case of Wirikuta can be solved with a legalistic approach, basing the arguments on a violation of Convention 169, Constitutional Law, among others legal instruments. I propose a twist to this discussion to include what has not been acknowledged, the indigenous cosmopolitics of the Wixarika, who considered the area of Wirikuta to be the territory where life began. Besides the cultural relevance of Wirikuta, the Wixarika activists, scientists and members of the Wixarika community have denounced the environmental impact of the mines and the direct violence. The SCJN was based on consuetudinary law regardless of the relevance of the arguments of the Wixarika. It is

important to notice that in 2013 the SCJN mentioned the relevance of the Mining Law (*Ley Minera*) stating the importance of this industry to the economy in Mexico. In this section I discuss how the ‘politics of matter’ (Stengers 2010) and new materialisms (Alaimo 2008; Coole and Frost 2010; Coole, et.al 2010) intersect with critiques to the construction of indigeneity in Mexico.

Legal Inscriptions of Indigenous Cosmo/politics: The Case of Wirikuta

The juridical order of the case of Wirikuta relies on the Mexican Supreme Court of Justice’s decision to stop the mining in the area of Wirikuta after the Declaration for the Defense of Wirikuta. This decision was presented in 2010⁷⁵ and many mobilizations from environmental activists, indigenous authorities from the Wixarika took place in different parts of the country. How can we relate the indigenous cosmopolitics of the Huichol to this case?

Besides the legal relevance to constitutional law and to consuetudinary rights and communal rights (Nikken 2010) this case is tightly related to what Marisol de la Cadena (2010) called ‘indigenous cosmopolitics’. For de la Cadena, indigenous cosmopolitics (different from cosmopolitics) is a response when ‘culture’ is not enough: “its activism is interpreted as a quest to make cultural rights prevail. Yet, what if “culture” is insufficient, even an inadequate notion, to think the challenge that indigenous politics represents” (2010, 363). Hence, *indigenous cosmopolitics* is a response to the necessity to release an academic discussion of what has been dismissed in discussions in ethnic studies,

⁷⁵ See: Declaracion en Defensa de Wirikuta, <http://www.frenteendefensadewirikuta.org/?p=5879&lang=es>

anthropology and legal studies. The *matter* in this case is brought to realm of ‘politics’ through Indigenous cosmopolitics where, “what makes us human is not ours: it is the relation we are able to entertain with something that is not our creation” (Stengers 2010, 47). The non- human or the *more than human* as David Abram (1997)⁷⁶ calls it in the case of Wirikuta corresponds to the implied dangers of destruction due to the mining in Wixarika land. The *matter* in the case of the legal battle with the Federal government is Wirikuta, as a conjunction with the *political matter*, where what is being defended is more than land; as Moraga (1993) states “land remains the common ground for al radical action”. But “land is more than rocks and tress [...] For immigrants [coming from Latin American to the US] and native alike, land is also the factories where we work, the water our children drink, and the housing project where we live [...] Land is the physical mass called our bodies” (173). The ‘land’ for Moraga describes “what might otherwise be called ‘nature; or ‘environment’” (Solis Ybarra 2004, 240). The constitutional controversy presented by the Wixarika was based on the sacredness of their *land* and to reclaim the illegality of the extraction of gold and silver, the contamination of the aquifers, and the impossibility to realize their yearly pilgrimage (Liffman 2011). Hence, the constitutional controversy is relevant for discussions on indigenous and human rights, but also to show the debacle and insufficiency (or deficiency) of the multicultural approach within legal studies. Ultimately, however, while the SCJN stopped the mining operations temporarily, in the end, in its very last *sentencia* the SCJN did not state the rights of the Wixarika, it debunked the international agreements such as the Convention 169 of the International Labor

⁷⁶ In *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996), Abram points out that: To the sensing body, *nothing* presents itself as utterly passive or inert. *Only by affirming the animateness of perceived things do we allow our words to emerge directly from the depths of our ongoing reciprocity with the world* (56)

Organization (ILO) and the Mexican Federal Constitution itself. According to the SCJN the economic benefits of the mining industry were primordial.⁷⁷

In the description of Wirikuta and its sacredness de la Pena (2002) describes: Wirikuta is located in the desert sierra of Real de Catorce in the state of San Luis Potosí. The Wixarika (or Huichol) as other indigenous peoples have been subject of marginalization and displacement. The Wixarika are located in Sierra Madre Occidental of Mexico, specifically in the states of Jalisco, Durango and Nayarit, the destiny of the pilgrimage is Wirikuta (located in San Luis Potosi) which is a total of 140,000 hectares. The mining companies occupied 85,000 hectares and 65,000 hectares were recovered by activists and non-governmental organizations, after 20 years of struggle and after the decision of the SCJN. The construction and re-creation of the landscape and territory of Wirikuta is influenced by direct decisions and operations of the mining companies, tourism, ecotourism, and the legal inscriptions made on the place. By legal inscriptions I refer to law being intrinsic to the constitution of the Mexican nation, and identity, where a discussion on rights and duties for and by the indigenous people are not based in a political conversation on how disruptive economic practices are to the lives of indigenous people and activists on the edge.

The political discussion of the continuous ecocide and genocide is illuminated well by de la Cadena's critique of Andeanist ethnographic studies which (2010) "has been habitually rich in ritual and symbolic analysis and oblivious to politics" (340). Indigenous

⁷⁷ According to the think tank, Fundar the case of Wirikuta is a representation of violations of cultural rights, indigenous peoples' rights; and right to get legal consultation. See, http://www.fundar.org.mx/mexico/pdf/InformejusticiabilidadDESCA_MEXICO_Casos.pdf

peoples have been glorified as cultural artifacts of studies, while the political-economic implications of Indigenous cultures and knowledges have been marginalized. The incorporation in 1988 of Wirikuta to the protected places by UNESCO, and its inclusion to the list of protected places (natural reservation) in 1993 by the Mexican government might seem as benevolent governance, but do not proceed from or show any dialogue with the cosmovisions of the Wixarika; they are thus continuations of Western-centric legal inscriptions of culture over nature.⁷⁸ As Tuana (2008) states, “the urgency of embracing an ontology that rematerializes the social and takes seriously the agency of the natural” (188) is apparent in cases of mass environmental and social devastation.⁷⁹ The conflict of Wirikuta has always involved a *matter* that has politics (which also includes intangible matter), since it has never been omitted by the civil organizations. The cosmovision of the Wixarika, for whom Wirikuta is the final destination of their pilgrimage, is a whole, an indivisible place where everything is sacred; also its relevance relies on the unique biodiversity of the region, including endemic species in danger of extension (*Tamatsima Wahaa, Frente por la Defensa de Wirikuta*). The 22 mining concessions to First Majestic Silver Corp and the launching of the *Proyecto Universo* (a mining project that targets almost 60,000 hectares) were not the first cases of resistance to unlawful and unethical exploitation in the Wixarika land (de la Peña 2011). The case of Wirikuta did emerge widespread conflict in the mass media in Mexico, denouncing the corruption and lack of

⁷⁸ In this matter, de la Cadena (2010) states that “A hegemonic notion of the political built on the silenced antagonism between nature and humanity either legitimized or occluded the war between the world of modern colonizers and those of the colonized—an in neither case allowed for politics between them” (344).

⁷⁹ Tuana’s article, “Viscous Porosity: Witnessing Katrina” (2008) is based on Hurricane Katrina’s impacts on New Orleans.

accountability of the Mexican state. However, these representations only seldom underline the relevance of the ‘more than human’ agency in the realm of politics (not only in terms of cultural rights). There were only some overt statements of the interconnectedness of the environmental conflicts to racial dynamics. Nevertheless, this conflict did open up some spaces for the possibility to ‘take matter seriously’ since this and many other similar conflicts “entail nothing else than a thorough rethinking of the fundamental categories of Western culture” (Alaimo and Heckman 2008, 17). One of the spaces created to spread awareness of the conflict in Wirikuta was the *Wirikuta Fest*, a musical festival with the intention to be fundraiser for the Wixarika and civil organizations involved in the legal conflict against the Mexican government. The music festival re-constructed the landscape of Wirikuta; activists and people interested in the case have visited the place. Here it was discussed how ‘nature’ in Wirikuta encompassed the ‘human’.

The *politics of matter* (Stengers 2010) also constitute the construction of landscape and territories. As Iovino (2010) states:

Very often, thinking about local natures means thinking about landscapes. When we look around us, we see changes so continuous and radical that these landscapes seem to be constantly under siege. ‘Landscape’ is not meant here as mere scenery, but as a balance of nature and culture stratified through centuries of mutual adaptation. It is a ‘warehouse’ of common memories to humanity and nature, in which human and natural life are dialectically interlaced in the form of a *co-presence* (31)

The landscape of Wirikuta was not widely known in Mexico, before the *Wirikuta Fest* and the mass mobilizations (mostly in San Luis Potosi and Mexico City); the land of the Wixarika, was mostly visited by tourists for many reasons but most often without even acknowledging they were vacationing in indigenous land. What happened in the aftermath

of *Wirikuta Fest*, is what Navarrete Saavedra (2010) calls, “mexicanizar al indio” (to mexicanize the indian) meaning a way to translate the world (or the indigenous cosmopolitics) of the Wixarika to the non-indigenous was through a tangible and understandable sensorial experience: in the form of a music festival (with mestizo and non-indigenous music bands), with vivid huichol colors reflected in screens of the festival. An avoidance of the *politics of matter* and a twist to what is being in debate, that is for the SCJN is the ‘place’, for the Wixarika is the ‘land’ (and its matter) (echoing Moraga).

For Tunuary Chavez, member of the *Asociación Jalisciense de Apoyo a Grupos Indígenas* (Jalisco’s Association for the Support of Indigenous Groups) the illnesses derived from the mining industry in the state of San Luis Potosi have been neglected due to the focus on economic goals, and the prevalence of mining projects and other megaprojects related to foreign investment (video conference, Tunuary Chavez). That is, *Wirikuta Fest* served to spread awareness and collect funds but did not change the iteration of a discourse based on cultural and indigenous rights avoiding the possibilities to engage in a dialogue that involves the Wixarika cosmovisions. The question is how it is possible to engage in both new materialisms and indigenous cosmopolitics in a way that those dialogues represent a change in traditional conceptions of intercultural dialogue and political transformation? As Coole (2010) notes, “the predominant sense of matter in modern Western culture has been that is essentially passive stuff, set in motion by human agents who use it as a means of survival, modify it as a vehicle of aesthetic expression, and impose subjective meaning upon it” (92) For decolonial scholars in the Global South, the re-emergence and acknowledgment of non-Western cosmovisions is essential for a larger plan of decoloniality (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012). The process of decoloniality is not exclusive for

indigenous peoples, it is however a process where non-Western cosmovisions have a central place, which includes the recognition of the importance of writing about nature and the body, nature and the Nation-State, the role of the embodied and racialized experiences and the construction of the boundaries between human and non-humans.

So far, I have presented the case of Wirikuta and how the mining companies operate within the (neo-) colonial modern capitalist system. I suggested to open up a conversation of indigenous cosmopolitics, the politics of matter and new materialisms, which distance themselves from the anthropocentric perspective allowing the finding of convergences in different disciplines and venues by locating sites of racialized and violence.

To say that matter is a potentiality and a becoming creates a space of reflection and possibilities for emancipatory practices (within and outside institutionalized academia). This discussion needs to relate to the discourse of *coloniality of power* since overcoming the denial of the existence of different ontologies requires, besides, a critical theoretical endeavor, to write the stories of the pluriverses and cosmovisions not included within the legal discourse. The violence derived from developmentalism is intrinsic to a system of dispossession. Hence, the materiality of race and gender is constituent of the modern capitalist colonial modernity, which implies an iterative ontology of violence. The discussions in this chapter have shed light on how new materialisms or the material turn are part of a larger set of discussions on how to include non-human agents within the realm of an eminent environmental crisis.

Other “Representations” of the Wirikuta Case

As part of the representations of indigenous environmental struggles is the case of documentaries as testimonies. The political documentaries in Latin America serve as an entry point through cinema to present a reality of a continent otherwise obscured. According to Ortega (2011), the particularity of documentaries from Latin America is the conjunction of influences from Europe and the Soviet Union, as well as characteristics that emanated from Latin America itself. For Ortega, the diversity of documentaries range from the ones experimenting with the absences of paternal figures, to political overtones such as the ones dealing with (traumatic) memories. For example, *La Memoria Obstinada* (France-Chile) (1997), a documentary by Patricio Guzman, portrays “the social fracture and the wounds, still open by the coup d’état from Augusto Pinochet” (Ortega 2011). The state of affairs in Latin America has served as a fruitful space to present political documentaries that show the complexities around race, gender, sexuality, class that saturate Latin American everyday life. One of the examples that Ortega discusses is the documentary by Juan Carlos Rulfo, *En el Hoyo* (2006) (In the Hole). Presenting one of the most emblematic public works for transportation, Rulfo filmed the construction workers of *El Segundo Piso* (the Second Floor, a highway) and the interaction of something inanimate, the construction and their positionality as proletariats, working for the state, without the possibility of ever using the same infrastructure they are working on, since they cannot afford a car (Ortega 2011). Other discrepancies continue to be developed, such as the ethnicity and race of the director, and his interaction with the construction workers.

Coming back to what I discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, how is non-human and human agency interwoven with race and ethnicity in light of mestizaje? How is this reflected visually in the case of environmental justice? In the United States, visual works

that portray and have the intention to communicate issues and concerns around ecological problems are often referred as *ecomedia*.⁸⁰ The use of eco-documentaries in Latin America has been used as a way to reach a variety of people and to communicate the relationship between indigeneity and cases of environmental justice.

Part of the social movements and activists actions around the case of Wirikuta is the visuality of the case. A documentary by Hernan Vilchez, *The Last Peyote Guardians* (Mexico-Argentina) (2013) portrayed the history of a Huichol community that lives in Wirikuta. It is showed clearly, in the first minutes of the documentary, how *mestizaje* is an elusive concept, and indigeneity is complex. In *The Last Peyote Guardians*, it is shown how mining corporations want to establish in Nayarit and exploit the resources of the area. For Vilchez, the documentary is an example of what is happening in Latin America, as well as an example of its connections with similar cases in the Global North.⁸¹ This documentary has been effective in communicating the distinct *pluriverses* and *indigenous cosmologies* involved in this case, by providing an insight of how resource extraction functions by displacing Indigenous people as part of a discourse of developmentalism and modernity. In the film, it is shown how the perspectives of some non-indigenous people, mostly mestizos, reproduce the discourses of modernization and progress. On the other hand, it is shown the importance of Wirikuta for the Huichol people and its connections to something more transcendental than the mining activities in Real de Catorce (the mining town). By connecting the violence against humans with the potential danger to Wirikuta as a whole,

⁸⁰ *Cfr*, Rust, Stephen, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt, eds. *Ecomedia: Key Issues*. Routledge, 2015.

⁸¹ Interview with Hernan Vilchez, March 2015.

The Last Peyote Guardians brings into question non-human personhood, since non-humans in the Huichol cosmology are considered persons.

This documentary has been screened globally with the purpose of establishing a relationship of resource extraction from the Global North with the Global South, as well as the inevitable connection of a colonial discourse of dispossession and exploitation. More importantly, *The Last Peyote Guardians* presents the different *logics* around resource extraction in Wirikuta without formulating a moral approach; the story develops in a way that both indigenous peoples and mestizo arguments have the same value and credibility.

Ancestral Knowledge and Socio Cultural Relevance of Maize

After the signing (in 1992) and implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on January 1st, 1994 (the same day the neo-Zapatista movement emerged), the Mexican agricultural sector has been experiencing a series of transformations accompanied by a discourse of modernization of the agricultural sector, trade liberalization and diminishing trade barriers, offering fiscal havens and lax labor laws (Beaucage 1998). The “political ecology of maize” (McAfee 2008, 149) reflects a complex set of connections that interrelate to transgenic crops and incorporate it to environmental justice movements and issues of biosafety, food sovereignty and the *coloniality of nature* (Escobar 2008).

The relevance of maize in its socio-cultural aspects has been reduced by the dominant Western society to what is visible to the eye of the scientist (Conway and Singh 2011). The hegemonic perspective discredits the observation from the perspective of other

cosmovisions; in order to enable alternative perspectives there must be *translating* and adapting of different *pluriverses*. The act of translation is filtered by expert knowledge, in which process the relations amongst humans and more-than-human are defined through scientific knowledge. This *translating* has to relocate our views and understandings of maize to a place where it is understandable in terms of the relationship between the *campesinos* and their agricultural practices, and its connection to their different *cosmovisions*, with their distinct valuation of relationships where diverse types of sentient and non-sentient beings can be acknowledged. For example, we can consider the *Ustilago maydis*, the corn smut, called in Nahuatl *huitlacoche* which is part of the food and plant medicine culture in Mexico, and is considered a delicacy for indigenous populations. The *huitlacoche* is associated with a pre-conquest diet and is part of the food system and food cultures for people in Mexico. Agribusinesses often dispose of *huitlacoche* since they consider it a pests⁸². However, for indigenous peoples it is related to a larger set of connections concerning maize and the use of fungi for medicinal and ritual purposes, both of which are integral to a land-based food culture. This illustration reveals part of the complexity in attempting study the relationship of non-humans and humans in the context of two conflictual worldviews; one based on the modernization of processes of food

⁸² In a similar fashion, in colonial Mexico, amaranth, was prohibited by the Spanish Catholic settlers because of its relation with the Aztec god Huitzilopochtli, a deity related to the sun and war. The prohibition was based on the presence and use of *tzoalli*, a paste made of amaranth which had a ceremonial and divine value. The *tzoalli* was perceived by Spanish settlers and religious authorities as similar to the Eucharist (Velasco Lozano 2011, 60). According to Ana María Luisa Velasco Lozano, the use of amaranth or *huatli* was interrelated to agricultural cycles and the ‘divine’, including the decoration of temples with corn and amaranth (in the form of figures of deities and in shrines) (Velasco Lozano 2001, 46-49). Hence, that Velasco Lozano sees these relations between seeds and humans as a “corporealization of the divine”, through the ingestion of animals, plants and humans.

production, and the other based on the connection of humans and non-humans within a living interwoven system (Lenkersdorf 1998).

The close relationship between “feeding,” “nurturing” and building a civilization must be connected to larger systems of knowing. As Adamson points out, “the earth regenerates the human body when people eat corn and, when they die, humans return to the earth and the cycle continues” (2012, 228). What happens with the introduction of *bioartefacts* into this cycle? If, the dualism of modernity/coloniality, the colonial/modern capitalist system is embedded into the most intimate spaces of our corporeality, from feeding to losing self-sufficiency in the capacity of relating ourselves to our surroundings, what has been left if not a space of constant re-covering and a continuous search for alternatives and solutions to the series of crises including a deception of (an unachievable) modernity (Escobar 2008).

Indigenous cosmologies (Viveiros de Castro 1998; de la Cadena 2010) proceed from their own distinct accounts of the beginning and creation of the “Earth” and its inhabitants and lead to different understandings of how we humans (ought to) live and relate to the Earth. They include explanations of how humans and non-human animals came to be the way they are, the reason of their values, their unique characteristics, their purposes, and their continuation. These accounts include the symbolism of maize for indigenous cosmologies and its relation to changes in the (postcolonial) material relations of indigenous people. Looking at the world from within indigenous cosmologies and their symbolisms helps reframe in constructive ways the series of environmental crises that people in the Americas (indigenous, and non-indigenous) are facing, including struggles

against mining, dam construction, endangering of species and consistent violence against environmental activists (Machado Aráoz, 2011).

Although there are similarities among indigenous traditions and languages, it is impossible to delineate a unique indigenous cosmovision that would represent the whole of a modern nation-state (such as Mexico), even when such states have established public policies and institutions that construct the “indigenous traditions” as a monolithic whole. Aside from this, it is possible to find commonalities amongst indigenous populations across the Americas especially in relation to nature; and some of these commonalities are also shared with other peoples at the margins. As Cajete points out “for Native people throughout the Americas, the paradigm of thinking, acting, and working evolved because of and through their established relationships to nature” (1999, 6). The ancestral relevance of corn in Mexico and its value in revitalizing Indigenous cosmologies in today’s struggles has to be understood as juxtaposed with the rampant escalation of environmental depredation and dispossession of indigenous resources and ways of living.

Pluriverses in the Midst of Environmental Conflict

The multiple connections of environmental crisis and conflicts (Tsing 2005) in the Global South show a constant tendency to dispossess indigenous and other marginalized peoples of their means, and transforming their lives into exploitative labor relations. These dispossessions reiterate the reproduction of a global world-system that is structured to transform nature into a mere repository of resources for market production and to change the humanity of the peoples’ of the Global South into precarious lives by causing a “neoliberal appropriation of the land” (de la Cadena 2010, 340).

The apparent incommensurability between the Indigenous world and the world being imposed over the people at the margins, the appropriation of natural resources, the dispossession of ways of life and its relation to anti-systemic resistance have brought scientists, environmental activists and ethnologists to consider a dialogue within the framework of *pluriverses* that recognizes the multiplicity of “views” which also include non-human actors in the realm of politics (de la Cadena 2010; Carrillo Trueba 2006). The neo-Zapatista movement, although not the only anti-systemic, anti-globalization movement, is one that has been *transnationalized* and addressed openly the legacy of colonialism, modernity and the implementation of liberalism and modernization, especially in contradistinction to the alternative epistemic and ontological ‘worlds’ associated with the concept of *pluriverses*.

The dualism deconstruction of the divisions of human/animal/inhuman is extended to the relationship with plants, and other beings while acknowledging the existence and is also acknowledged within the concept of *pluriverses* (Carrillo Trueba 2006). For example, the relationship of Maria Sabina, an indigenous Mazatec *curandera* (shaman) from the highlands of Oaxaca, was well known of her knowledge and relationship with hallucinating hallucinogenic mushrooms of the region (Carod-Artal 2014); she understood the mushrooms as beings with agency. The uses effects of the different types of mushrooms range from medicinal to spiritual, and they are interconnected to a larger set of indigenous knowledges, which were documented by Estrada (1989), Benitez (2005;1989) and ethnomusicologist Wasson (1958), among others. The study of Maria Sabina’s use of mushrooms and shamanic chants raised an interest from anthropologists and botanists due

to the connection of Sabina's to indigenous Mazatec traditions and the use of mushrooms for healing.

Addressing human non-human interactions and its linkages to sociocultural practices brings forth questions concerning maize and its relation to a larger set of knowledge systems. As McAfee points out “the possible risks posed by traveling transgenes are not well understood, but there are plausible scientific reasons for concern about possible hazards to agricultural biodiversity and agro-ecosystems. More troubling, however, are the likely consequences for local food security, cultural survival and national economic sovereignty” (2003, 18). Hence, the controversy around transgenic maize in Mexico can be defined both as a techno-scientific controversy and a conflict between apparently two worlds, the indigenous way of living and the “modern” way (Barkin 2002).

As the agricultural sector changes towards the use of monocrops, the once biodiverse rural landscapes in the Mexican farmland, often based on Indigenous agroecological and polycultural traditions, have now given way to a landscape of monocrops, soil erosion, biodiversity loss and socioecological desolation that has created empty spaces, abandoned towns, and forced migration. When it comes to actions of resistance in environmental conflicts, there are several perspectives that address how the environmental crises constitute a civilizational crisis. Thus, recognition of *pluriverses* also implies embracing what de la Cadena (2010) calls indigenous cosmopolitics, or *pluriversal politics* (de la Cadena 2010, 361).

Bioartefactos: Desgranando Lentamente un Maiz

One of the major debates about transgenic corn is happening in the State of Oaxaca, Mexico, where the exhibit *Bioartefactos: Desgranando Lentamente un Maiz* (2014) (Bioartefacts: Slowly Threshing a Maize)—henceforth *Bioartefactos*—was shown. The incorporation of new relations was introduced. It sought to force a redefinition of various notions such as territory, labor and distribution of geographical boundaries (Lander 2003). The “living matter” within indigenous cosmopolitics in the Americas includes storytelling and writing about the different entities that comprehend the cosmos (Montemayor 2014; Reyes and Roig 2008). By “living matter”, I am referring to the more than human world, where plants and humans interact (Abram 1997). In these interactions there is much that is *unseen*. But what is not seen is not because of a faulty perception of reality, but because these interactions can only be brought forth to visibility as part of stories and cosmogonies (Montemayor 1998). Hence, humans and their origins are not by themselves a finished entity; we are continuously interconnected to several human and non-human relations and interdependencies; these networks of relationships have their own commitment to communal preservation rather than individual transcendence (Montemayor 2014).

The opposition to transgenic corn in Mexico has been accompanied by a discourse of food security, national security; indigenous rights. The transnationalization and visibilization of the connections between environmental struggles, food struggles and indigenous struggles can be seen in several collective initiatives (Richard 2012). This is a multi-faceted conflict that involves human and “nonhuman substances, systems and beings” (Latta 2014, 325) where lives are at stake and unconventional agents are incorporated into the realm of politics (Stengers 2010).

The use of bioart in Latin America has different forms, reflecting the variety of lifeways and thinking in the area. Mostly developed in university and research centers, it is presented as a form of transdisciplinarity geared towards social engagement. Some of the work by Southern Cone artists has social justice components. For example, Coleman (2015) discusses how *Ala Plástica*, an Argentinian art collective and environmental organization based in Rio de la Plata, links their artistic projects with environmental justice endeavors.

The relationship between humans and maize is one of manipulation of the variety of plants, experimentation, adaption to necessities and preservation of maize. Hence, maize is considered a biological artefact created by humans for human consumption and related to traditional agricultural systems such as *la milpa* (Richard 2012). The manipulation of 'life' is argued as the main concern when dealing with transgenic crops, as it is seen as a transgression of life, culture and a manufacture of the unnatural. Hence, the interest to discuss *bioartefacts* in the context of Latin America and its connection to the ethics of science and technology extended to social problems.

The art exhibit, *Bioartefactos* shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art, MACO, in Oaxaca City in 2014 curated by Maria Antonia González Valerio⁸³ included collectives and artists such as *Bios ExMachinA*; *MediaLab* and *MAMAZ Collective*. These artists presented different and provocative views of environmental conflicts which included dispossession of lands, resources and forced displacement.

Serán Ceniza, Mas Tendrá Sentido (ligeramente tóxico) (2014)

⁸³ <http://www.magonzalezvalerio.com/>

The opening installation is *Serán Ceniza, Mas Tendrá Sentido (ligeramente tóxico)* (They will be ashes, but will make sense [slightly toxic]) (2014) by the artist collective *BioExmachinA* was at the opening patio at the MACO, with yellow caution tape in the corners to stop people walking through the installation. The first encounter of the visitor is the caution tape embracing the columns that surround the patio (see fig. 1). This piece is an interactive experiment consisting of 83 samples with 800 seeds of maize from the state of Oaxaca with the purpose of exposing them to Glyphosate or Roundup produced by Monsanto. When spraying the patented herbicide all weeds and plants die, “including the *milpa*,” a polyculture that combines multiple species and crops such as “quelite, squashes, tomatillo, purslane and beans.” However, the patented herbicide “does not kill any plants genetically modified to resist the toxicity”. The artists write, “The dead will become ashes when burned, thereby turning on trace of its origin. The living will witness the uncontrolled insertion of transgenic corn and also a trace of its origin” (BioExmachinA, 2014). The uncovering of transgenic maize in this installation is an act of *demystifying* a seemingly unreachable sphere of the scientific. I argue this should be interpreted within wider social contestations. It should bring up questions about how the indigenous-based *milpa* system is based on a different cosmovision. *Pluriverses* must be recognized and interconnected to larger knowledges systems (Carrillo Trueba 2006).

The name of the above described installation alludes to a poem of seventeenth century baroque Spanish poet, Francisco de Quevedo since it “talks about the persistence of sense in the insignificance of the dead.” As the artists explain, “[g]lyphosate reveals the degrees of artificiality inherent to the corn seed and shows the conflict between the multiple layers determining its artificiality” (BioExmachinA 2014). The toxicity of the transgenic

maize is treated as something to be aware of and something to be cautioned because it is closer to the familiar namely, maize and its multiple presentations and connections to indigenous cosmopolitics. Hence, “tracing a toxic substance from production to consumption often reveals global networks of social injustice, lax regulations, and environmental degradation” (Alaimo 2010, 15). As a bioartefact, transgenic maize is conceived under the hegemonic technoscientific discourse as a scientific/technological innovation of rational human agency. This is clearly not interpreted the same way within indigenous cosmovisions. The question remains if notions such as *pluriverses* and the “pluralization of politics” which is sometimes ignored or what is the same, “a matter of ignorance and superstition” is going to be included in these controversies (de la Cadena 2010, 360). The entry point to this discussion is the cautionary action to the uncertainty that the presence of transgenic maize brings. Is it toxic? How can we trace the toxic flows? How and what do we need to access to the “biological truth”? (Alaimo 2010, 62).



Image 4. Bios ExMachinA: “Serán ceniza, mas tendrá sentido (ligeramente tóxico)”.
Oaxaca City, Mexico. 2014.

At the Insides of a Living Organism: Polinización cruzada (2012) and Desde adentro (2014)

In the collective video installation, *Polinización cruzada* (Cross Pollination) (2012) by BiosExmachinA shows a series of interviews with eight scientific experts and artists about transgenic maize and biotechnology in Mexico (see Image 3). The purpose of this installation is to show divergences among the interviewees on controversies around biotechnology, public policy and social justice. According to Ortega (2015) this piece represents the complexities of the topic; it demonstrates that there is no certainty for any of the arguments expressed on the video installation.⁸⁴ Where:

Polinización cruzada refers to a feature of corn that has worked as a critical point. This crop’s open-air reproduction, uncontrollable by definition, concerns the protectors of native varieties, enables “transgenic contamination” and suggests the profusion of uncertainty since the variables of genetic information released cannot be calculated. How can we make the critical discourse on biotechnology not to be exceeded by uncertainty and “impure” exchange of information? How not to avoid the complexity of speeches and their fundamental flexibility? (BiosExmachinA)

This video installation is part of a series of discussions on the role of expert knowledge and expertise in the public eye. The construction of platforms for sets of ‘experts’ to speak in public forums has been brought together with the mobilization of environmental activists and people from the community in the attempt to produce ‘valid’ statements in the eyes of governmental agencies and courts. *Polinización cruzada* shows

⁸⁴ Conversation on Skype. Also note that BiosexMachinA states that *Polinizacion Cruzada* does not reflect the views of the interviewees.

the uncertainty and flexibility of the flux of information derived from the multiplicity of opinions and positionalities of the unidentified interviewees.

In a similar fashion, *Desde Adentro* (From Within) (2014) by BiosExmachinaA disrupts the private aspect of a laboratory. It is described as “a site of biological experimentation. Separation and marking of DNA. Thermocycle and a box of electroforesis” (see Image 4). The purpose of *Desde Adentro* (2014) is to create an interactive participation for the visitors to help in the decoding of a DNA molecule of a corn seed; it is possible for the visitors to bring their own corn seeds and with the scientists determine if their sample is a transgenic seed or not. This installation deconstructs the mysticism around a laboratory and transforms the space of the museum into a participatory laboratory that engages the audience.

If information is incomplete and scientific and nonscientific arguments bend, and a consensus is hard to achieve, the alternative proposals by environmental activists is to incorporate unconventional participators, including those excluded as agents of politics such as indigenous knowledges and the more than human world (de la Cadena 2010). As Richard points out “there has been a notable insistence upon broadening the range of experts contributing to policy formulation beyond official ministerial and corporate representatives to include independent and social scientists as well as local knowledge producers” (2012, 67). This inclusion would not render public certainty in relation to transgenic maize; however, it can open possibilities to create “unexpected alliances” from local to global and to a *pluriversal politics* (de la Cadena 2010).



Image 5. Bios ExMachinA: *Polinizacion Cruzada* (2014).



Image 6. BioExMachinA: "Desde Adentro" (2014)

The Private Act of Feeding

The installation by Lena Ortega, *Dulce Vida* (Sweet Life) 2014 is “about the relation of maize, transgenic corn and high fructose syrup; the installation invites an active participation of the audience to make a reflection on the production and consumption of food that people consume in their homes” (Bioartefacts exhibit 2014). This installation does not present a bioartefact in ‘plain view’; however the food on the table contains high fructose corn syrup, a byproduct of maize. This byproduct is being produced by some of the companies that have promoted the liberalization of the market economy and fostered lax labor laws accompanied with the weakening of the social security system (Fitting 2011). The interaction between the audience and the exhibit transgresses the fragile sphere of privacy. Ortega invites the visitors to bring the food from their homes containing high fructose corn syrup as an act of uncovering and interactive participation (Ortega 2014).

This is the only piece with a human representation on it, emulating a museum diorama, a female bodied mannequin performing the ultimate act of motherhood, feeding and nurturing her child with industrialized foods. The kitchen and the corn fields meet at the diorama. It shows the fragility of the *sweet life*, evoking a 1950s American kitchen scene, the dream of a peaceful upbringing is disrupted by looking through the window to see the corn fields connected to the industrialization of the food system.

While struggles for food sovereignty refer to a nation-state component, *Dulce Vida* (2014) tacitly shows the intersections of gender; class and race with food sovereignty struggles by composing a diorama where the class and race comfort is dismantled by the industrialized food containing high fructose corn syrup on the table, closer to home.

Moreover, in the colonial/modern gender system divisions between nature and culture are extended to reproductive and unpaid labor and exploitative relations that are part of a genderized and racialized system throughout the Global South (Escobar 2008). Then, Ortega's representation of a kitchen-corn field at the diorama resembles the breaking of the ultimate frontier of modern comfort. It presents an act of potential catastrophe which is already happening for—mostly—women, people of color, indigenous people, migrants, peoples from the ex-colonies and the ones in the space of marginality (Nixon 2011).



Image 7. Ortega, Lena; “Dulce Vida” (2014), Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Oaxaca City, Oaxaca.

The Mechanization of Life: Milpa Polímera

The entry point to talk to about the mechanization of life in this exhibit, is the work of Marcela Armas and Arcangel Constantini, *Milpa Polímera* (2014), as described in the exhibit it is “an installation in a radial space in which a [small] tractor has on its inside a 3D printer which produces [corn] seeds from biopolymers created from corn (PLA)” (Bioartefactos 2014). The mechanization of the production of seeds made of biopolymers represents an additional frontier crossed in the manipulation of life. The *milpa* system is imagined as a lost and sterile system, where;

At its center, a tractor robot swivels in a closed cycle, sowing the artificial seed. The sterile seeds are printed and fall to the ground on the radial space, turning the soil into a sown field, into a cultural and economic artifact, but a sterile one from which no plant will ever grow, such as its industrial counterpart, a system trapped in a cycle aiming to establish itself as the only possibility (BioExmachinA 2014).

The machine *Milpa Polímera* is the end of the *milpa system*; it is its ultimate mechanization. As Merchant (1990) points out, using machine technology to effectively change the labor relations and “the machine also functioned symbolically as an image of the power of technology to order human life” (Merchant 1990, 220). The values added to the machines in Latin America in the waves of modernization including The Green Revolution implied a change from “traditional ways” including all “posing a challenge to the *milpa* system and devaluing the knowledge of *campesinos*” (Richard 2012, 72). A critique to the industrialization of life can find a place within indigenous rights movements.



Image 8. Lamas, Marcela and Arcangel Constantini, *Milpa Polímera*. 2014. Oaxaca City, Mexico.

As the tractor keeps going in circles dropping the biopolymer seeds which are fragile and artificial seeds with their incapacity to reproduce a new plant. This may be the ultimate demise of maize and the *milpa system*, by neutralizing the starting point of life, a seed.

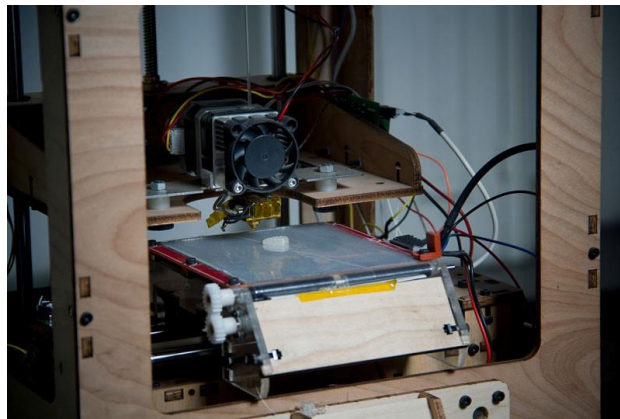


Image 9. Lamas, Marcela and Arcangel Constantini. 2014. *Milpa Polimera*. Detail of the machine producing the artificial maize seed.

Zea Mays and Zm_Maquina

The work of Minerva Hernandez Trejo and Héctor Cruz in *Zea Mays y los otros sentidos* is example of *translation* that Latour addresses, which is part of a “modern constitution,” meaning a “regime of life that create[s] a single natural order and separate[s] it from the social by creating an ontological distinction between things and humans that it purports [as] universal” (Latour in de la Cadena 2010: 342). In a similar way, *Zm_Maquina: Trazar la Vida (2014)* is an installation by MediaLab 2014 artist collective at Centro Multimedia-CENART⁸⁵. Hence, both pieces represent a question on how humans interact with plants, mediated and interpreted by a machine created by humans. The purpose of both installations is to establish a new understanding between humans and to “re-vision the planet as a cosmos of multi-species communities existing in intimate, entangled relations” (Adamson 2012, 44). The implications of this re-vision, and uncovering would entail profound changes, from discussing and seriously considering alternative paradigms to the cult of progress, and the relations of humans with the more than human world (Abram 1997). The installation *Zm_Maquina* was presented previously as *Desmodium Maquina (2012)* as part of the exhibit, *Sin Origen Sin Semilla 2012-2013* (Without Origin, Without Seed) an exhibit that precedes *Bioartefactos, Slowly Treshing the Corn (2014)*. *In the case of Desmodium Maquina (2012) research was conducted*

for the cultivation of *Desmodium gyrans*—unusual species in Mexico, as well as research and experimentation on sensing photosynthesis processes in plants, the design of hybrid devices, experimentation with electromagnetic mechanisms **for data visualization and operation of philosophical theories dealing with the problems that open in the assemblages between nature and technology** (Monreal 2012, my emphasis)

⁸⁵ The members of this project were Liliana Quintero, Fernando Monreal, Hugo Jesús Vargas Hernández, Minerva Hernández, Amaranta Sánchez, Myriam Beutelspacher, Enrique Hernández, Mónica Munguía, Mario Mendicutti, Juan Galindo, Amanda Lemus, Humberto Jardón, Hernani Villaseñor.

Those mentioned assemblages, are unlikely to happen if they are not mediated by humans. In *Zm_Maquina* (2014), the machine monitors the breathing of maize and transmits it through a mechanic arm the data obtained and graph into a copper disc (see fig. 7). *Zm_Maquina* is contextualized in the controversies around biotechnology and transgenic maize in Mexico; by using maize (*Zea Mays*) to translate its energy *into the human readable prove of the sensible aspect of the plant*. In *Zm_Maquina* “confronts life’s fragility to that fragility’s secretive technical manipulation, opening a reflection on how the artifacts are production devices to make the living visible” (Monreal 2012). The question in this installation is the visibility of the different *plant manifestations* of *Zea Mays*; the copper disc serves as a testimony of its life, and relevance.

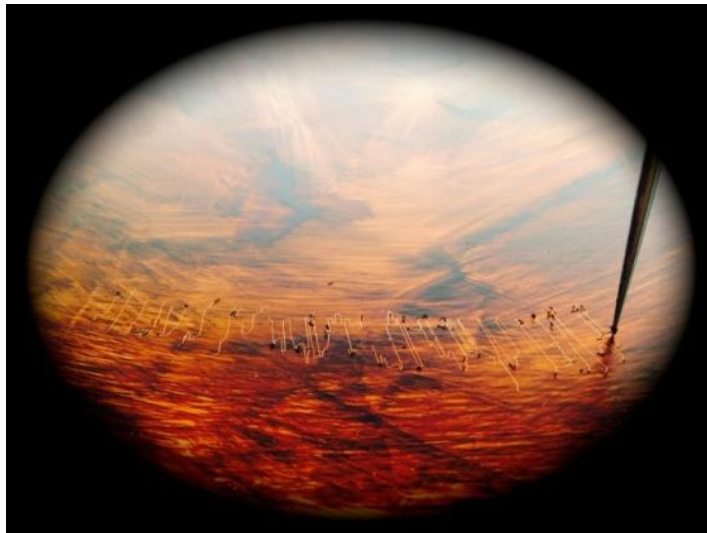


Image 10. Hernández Trejo, Minerva and Hector Cruz “*Zm_Maquina*” (2014). Detail showing how the machines reflect the energy that emanates from the *Zea Mays*.



Image 11. Hernández Trejo, Minerva. *Zea Mays* 2014

The work of Hernández Trejo and Cruz, *Zea Mays: Trazar la Vida* (2014) speaks to many levels of the recognition, study and reflection of how non-human animals interact with humans, and how plants (in this case *Zea Mays*) react and interact with human presence. As Mitchell (2012) notes, “bioart almost invariably encourages this embodied engagement with the work of art in order to produce a sense of “becoming–medium” on the part of a gallery–goer — that is, a sense that one’s own body can become an associated milieu for other forms of life” (92). The human is placed as a complement to the *Zea Mays*, in both installations the machine is not the demise of *Zea Mays*, but a medium between humans and earth-beings. For Amerindian cosmologies the existence of different interactions between humans and the more than human world is not new, although the means of communication are different (e.g. activism, international advocacy, local knowledge). Arguments around the agency of non-human in pluriversal politics have been

recurrent in cases of environmental justice and non-human agency (Lamberti 2014). Both installations, *Zea Mays* and *Zm_Maquina* invite deeper discussions on the alternative ontologies and pluriversal politics of bioartefacts, and non-humans (Viveiros de Castro 2004).

Embroidered Corn in MAMAZ: Códice del Maíz.

One of the nine pieces of the exhibit is quite different in its presentation of the controversies and problems around transgenic corn in Mexico. It is more common to see this representation of acts of resistance against transgenic corn as easy to access aesthetic expressions of environmental justice struggles, using shared icons of the popular culture, from food related to corn, as well as formal and informal jobs, and corporations which are portrayed on the textiles. The non-profit women's art collective *Colectivo de Mujeres Artistas y el Maiz*; MAMAZ based in Oaxaca, Mexico present their reason to become a collective in Oaxaca in the context of several environmental struggles:

Given that the native maize seed of our indigenous towns is on the verge of extinction in part due to the lack of support of the government, the loss of the tradition of sowing in our communities due to immigration, water shortage, climate changes and transnational economic interests. Our projects focus on bringing together women whom share and teach each other about what is happening to our local food supply. We use art as means of expression and as a form of social activism. (MAMAZ 2014)

Different from pieces of Bioartefacts, *Códice del maíz* by MAMAZ, uses a mixture of a traditional practice; it employs embroidered handkerchiefs as part of traditional knowledge. The handkerchiefs are a communal action (by collective sewing) and reflect

the—indigenous rooted—communality in Oaxaca. These artworks serve as a way to make visible a collective memory.

Traditionally, embroidered handkerchiefs are a women exclusive activity, and are made for decorative purposes in the privacy of the home. These handkerchiefs are a product of communal female labor; handkerchiefs are not usually associated with notions of high art as would be found in mainstream museums, nor with the technoscientific innovations. It is in this context that the exhibit of handkerchiefs is meant to subvert hegemonic notions of the aesthetic and the rational which are pervaded by patriarchal, Eurocentric, and liberalist biases. In this case, MAMAZ joined the exhibit with the installation *Códice del maíz* by showing a different type of translation, one that communicates to the observer an embroidered activism of the poor, and of the female, in this case one reserved by hegemonic culture to the home. This installation can be seen as a counterpoint to the mechanized, industrialized and atomized domestic situation represented by Lena Ortega in *Dulce Vida* (2014). As previously discussed, bioartefacts have an ontological duality based on an object-subject relationship. Hence, the interest to discuss the participation of MAMAZ as an act of aesthetic resistance, and placing at the same level the work of this collective to the ones presented based on science and technological grounds. The insertion of beings into the conceptualization of bioartefacts would place us in a problematization of the Zea Mays as a live entity with an agency rooted on its relation to human and other earth-beings (Parente, 2014).

The use of textiles has become a common place for addressing social justice phenomena such as migration and environmental justice problems, like the one around

transgenic corn in Mexico. The collective has been using textiles since 2006, since according to the director, Marietta Bernstoff, it is an easier and closer, more intimate, way to communicate with the audience. The use of handkerchiefs is a way to foster the collective memory in an artistic manner that does not result in a hierarchical relationship⁸⁶. It has been in other cases where the use of traditional textiles (such as handkerchiefs) has been used as collective action of memory and survival (Gargallo Celentani 2015).



Image 12. Colectivo MAMAZ, *Códice del maíz*.

Passages of Corn and Dirt: Containers (Arriaga-Ixtepec)

An interesting aspect of non-hegemonic cultures is the question of a certain type of cleanliness and order, associated with a higher way of civilizational organization. In the piece, *Containers (Arriaga-Ixtepec)*, plastic artist, Alfadir Luna presents “an installation

⁸⁶ Interview with Marietta Bernstoff via Skype.

with cement walls, chapopote⁸⁷, corn flour, corn seeds, sand, diesel and constructions ribs which deals with the topic of production and transportation of maize showing what is being altered includes from roads, housing to food” (Bioartefactos, 2014). The use of organic materials for construction of walls, represent a passage, that according to Luna derived from an observation of the immigration journey of humans and materials in the train that goes from Arriaga, Chiapas to Ixtepec, Oaxaca in Mexico.⁸⁸

The materials used in the construction of containers are the ones being transported in the train called *La Bestia* (The Beast). And along with the material it serves as a means of transportation for migrants in transit (mostly Centroamerican) to their final destination, the US. The bodies that move in the train and the materials are what Luna presents in this installation. The replacement of grave and other materials with flour and maize and the fumes that the fresh mixture emitted transmit to the visitor the experience of moving using a container of materials and bodies. This piece *in situ* was thought to use the maize to link the “construction materials” to an experience of movement (migration) of humans and matter.

As the project of modernity and progress has been implemented and developed in Mexico, including the North American Free Trade Agreement, a constant tendency of privatization of public resources has taken place. This includes the commodification of nature and a history of resource extraction linked to a massive forced movement of humans (Nixon 2011).

⁸⁷ Chapopote is a construction mixture derived from petroleum.

⁸⁸ Interview with Alfadir Luna, March 2015.

This installation serves as a connecting aisle to the other exhibits, making Containers (Arriaga-Ixtepec) a “rite of passage”. It briefly invites a reflection on the connection of human (forced) migration with a flexible conceptualization of human and the inhuman. As Braun and Whatmore asserts, “these include concerns for forms of human life, but crucially they also include concerns for what used to be considered the “outside” of human life— nature— but which is perhaps better thought of in a broader sense of geophysical and biochemical materials, entities and processes with which humankind and social lives are intertwined” (2010, xxv). In the midst of an aggravating environmental crisis, including food sovereignty, the treatment towards female environmental activists has escalated to gender-based violence, state sponsored terrorism, and forced disappearances. However, this violence is often unseen or overlooked, although it is perhaps the most persistent. The subject of the struggles by environmental activists can be identified, on the one hand, as a defense of “natural resources” or “their territories/land” and, on the other hand, as a struggle for lives, livelihoods, and survival including migrants.

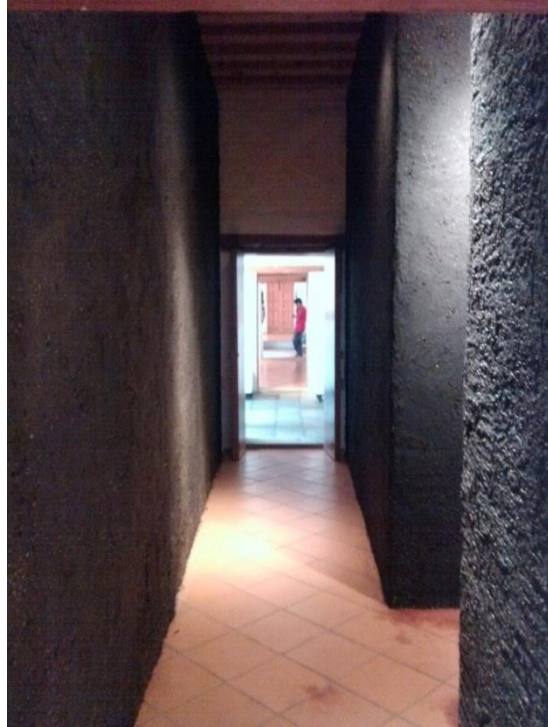


Image 13. Alfadir Luna, Containers (Arriaga-Ixtepect) (2014)



Image 14. Alfadir Luna, Containers (Arriaga-Ixtepec) 2014.

Chapter Conclusions: The Non-Human and Bioartefacts

In this chapter I drew on perspectives and debates concerning pluriversal politics, indigenous cosmopolitics, multi-species ethnography and coloniality of nature to analyze the exhibit Bioartefactos. The purpose has been to show the way in which aesthetics representations can converge with indigenous knowledges and other critical perspectives to challenge the mechanization and commodification of life which proceeds from the separation of human and non-human.

As previously discussed, maize is a bioartefact within Western cosmologies, since its “coming into existence” was brought by human animals, and its development depended on human settlements. In the , case of the collective *BiosExMachina, Workshop of the Human and Non-Human*, it shows the interdisciplinary efforts to reflect, expose and challenge the ways in which living artefacts are represented by scientists and artists. In relation to “nature” and the aesthetics of conflict, several Latin American(ist) scholars have discussed how collective memory and the—politics of—the forgotten play an essential role on the representations of the absent bodies and earth-beings. (Gargallo Celentani 2015; Gomez and Mignolo 2012)

The visitor of this exhibit may find these series of art installations closer to home since corn is embedded in Mesoamerican culture as a living artefact represented in several

forms from food for subsistence, food as part of rituals, festivities and cultural pride. Moreover, it touches upon the genderization and racialization of environmental justice conflicts.

In Latin America, the effort by federal governments to foster an intercultural dialogue seems insufficient; this is needless to say given the massive dispossession of lands, construction of roads (de la Peña 2011), and the building of megaprojects, which are reflections of two dominant discourses: one that promotes a path to development, a progressive way of destruction; and second a consistent annihilation of different ways of life through the obliviousness of the insufficiency of the solutions that have been provided so far by hegemonic systems. For this reason, within the environmental justice cases in the Americas, it is necessary to depart from the mainstream neoliberal multiculturalism. (Hale, 2005) I envision a different departure to analyze environmental crisis cases under the approach of *pluriverses*, which entail a defiant ontological stand point that recognizes the interconnectedness that material feminists, new materialisms, and indigenous cosmopolitics place at the forefront of their discussions.

In relation to “nature” and the aesthetics of conflict, several Latin American (ist) scholars have discussed how collective memory—and the politics—of the forgotten plays an essential role in the representations of the absent bodies and dismissed and overlooked earth-beings (de la Cadena 2010). Behind *human* rights and food sovereignty movements in the Americas is the question of how to embrace alternative projects that include and are based on different *pluriverses* in a manner that materializes in changing the ways we perceive social phenomena. As seen within the work of bioart of Minerva Hernandez (and the projects of Bioexmachina and project Arte+Ciencia), the interaction between *Zea Mays*

and human presence is mediated by different kinds of knowledge, where the intangible aspect of corn is expressed in terms of the “readable” for the human sense of perception.

The examples provided here, the case of Wirikuta and the use of bioart to approach the case of transgenic case in Mexico (discussed in detail in Chapter 5), showed how including political ontologies in the forefront of socio-ecological conflicts serves to reveal the violence in different forms of the *coloniality of power*. A discussion missing in the case of Wirikuta is one regarding how resource extraction—in this case, mining—is interrelated with the colonial gender system (Lugones 2013). This includes an analysis on how mining is related to slavery, settler colonialism, and the imposition of systems of exploitation and capitalistic accumulation. The case of Wirikuta attracted attention as a result of the possibility of questioning the consequences of colonialism to indigenous populations, and to mestizos by showing the material consequences of resources extraction and human exploitation.

In the case of bioart, the readability of non-human life is related to the capacity of human understanding of the non-human agent being recorded and presented. The question remains whether such *translations* would eventually make a change on the autonomy⁸⁹ and sovereignty of indigenous peoples. Since this exhibit was not based on indigenous cosmologies, it reflected a critical perspective based on the assumption of the need of other matter to express, communicate, and translate different *pluriverses* of the non-human. These pieces of bioart express and portray what otherwise would pass as imperceptible and overlooked. Both cases show different *pluriverses* through “human intervention,” making

⁸⁹ Including a “corporeal autonomy.”

indigenous cosmologies and non-human agency readable and visible. In both cases, the silence of gender violence is present (except for Lena Ortega's piece). The changes needed to overcome the series of crises we are facing, including a revitalization of indigenous knowledge and the recognition of marginalized knowledges.

Chapter 5

Contemporary Indigenous Literature and its Politics

This chapter examines indigenous literature's expression of diverse political ontologies that dissent from mainstream literatures and their political positions, and investigates perspectives on the poetic expression of the environmental social movements and political struggles of indigenous peoples in contemporary indigenous literatures. The chapter specifically analyzes poems by three indigenous Mexican women—Irma Pineda, Mikeas Sánchez, and Celerina Patricia Sánchez Santiago—from the poetry collection *Voces Nuevas de Raíz Antigua* (New Voices of Ancient Roots), published in 2013 in Mexico City by *Pluralia Ediciones* as a project for the revitalization of indigenous languages.

This chapter converges with the rest of this research as it incorporates an analysis and a critique of the use of language in indigenous literatures. This type of literature is often labeled “postcolonial literature,” defined by not only its period in history—written in former British, French and other imperial colonies after they gained independence—but also its subject matter. The forms of sociopolitical resistance this literature expresses include state-sponsored violence, forced displacement, revolutionary erotic female pleasure, and indigenous experiences in the city in the aftermath of relocation from a rural setting. Hence, that these literatures present different political ontologies within contemporary indigenous literatures.

A History of Linguistic Discrimination and Settler Language

On January 10, 2016, Mardonio Carballo (Nahua), a Mexican poet, public figure and artist, won an appeal on the grounds of the unconstitutionality of the amended Federal Telecommunications and Broadcasting Law in Mexico:

Article 230. In their transmission, concessionaire broadcasting stations shall use the national language. The foregoing is without prejudice to the use of the corresponding language of the indigenous people by the concessions of indigenous social use. If transmissions are in a foreign language, subtitling or translation into Spanish shall be used. In exceptional cases, the Ministry of the Interior may authorize the use of foreign languages without subtitling or translation in accordance with the regulations (Executive Branch of the Ministry of Communications and Transportation 2014).

Carballo's appeal was supported by indigenous writers and artists, who emphasized the relationship between autonomy and linguistic rights for indigenous people, explained here by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2005):

One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. The imperial education system installs a 'standard' version of the metropolitan language as the norm, and marginalizes all 'variants' as impurities. Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium which conceptions of 'truth' 'order,' and 'reality' become established. Such power is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice. For this reason, the discussion of post-colonial writing which follows is largely a discussion of the process by which the language, with its power, and the writing, with its signification of authority, has been wrested from the dominant European culture. (7)

This revitalization of indigenous language in Mexico was concurrent with the beginning of European-derived humanism as a discipline and ideology there, which was crucial to Mexico's postcolonial nation-building. For Foucault, "what is called humanism

has always been obliged to lean on certain conceptions of man borrowed from religion, science and politics.” (Foucault 1984: 43). Following similar processes in Latin America, this humanism was fostered by “Creole intellectuals in defense of [North] Americans against the Spanish dominant groups [...]. [T]his humanism became a nationalist ideology that prompted independence movements in Spanish colonies in America” (Velasco Gomez 2010, 2).

Despite the ongoing debate on what precisely the humanist perspectives of Creole intellectuals were toward American Indians (Velasco Gomez 2010; Kubitz 1941), Mexico’s humanism and its practices were fundamentally based on:

1. doctrines of individual behavior, in contrast to indigenous notions of community and collectivity (Lauderdale 2009);
2. conversion to a monotheistic religion;
3. creation of a racial order based on asymmetric miscegenation (and the beginning of an uncritical devotion to *mestizaje*); and
4. overglorification of rationality and science as a new type of non-religious conversion.

Mexico’s inheritance of European humanism and its precepts was reflected in not only the social and political order of New Spain (later becoming Mexico, as a nation, in 1821), but also the intra-activity (Barad 2008, 141) of the colonial bodily experience of what would be known as ‘Mexican,’ that is, “the mestizo; the new Mexican, the sprout of the new nationality” (Corbato 2009, 379) that eventually would live on without the need of the ‘colonizer.’ Colonial performativity (Barad 2008, 141) was an everyday practice

by itself, and then it evolved into a continual colonial discourse that remains prevalent in the 21st century—‘discourse’ defined here according to Barad (2008): “it is not what is said; it is that which constrains and enables what can be said. Discursive practices define what count as meaningful statements.” (137) Therefore, social and racial formations as hierarchies became materialized through a discourse, which, as colonial practices, are “material discourse practices” resulting in “apparatuses of bodily production” (Barad 2008, 140).

Therefore, the *India/Indio* contribution to nation-building is more than an ornamental presence. As a result of Eurocentrism (Quijano 2000), it is the constant, oft-neglected re-creation of a new body, in which inscriptions and recognitions of Western knowledge are necessary for the existence and continuation of these colonial discourses.

Since “all knowledge is a condensed node in an agonistic power field” (Haraway 1988, 577), knowledge derived from colonial foundations—including science and all that is perceived as ‘real,’ ‘valid,’ ‘normal’ and ‘natural’—apparently found contestations throughout Mexican nation-building history.⁹⁰ These included revolts among slaves⁹¹ (either indigenous or blacks), escapes from the *haciendas*, clandestine or rebellious worshiping of indigenous deities, and challenging the classification of human and non-human animal bodies, hence their restrictions on existence. The indigenous body thus

⁹⁰ Mexico, as a colonial product, is not a finished, bounded entity. It reconstructs itself daily, and its constituents (Mexican ‘citizens’ and ‘non-citizens’) interact with this entity by either reifying or neglecting its existence.

⁹¹ Although slavery has been denied in Mexican history narratives, the slave revolts and their alliances between blacks and indigenous against their commonly experienced subjugation must be noted (Valdes 1987). Moreover, serfdom, with attributes comparable to those of slave systems, was widespread, and some of it continues to this day.

became the abject ‘other’ body, assuming its corporeality would be perfectly bounded and immutable, constrained by the colonial experience. As Esteva (1999) points out, “The Indian peoples basically want to practice their own mode of living and government. This aspiration is not compatible with the dominant regime, nor even the design of the nation-state” (165).

The *india/indio* can be critically interpreted here as a construction of Mexican humanism, and the neocolonial indigenous body and its invisibility can be defined as a rebellious matter that confronts the formation of the Mexican nation and its aim to socially stratify the indigenous body and its dilution through the act of Europeanizing *mestizaje* (mixture favoring European biocultural elements). Hence, the triad “race-state-nation” (Machuca 1998, 63) did not end with Mexican independence or the Mexican Revolution, but has been reinforced without necessity of colonial indoctrination. The process by which Mexico achieved its current state in the 21st century partially explains why some Mexicans are not truly Mexican, but by law (*de iure*) are Mexican citizens, not by choice but by the self-granted constitutional power that produces docile bodies by classifying them and imposing physical disciplinary restrictions on their existence. To discuss race (or racism) in Mexico is to enter an inhospitable terrain of painful assimilations, physically imposed impediments, and constraining bodily experiences.

The Mexican racial project, influenced by European traditions (mostly Spanish), involved a constant anthropomorphization of the new colony. Spain became *la madre patria* (roughly translated as “mother-fatherland”), which seems contradictory, being simultaneously *a patria* (homeland), derived from the Latin *pater* (father), and a *madre*,

derived from the Latin *mater/matris* (mother). This constitutive duality of the Mexican nation responded to the racial hierarchies as new social and economic forms of organization evolved in the newly invaded territory, and has served to nurture the new citizen, the mestizo, the representative subject of a new Mexican. This subjectivity would entail the constant caring for human bodies who are ‘becoming’ and ‘transforming’ themselves into citizens by changing both their mores and their general interactions with life, death, and their milieu. Thus a sense of ‘self-shame’ permeated indigenous bodies as a part of a cult of framing the ‘perfect citizen,’ thereby infusing indigenous bodily attributes with a sense of uselessness. This turned the indigenous into a disposable subject that fell outside the boundaries of the socially acceptable (Hidalgo 2006, 6, 88).

As a consequence, educational books reproduced the histories of a Creole-dominated culture and helped to minimize and erase indigenous memories and desires of occupying a physical place within Mexico’s political borders. Thus it was not until the uprising of the *Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN-Zapatistas) in 1994 that the Mexican federal government, intellectual community and civil society were hearing the *indio vivo*—the ‘live Indian’—speak, contesting acknowledged demands for a better life (which other indigenous and non-indigenous social movements previously demanded) and challenging the construction of the Mexican human individual as the product of an evolving coloniality (Montemayor, 1998; Rovira 2009). The Zapatista movement did not entail an indigenous movement per se, because:

[...] The Zapatistas were an inspiration for the recovery of the spirit of resistance that has characterized the movements of the past decade, their vision will continue to be a key inspiration as these same movements struggle with the necessity of moving ‘beyond resistance’ (El Kilombo Intergalactico 2007, 11).

The rebellious bodies were not the only ones holding a rifle or shouting, “*Ya basta!*” (“Enough!”) Others who wanted their social and ethnic identities back were also ‘in rebellion’ against Mexico’s social, racial and economic hierarchies (El Kilombo Intergalactico 2007, 45). As Esteva suggests, the social pact was broken not in 1994, but many years prior, and has slowly dissolved the original Mexican society (Esteva 1995, 81-83). Hence, historians view the *indio vivo*’s corporeality as rebellious. Even if the Zapatistas in Chiapas could flee or be eliminated, their visibility is now evident and irreversible. Almost every corner of the world acknowledges Mexico’s Zapatistas and their struggle against neoliberalism and the oppressors (Rovira 2009). Zapatismo “activated millions of discontents, which quickly organized politically effective coalitions, with one single word: ‘Enough!’ ” (Esteva 1999, 162)

The discourse of rebellion is an ‘intra-activity,’ or a performance of a visible bodily rebellion demanding recognition and struggling to take back the indigenous voice which was silenced in the name of a *cosmic race* that celebrated the “mixture of races” (Vasconcelos 1979, 29). For the Comandante Tacho (2003, 322), this visibility entails recognizing that:

Somos los indios que somos. Estamos vivos. Y aquí estamos.

[...] para que todos los que somos nos hagamos uno solo, para poder seguir siendo todo, todos los que somos.

Aquí estamos. Somos los indios que somos. Indios verdaderos somos.

Somos la digna memoria. Somos hermanos....y hermanas...el corazón de la historia.

We are the Indians who are. We are alive. And here we are.

[...] so that all of us who are become a single one, so as to be able to continue being all [and] all that we are.

Here we are. We are the Indians that [we] are. True [and truthful] Indians we are.

We are the dignified memory. We are brothers...and sisters...the heart of history.

Claiming indigeneity, for Comandante Tacho, involved claiming the recognition of not only the Zapatista movement but also an indigenous body, the forgotten, the diluted by asymmetric miscegenation, history books and nationalist myths (Gutierrez Chong, 2001). The presence of the Zapatista movement and other indigenous rebellions—e.g., the Revolutionary Popular Army (EPR)—in the Mexican public sphere caused a challenge and a turn to the materiality of the imagined Mexican individual. Before the Zapatista movement, the *india/indio* body was relegated to a constructed passivity, being outside discursive practice. Yet “matter is not immutable or passive” (Barad 2008, 139), and here it recreates itself as a material manifestation of a rebellious body.

The 1994 indigenous uprisings in Chiapas responded to: (1) liberal nationalist welfare policies of forced educational and cultural assimilation, and (2) neoliberal measures that opened markets, capitalized on natural resources, and privatized common resources and places (Lauderdale 2009, 13). The situation of “dissatisfaction with elite rule, exclusionary political projects, and policies that cause or perpetuate the economic or ethnic marginalization of the masses is certainly not new in Latin America” (Vanden, 2007, 6). Nevertheless, the present dissatisfaction with elite rule does intersect with an emerging overlap between the micro and the macro, the local and the global, in the

generation of a fourth world (Castells 2011).⁹² One of the biggest challenges of the Chiapas revolts was twofold: (1) to re-connect with precolonial knowledge, and (2) to challenge the reification of a material existence. It thus became necessary for the rebels to reinterpret the indigenous body as the performative practice of an ‘other existence.’ This entailed a transformation of what constituted not only the spaces where poetry was performed and produced, but also the visibility of the indigenous body in the political, cultural and social life, including areas dedicated to the exquisite and perfected Spanish: Mexican and Ibero-American literature (Máynez 2003).

These contested spaces for poetry are well documented by Carlos Montemayor and Donald Frishmann (2005), who call the literary production of indigenous people “Voices of the True Peoples” and provide an anthology of that output in a multilingual book. Thus they expose the invisibility of indigenous languages in the national production of literature, as well as the obliviousness of the ongoing production of narrative, as expressed through indigenous languages (Montemayor and Frishmann 2014). The study of contemporary indigenous literature has received attention from non-indigenous scholars in Mexico, who expose the bilingual (and multilingual) public education the Federal government institutionalized in 1960 as an insufficient, paternalistic statist measure that preserves the national myths of unification within plurality. (Gutiérrez Chong 2003; Barceló and Portal 1995)

In 1991, the National Indigenist Institute and the Center for Research and Higher

⁹² The Fourth World, according to Manuel Castells, refers to those people living in an unequal world of information access. Castells’ interpretation is used here, because his Fourth World happens to intersect, not coincidentally, with the constitution of a global class of “indigenous” populations.

Studies on Social Anthropology (CIESAS) institutionalized a master's program on Indoamerican Linguistics. Following this endeavor to recover indigenous languages and knowledges, several intercultural universities were founded during Mexico's Vicente Fox Quezada presidency. All of these measures are still not sufficient to recognize that indigenous languages are spoken as a discourse of resistance of a material experience of subalternity, institutionalized in legal frameworks and official public education.

This 'otherness' eventually became recognized by the Mexican nation and government in the *Magna Carta*, the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States (*Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*), but only after the indigenous uprisings of the Zapatistas and their coalitions with non-indigenous movements, in addition to the international pressure that made the indigenous bodies visible. But what constituted an act of transgressing the nation was not the Zapatista uprising, but the beginning of an *indio/india* visibility in political affairs—one enabled by what could be interpreted as an indigenous guerrilla through the weapons of writing and public performance: "Our word is our weapon!" Zapatismo cried (Marcos 2001). As de la Cadena (2010) suggests, "the things" indigenous movements are currently "making public" (cf. Latour 2005) in politics "are also sentient entities whose material existence—and that of the worlds to which they belong—is currently threatened by the neoliberal wedding of capital and the state" (342). These 'sentient entities' are *india/indio* bodies, but also denied entities: other ways of knowing and perceiving visible and non-visible matter (for human eyes). These types of movements are thus part of an "indigenous

counter public sphere” (de la Cadena 2010, 341) but also an *inclusive* counter public sphere that transcends geopolitical borders and disciplines.

The linguistic oppression Amerindians experienced in Mexico provoked a slow re-emergence of self-identified indigenous writers (beginning in 1980) and the creation of bilingual (Spanish-Amerindian) institutionalized spaces (Montemayor 2005, 5). Following the Zapatista uprising, indigenous writers began to transgress the Mexican Nation, particularly when they abandoned the Spanish language as their communicative mechanism because they questioned it as the language of subjection: the enslavement of their memories to the Spanish language as a master system of signification would be openly contested once again. For indigenous experiences were (and largely still are) the subject of official textbooks, as the Western, mostly Ibero-American gaze, had constructed the *india/indio* as a subordinate entity from within humanist precepts and discourses. As de la Cadena (2010) argues:

Literacy emerges as a benevolent technology of improvement, the historical thrust of which has been to programmatically let Indians die: *Indio leido, Indio perdido*⁹³ says a very old and widespread adage in Spanish-speaking Latin America, reflecting the belief that for better or worse, literacy instills [Euro-Western] reason” (346).

The ‘existing’ *india/indio* was thus formed into a subordinate, gradually annihilated race (Hames-Garcia 2008, 308).

Moreover, the process of subordination had major consequences for identity

⁹³ An *india/indio* who assimilates herself/himself to the European canon becomes lost, and eventually loses her/his identity.

politics, social organization and the reconfiguration of power structures (Quijano 2000: 533), having led to a “consolidation of a Eurocentered world economic system [and a] Eurocentrifcation of knowledge, culture and history” (Hames-Garcia 2008, 319). This knowledge included the discourse of humanity that was attached to *criollos* and Europeanized mestizos but stripped away from *indias/indios*, locating them within the natural wilderness and creating the *india/indio* as the counterpart of the ‘material.’ Consequently, the *india/indio* writer (if recognized at all), according to Carlos Montemayor, would have to experience either a sense of dismissal of her/his work or a transformation of that work to fit the Euro-American academic and social canons (Montemayor 2007). As a result, the 21st-century emergence of writers such as Natalio Hernández Hernández, Briceida Cuevas Cob, Waldemar Noh Tzec, Cessia Esther Chuc Uc, Ubaldo Lopez Garcia, Petrona de la Cruz Cruz, and Nefi Fernandez Acosta not only contributed to the institutionalization of programs promoting indigenous languages but also made visible the bodies of the writers as explicitly “indigenous.” This new visibility of the *indio* as *indio* enabled a questioning of the glorification of the “dead Indian” that was habitually coupled with a scorn for the “live Indian” in Mexican mainstream culture and politics (Gutierrez 2004, 30).

What this new visibility of the “indigenous” reveals is that the racialized human body in postcolonial Mexico neither exists by itself nor reproduces its race or racial characteristics on its own from within. Rather, since “humans’ are neither pure cause nor pure effect, but part of the world in its open-ended becoming” (Barad 2008, 139), this new visibility emerges from within the age-old contrasts of a decaying colonial discourse. This continued ‘material discursivity’ of a “physical or biological form as a

bodily matter” (Hames-Garcia, 2008, 321) is reflected when such contemporary indigenous writers as Natalio Hernández Hernández transgressed the nation by changing the rules by which their bodily production was taking place before their writing—that is, as an “intra-activity of the world in its becoming” (Barad 2008, 140) and, more precisely, of the postcolonial world. To transgress the Mexican nation means to reclaim memories of existence and to “transcend modernity and other cultural contexts, without giving up the root, the origin, the self-identity, the cultural matrix.” (Hernández Hernández 1998, 181-182)

Poetry and Military Violence: Irma Pineda’s Poetry

The work of Irma Pineda (Juchitán, Oaxaca) exemplifies the connection of linguistics (*la palabra hablada*) to violence Zapotec people experienced in the state of Oaxaca. Its military presence is opposed to the struggles for autonomy and defense of the land for indigenous people. Pineda’s poem *You Will Not See Me Die* (2013) epitomizes the revitalization of indigenous language (Binnizá or Zapotec) and a message of hope and resistance based on Binnizá thought.

The Binnizá or Zapotec people are one of Mexico’s largest indigenous populations (after the Nahua people). Mostly located in Oaxaca, the Zapotecs have a long history of resistance to colonization, and in recent years both mestizo and indigenous populations have increased their state violence and struggles for land access and rights. The revitalization of indigenous languages and knowledges needs recognition of its relevance and complexity, since:

Zapotec was a written language long before any other language currently spoken in the Americas was put on paper or carved into stone. Around 600 BCE, long before the Maya began carving words and stories onto stelae and pyramids, the Zapotecs began using a glyph-based system to record their history. This writing system persisted for fourteen hundred years, dying out half a millennium before Europeans arrived in the Americas. After that, Zapotec poetry and prose once again became an oral tradition. Then, 120 years ago, Isthmus Zapotecs began using a transliterated Latin alphabet to record their poems, jokes, stories, and songs. (Call 2013, 200)

The Zapotecs of the Isthmus call the Zapotec language Diidxazá, and 41,090 people in Mexican territory speak it. As for cultural production, Oaxaca has linked social and political struggles to street art and novels and has inspired social scientists to link ethnic and racial conflicts to environmental justice struggles. Pineda's work is part of a long-time effort of scholars, translators, writers, artists and activists to promote and effect the revitalization and reevaluation of the Zapotec language (Sullivan 2012; Peterson Royce 2011). Activism and work around the preservation of Zapotec culture, including Diidxazá, have also been linked to social and ecological movements and the implementation and formalization of educational institutions in Oaxaca (Sullivan 2001).

In *You Will Not See Me Die* (2013), Pineda's voice emerges as a chant for hope and different materialization of the human and more-than-human worlds. The "live forever" in Pineda's poem, as a Binnizá, reflects a *pluriverse*, where the human understanding of the life cycle is challenged. The speaker's voice about life and death is replaced by the indigenous cosmopolitic idea of life cycles, where death is not a definitive end to the presence of the Binnizá. The imagery of the human cycle is a continuous becoming, a life that never ends, since it perpetuates oral stories and traditions (Montemayor 2011).

In a way of perseverance, the poem's speaker goes from evoking oral traditions to extolling the permanence of the Binnizá (Zapotec):

[...] there will be a seed hidden in the scrub by the path
that must return to this land
and see the future
and feed our souls
and our stories be reborn
and you will not see me die
because we will stay strong
we will always survive
our song will live forever (Call 2013)

This poem depicts the experiences of Binnizá (forced) migration to the U.S. and the sentiment of being far away. It also reinforces the pride of being indigenous and the perseverance of the Binnizá through literature. The indigenous body became the abject, the 'other,' claiming its corporeality would be perfectly bounded and immutable, constrained by the colonial experience.

Within these discussions, Pineda sheds light on the state-sponsored violence that has been experienced in Oaxaca in Guie'Ni Zinebe, *La Flor Que se Llevó* (2013) (*The Flower that was Taken Away*):

We are the life not the history that is reborn,
Your wishes were not sufficient to erase the color of my skin
In the hands of the world
We are here present in the dreams of birds and flowers,

like fire and sun that lights the paths
I am the earth woman that you scratched to plant your seed
I bathe my body to scare away the fear
You took my flower, soldier! (87)

This poem expresses the imagery of violence and reconciliation as a constant search of recovering memories, and makes them visible, since memory and remembrance is a way to recognize the violent past. The pictures that form part of this collection show the violence against indigenous people and the military presence in Mexico. Although a disruptive presence of indigenous bodies in the line of activism for survival is depicted, a false romanticism of the indigenous activism is avoided. Moreover, indigenous literature and socioecological movements are inseparable.

The Flower that was Taken Away can thus be read as a critical approach to conventional interpretations of violence in indigenous communities. For Pineda, this violence can be interpreted as a war on indigenous peoples; her voice is directed toward her sisters, other indigenous women. Simultaneously, the author is talking to the aggressor—the soldiers whose memory has been taken away (Pineda 2013, 101). Hence, the imagery of memory is a constant for Pineda as a source of bodily presence and preservation of Binnizá culture. As Catriona Mortimer Sandilands explains in relation to memory in the work of Jane Urquhart,⁹⁴ “memory does not only reside in the mind, but rather in the complex relations among bodies, minds and landscapes” (2008, 279).

Indeed, Pineda expresses the persistence of memory, since “word and memory are stronger than guns” (2013, 87), and presents nature as part of a continuous change, in which human suffering is connected to non-human life. Here, Pineda (2013, 50) evokes a moment of aggression and awareness:

Without mercy you took it away
My branches were not strong enough
The rain of my eyes will not be enough to wet the floor and make a flower be
reborn
When the world extended the stars in the sky
That we used to look at
They came with their metal arms and fire, burning the night
They awoke the earth with the screams of the wild animals and moaning in the
pain of my brother’s and sister’s nose and throat
Save yourself, mother,
That when the memory hurts so much that it kills us
Go far away
But go, because the men in green are coming for you

Here the poem calls for a recovering of subversive memory (Montemayor 2000) in the form of *la mujer tierra* (the earth woman), a figure found in a continuous persistence of women facing state-sponsored violence in the context of their relation of land and memory. Thus the poem can be read as a testimony of gendered violence toward indigenous and mestiza women.

The Flower that was Taken Away presents the interaction of nature with humans and the more-than-human world as a connection between violence and memory in a context of constant attacks on indigenous communities by either slow or direct corporeal violence. Since Pineda presents nature as central and inseparable to Binnizá culture, a classification of the author's work as 'nature writing' would be misleading (Trueba 2006). Her presentation of humans and non-humans as equally subject to military violence engages with the concept of *pluriverses*. This lets us see different dimensions of overlooked violence for both humans and the more-than-human world, including the imperceptible. By including contemporary indigenous literature, we can imagine futures that were not possible under the nature/culture divide.

Mokaya: Female Corporeality and Revitalization of Indigenous Literature in the Work of
Mikeas Sánchez

Mikeas Sánchez (Chapultenango, Chiapas) is a Zoque writer and radio communicator at an indigenous radio station in Chiapas.⁹⁵ The oral indigenous traditions of the Zoque people shape her work. Coming from a common history of colonialism and displacement (like other ethnic groups and pueblos of Mexico), the Zoque are geographically situated in the states of Chiapas, Tabasco, Veracruz, and parts of Oaxaca (Báez-Jorge 1973). Before colonization, the Zoque extended to the border of what is Guatemala today.

⁹⁵ The indigenous radio station is called XECOPA, *Voz de los Vientos* (Voice of the Winds). This radio station is primarily for the Zoque and Tsotsil people in Chiapas. Its website is: <http://ecos.cdi.gob.mx/xecopa.html>

Most archeological evidence of precolonial Zoque culture dates back to 3500 BCE. They call themselves *O' de piüt*, which means “people of the language,” “authentic” or “truthful.” In 1982, the eruption of the Chichonal Volcano displaced the Zoque, which caused them to redefine their homelands, hence their relationships with other indigenous and mestizo populations. The Zoque language is one of 64 indigenous languages spoken in Mexico. The history of the Zoques is tightly related to Mixes, with whom they have often been grouped into the misnamed *Populuca* ethnic group, in part because both peoples have been oppressed in Mexico, mostly as a result of the systemic racism, violence toward indigenous cultures, and gender violence (*Ibid.*).

Sánchez’s collection of poems, *Mojk’jäyā/Mokaya*, is divided into four sections: *Ore’yomo*, *Mokaya*, *Wejpäj’kiu’y and Naming Things*, and *Mojk’Jaya*. Sánchez alludes to Zoque traditions and calls up Zoque indigenous cosmologies (including the figure of corn) into her reflections and insights.

In the opening section, *Ore’yomo*—the name for Zoque women— Sánchez presents the figure of *Oko’chuwe*, the “grandmother/old fearsome woman/*warm lady*,” as “the knower of good and bad” and “the mother of pleasure and pain.” In these multi-faceted representations, *Oko’chuwe* strikes a contrast with the visions of benevolent women figures, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe, a figure of forgiveness and passivity. The poems in *Ore’yomo* allude to the experiences of young women in their indigenous community and explore the connections to their indigenous roots.

For example, the poem *Metza* (Two) presents a female figure of healing that resists the elimination of indigenous traditions:

Metza

Muchacha que escondes bajo tu falda
los secretos más exquisitos
Muchacha que lloras porque desconoces tu origen
Diosa milenaria
muchacha
ven a cantar conmigo
ven a olvidar esto que nos hiere
esta espinita que se nos encarna
ven hermana mía
ven a maldecir conmigo
a todos aquellos que escupieron sobre nuestro
origen

(Sánchez 2013, 15)

Two

Girl, you hid under your skirt
The most exquisite secrets
Girl, you cry because you know not
your origin
millenary goddess
Girl
come to sing with me
come to forget this that hurt us
this little thorn that is incarnated
come my sister
come to curse with me to all those
that spat over our origin

(Sánchez 2013, 15)

This female figure is recurrent throughout Sánchez' work in different forms, including one of a reconciliation with her corporeality, Zoque identity. Despite the different symbolisms of motherhood and femininity across Mesoamerica (as both punisher and life-giver) (Cruz 2012), the "Girl" reflects the relevance of gender and nature within Zoque cosmopolitics, symbolizing the collective work of the community and their relation to the land. Sánchez calls nature into her work as she reflects on the lives of the Zoque, mestiza women, and the politics of place, identity and ethnicity by incorporating pluriverses, based on indigenous cosmopolitics, and a critique of the human and nature divide and its relationality to the "natural world."

Mokaya evokes cosmological thinking of Zoque oral tradition and interconnects with Sánchez's experiences of growing up in Chapultenango, Chiapas, as well as being an indigenous woman in Mexico. In the poem *Tüma*, or *Uno* (One), the cultivation of land is in charge of *Mokaya*, a two gender entity, as a caretaker of the land:

Tüma
Uno

Soy mujer
y celebro cada pliegue de mi cuerpo
cada minúsculo átomo que me forma
y donde navegan mis dudas y mis
esperanzas
Todas las contradicciones son
maravillosas
porque me pertenecen
Soy mujer y celebro cada arteria
donde aprisiono los secretos de mi estirpe
y todas las palabras de los *ore'pät* están en
mi boca
y toda la sabiduría de las *ore'yomo* están
en mi saliva
(Sánchez 2013, 70-71)

Tüma
(One)

I am a woman
and I celebrate every fold of my body
every minuscule atom that forms me
and where my doubts and hopes sail
All the contradictions are wonderful
because they are mine
I am a woman and celebrate every artery
where I enclose the secrets of my lineage
and all the words of the *ore'pät*⁹⁶ are in
my mouth
and all the wisdom of the *ore'yomo*⁹⁷ are
in my saliva
(Sánchez 2013, 70-71)

Tumä is also the title of the first poem in *Mojk'jäyä*, which is the flower of maize that, according to Zoque cosmologies, is the complement of *Mokaya*. Here the author evokes the oral tradition of the Zoque people and their relation to the land and to agricultural practices. These oral traditions embody indigenous scientific knowledges (ISK) about the relation of the human to maize. In *Tumä*, Sánchez presents the figure of the flower of maize (*Mojk'jäyä*) as a compliment to the male figure of maize, showing that the Zoque understand corn to be a monoecious plant: it grows its male and female parts on the same plant. This scientific knowledge shapes approaches to “cultivating the land” and interacting with other humans and nonhumans. While in Zoque cosmologies

⁹⁶ A Zoque man.

⁹⁷ A Zoque woman.

the corn plant represents a blurring between all living and non-living entities, here Sánchez also draws attention to a blurring between male and female genders:

Tüma Uno	Tüma One
Soy Mokaya	I am Mokaya
soy hombre y soy mujer	I am man and woman
Mojk'jäyä	Mojk'jäyä
la flor del maíz	The flower of maize
la palabra cantada	The sang word
la dolorosa palabra	The painful word
cultivo la palabra	I cultivate the word
cultivo la tierra	I cultivate the land

This poem illustrates that an essential part of Amerindian cosmologies is sexuality, as a healthy part of the life cycle and reproduction—including eroticism—since sexuality is concerned with both human reproduction and the reproduction cycles of nonhuman “persons” such as the monoecious corn plant.⁹⁸

In these poems, Sánchez presents both the land and the female body as elements of nature mediated by Zoque cosmologies, hence the relationship between human with nature as one of interdependence among humans, non-humans, invisible and visible entities. Thus the female body is indeed a political territory (Gómez Grijalva 2012) where the women’s body is not marginalized but placed at the center. This placement confronts a genderized state-sponsored violence and an obliviousness of the eroticism, sexuality and knowledge the female body carries in itself. As ecocritic Stacy Alaimo notes:

⁹⁸ It is important to note that indigenous traditions in relation to sex and gender are not constrained by a duality of women/men, female/male, or heterosexual relationship.

[...] historically, nature has been mapped by mind/body dichotomies that are coded by gender and race, associating women and people of color with abject bodily resources. Negotiating such an ideologically mined terrain is extremely difficult, especially when the idealized version of nature seems to be complicitous in maintaining its mirror image (1996, 50).

In *Kuyay*, the seventh poem in *Mojk'jäyã*, Sánchez is concerned with denied sexual and erotic experiences for women, especially those of color,⁹⁹ for whom the exercise of sexuality is oppressed by conventions of gender and ethnicity. Sánchez presents a series of poems on female sexuality and eroticism that does not place the female body in a heteronormative state of passivity. On the contrary, *Kuyay* depicts women in the exercise of their sexuality and embracing their dignified bodies.

Symbolically, she is opposing subjugation of women and the forced heterosexuality required by the nation-state (Curiel 2013). Hence, the gendered bodies embedded within Sánchez's poetry are an invitation to reflect upon the shaping of sexuality and gender under a modern/colonial gender system (Lugones 2007). Her poetry invites us to deconstruct the imposed hegemonic sexuality, eroticism, and relations to the body:

**Kuyay
Siete**

Me nombro y hablo por todas las mujeres
que aún se duelen por su sexo
por rodas aquellas que todavía callan

**Kuyay
Seven**

I proclaim myself and speak for all the
women

⁹⁹ The concept of “people of color” and “women of color” in Latin America scholarship is not widely discussed. It is an emerging discussion within Latin American and Caribbean feminist scholarship. However, for the purposes of this chapter and in recognition of the potentiality that transnational work on indigenous feminisms and its convergent scholarship might achieve, the term is used here. For more information, see Maria Lugones' discussion in Maria Lugones' “Coloniality and Gender”; Rita Laura Segat's *La Nación y sus Otros: Raza, Etnicidad y Diversidad Religiosa en Tiempos de Políticas de la Identidad*; and Karina Bidaseca, “Mujeres Blancas Buscando Salvar a Mujeres Color Café.”

y aborrecen la palabra deseo
a ellas ofrezco mi espíritu
perfumado con flores de mayo
con ellas celebro mi dolor y mi gozo
(Sánchez 2013, 89)

that still hurt themselves because of their
sex
all those that still are silent
and despise the word desire
to them I offer my spirit
fragrant with May flowers
with them I celebrate my pain and my joy
(Sánchez 2013, 89)

The body of the indigenous woman of color is reframed and placed within indigenous perspectives on the bodies of women and sexuality. Mesoamerican cultures place the human body within cycles of life and death, and include sexuality as a vital part of the cosmos. Hence, Sánchez's work relies on life cycles, the agency of nature. The indigenous body is liberated and reaffirmed in its beauty, a worthiness embedded within Zoque cosmologies.

Sánchez's work illustrates that ancestral and traditional knowledge (IKS), including agroecological knowledge, has ecocultural relevance in the present. Informed by the monoecious characteristics of corn, she deconstructs the divisions of human/animal/inhuman and genderized, heteronormative understandings of female/male. Clearly, maize—like other elements of nature, both human and non-human, tangible or intangible—is both materially and culturally significant in indigenous environmental justice movements and literary arts that are connected to indigenous struggles for autonomy, food sovereignty, women's rights, indigenous language preservation, and the revitalization of IKS in Latin America. Yet, the skepticism with which current power structures in Mexico have viewed indigenous IKS parallels a general lack of attention and undervaluation of the intellectual work of indigenous writers in Mexico. As Miguel León-Portilla (2001) writes, indigenous cosmologies and oral traditions in Mesoamerica

(and in the Americas) are often considered just a remembrance or romanticization of pre-colonization days, and such attitudes hinder indigenous intellectuals from disseminating their work and bringing wider recognition to indigenous knowledges as valid scientific and cosmopolitical understandings:

It is true of course that the impact of Western civilization affected the living patterns and thinking of the original peoples of the Americas. But it is also true that while the imposition of foreign culture hurt the inner most cultural self of the Mesoamericans, it did not efface it. Different cultures have co-existed, influencing each other, shaping the “face and heart” (a Nahua metaphor meaning character) of what is today Mexico (14).

Ecocritics who focus on Mesoamerican (and Latin American) poets and artists and the significance of the recuperation of indigenous cosmologies in contemporary genres have the opportunity to change negative attitudes about indigenous cultures that have been pervasive in Mexico and to support indigenous intellectuals and artists. In doing so, ecocritics also help to reframe Western binaries of nature-human relations. According to León-Portilla (2001):

[It] would be unthinkable for the Mesoamericans, even today, to think of themselves as unattached entities, kinless, isolated in any way. They understand that the cycles, feasts and religious ceremonies during the solar year help them immensely to reinforce the vital feeling of belonging to a sacred time and space. This ethos is the realm where humans are born, establish links of close relationship with others, work, marry, have their children, and fearlessly accept their own death as a point of encounter with Her, Our Mother/Him, Our Father. Such beliefs and attitudes are very far from those of modern Western culture (15).

Sánchez’s work illustrates that many writers in Mesoamerica are engaged in a new appreciation for IKS. Montemayor (1998) asserts the necessity to view IKS as *arte de la lengua* (art of the tongue), which includes oral and written literary traditions that

often fall outside Western aesthetic conventions. The links between nature, indigeneity and “ecological thought” in Mesoamerican literatures—and indigenous literatures of the Americas—are being integrated into a corpus of contemporary global literary arts that are incorporating indigenous cosmologies and alternative ecological understandings to Western binaries of nature-human, object-subject.

Ecocritics, anthropologists, political ecologists, scientists, environmental activists, ethnologists, and artists such as Sánchez resist these binaries and their destructive effects on people and ecosystems alike by bringing forward perspectives of pluriverses that recognize the multiplicity of “views,” which also include non-human actors in the realm of politics (de la Cadena 2010; Carrillo Trueba 2006). Sánchez encompasses both humans and non-humans, and her work is dedicated to *Nasakobajk*, which, in Zoque cosmology, is Mother Earth and the protective spirit of the world. The name *Nasakobaj* is derived from *Nas* (head) and *kobajk* (land); therefore, *Nasakobajk* is the head of the land (Lisbona 2004, 226). Sánchez’s work contains no separation between the *natural* as an isolated, or wilderness, space and the space of the *human*. For example, in *Tujtay*, poem six in *Mokaya*, she writes of the “prayer of the peasant,” in which a man asks not for favors, but to understand the temporality of the human body and the limitations of human understandings of the non-human:

Seis

La oración del sembrador reza
“Kujkiki’
esta es la palabra que me enseñaron
los que caminaron la tierra antes de mí
Kujkiki’
será la palabra que dejaré a mis hijos

Six

The prayer of the sower goes
“Kujkiki’
This is the word that I was taught
The ones that walked the land before me
Kujkiki’

<p>el día de mi muerte</p> <p>Porque no excederé mi paso por la tierra</p> <p>ni abusaré del placer ni del dolor</p> <p>Con una mano brindo mi ternura con la otra recibo el calor del sol</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Sánchez 2013, 24)</p>	<p>It will be the word that I will leave to my children</p> <p>The day of my death</p> <p>Because I will not exceed my passage on this earth</p> <p>Nor abuse of the pleasure and pain</p> <p>With one hand I offer my tenderness</p> <p>With the other I receive the warmth of the sun</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Sánchez 2013, 24)</p>
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In this prayer is a continuity between humans and earth-beings, or the “ones that walked before,” even in contemporary times. Cosmic entities such as the sun do not represent a life-death binary but are seen by Sánchez to exceed a time-space continuum that falls outside of Western (and Abrahamic) conceptions of an ‘end of time.’

Sánchez’s poems illustrate how Mexican artists are engaged in forms of critique that support and reflect the goals and aims of documents such as the *Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle*. Both political document and poetry oppose violence against women that takes the form of heterosexuality enforced by the nation-state or threats to IKS that resist binary separation of nature and culture.

Memories of the Transcorporeal: The Poetry of Celerina Patricia Sánchez Santiago

The poetry of Celerina Patricia Sánchez Santiago (Ñuu Savi) is included in *Voces Nuevas* and includes topics ranging from Ñuu Savi cosmologies to nostalgia for the past to a resurrection of indigenous presence. Her poetry, while not postcolonial in its character and definition, does provide a critique to the consequences that settler colonialism and a postcolonial state have for indigenous peoples. Sánchez Santiago

provides a poetic reconstruction of the margins of the possibility to rise, and resist the vanishing of indigenous cosmologies.

Stacy Alaimo's (2010, 2006) concept of *trans-corporeality* is applicable to Sánchez Santiago's poetry and its connections to the embodiment of decoloniality, revitalization of indigenous languages and cosmologies:

[W]hat I'm calling "trans-corporeality," the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from "nature" or "environment." Trans-corporeality is a theoretical site, in a place where corporeal theories and environmental theories meet and mingle in productive ways. Furthermore, the movement across human corporeality and nonhuman nature necessitates rich, complex modes of analysis that travel through the entangled territories of material and discursive, natural and cultural, biological and textual (238).

In terms of trans-corporeality, the body is discussed here as a site of contact, of constant action, where its substance, its fleshiness is in constant interaction with the environment (Alaimo 2006). The female body is the center of the poetry presented by the authors of *Voces Nuevas*, as well as their indigenous cosmologies. By putting the body at the center of their literature, and to challenge the imposed and assumed passivity of the female body, *Voces Nuevas* offers an insight into poetry in indigenous languages.

Moreover, as Chapter 2 discusses, the postcolonial body is in itself a repository of a diverse of byproducts of coloniality and imperialism. Therefore, resonances of pain, recovery, yearning, and survival are present within indigenous literatures. Furthermore, transcorporeality can possibly be included and discussed under the framework of decolonial theory, since "at its most basic, decolonization work is about the divestment of foreign occupying powers from indigenous homelands, modes of government, ways of

caring for the people and living landscapes, and especially ways of thinking.” (Duarte and Belarte Lewis 2015, 678) The recurrence of resistance and perseverance narratives in Sánchez Santiago’s poetry resemble Pineda’s work, in that they represent a constant becoming, transformation and persistence of indigenous cultures.

In her book *Inii ichí, Esencia del Camino (Inii ichí, Essence’s Path)*, Sánchez Santiago explores *Ñuu Savi* (Mixtec) cosmologies, narratives, stories and an exploration of poetry in indigenous languages. According to Angélica Aguilera Figueroa (2016)¹⁰⁰, the author is bringing her ancestors into the opening poem, *Natsiká-viaje* (Natsiká-Travel):

The words [to which Celerina Patricia refers] from her ancestors are brought in the poem as subjects of the poem and more specifically, the words of the women who came before her and that she uses them to develop a synesthesia based on the words, not as they are [words in themselves], as signs but as a matter by which it is possible to build a path which is being traced which each verse, they are drawing a path.

Natsiká-viaje presents a path through words and the perseverance of the ancestral word:

Natsiká-viaje

Con mis pies descalzos he recorrido el
camino de los ancestros
donde las vueelas caminaron con pasos
firmes y contundentes
bajo el sol de muchas primaveras para no
morir
aquí estoy con mi tenate de palabras

Natsiká-Travel

With my barefoot I have traveled the path
of my ancestors
where grandmothers walked with firm and
firm steps
under the sun with many Springs not to
die
here I am with my *tenate*¹⁰¹ of words

¹⁰⁰ Personal phone correspondence.

¹⁰¹ A *tenate* is a bag or a basket.

como un canto a su historia y a su
memoria
las palabras son fuerza / valor / camino
y van tejiendo nuestro ser
palabras que construyen mundos
que rompen la vida
que cantan al son del río
que juegan con ser lluvia
que evocan al viento
que mueven montañas
que sueltan lágrimas
palabras que arrancan una sonrisa
palabras que fecundan
palabras que navegan
palabras / palabras / palabras
palabras escondidas bajo un árbol viejo
palabras que cantan con sus sonidos
aquí estoy con mi tenate
dejándolas libres para que vuelen
como mariposas o como pájaros en esta

like a song to their history and their
memory
the words are strength / courage / path
and they are weaving our being
words that build worlds
that break the life
that sing to the rhythm of the river
that play to be rain
that evoke the wind
that move mountains
that drop tears
words that tear a smile
words that fertilize
words that sail
words / words / words
words that are hidden under an old tree
words that sing with their sounds
here I am with my tenate
setting them free so they can fly away
like butterflies or like birds in this land

tierra

Ecocriticism, while more common and visible in academic circles of the Global North, has converged environmental scientists, literary critics, performance studies and social scientists on an interdisciplinary journey of examining overlooked life, denied ontologies and marginalized knowledges. Thus, through poems such as the one above, we may see how *la palabra escrita y oral*, is a testimony to the revitalization of indigenous languages, as well as a form of resistance to the dismissal of indigenous literatures from the national culture (Montemayor 2001).

The constant calling for ancestors and their knowledge is present throughout the work of Celerina Patricia Sánchez Santiago as well as Irma Pineda and Mikeas Sánchez. In *Natsiká-viaje* and *Tu'un-La Palabra* (The Word), Sánchez Santiago expresses how

indigenous languages are interconnected to different aspects and representation of human life:

Tu'un (La Palabra)

La palabra extensión de raíz
hierba subterránea como cualquier animal
escondida en regocijo del calor de la tierra
camina silenciosa en la noche
para amanecer en el pensamiento profundo del lenguaje
de una mañana contenida en la *jícara* de la historia
pasar como diáspora de colores y pintar la humanidad

Tu'un (The Word)

The word extension of a root
subterranean herb as any other animal
silently hidden at night
to wake up in the profound thought of language
of a morning contained in the *jícara* of history
passing as a diaspora of colors and paint the humanity

Here Sánchez Santiago demonstrates how the path and *la palabra* are connected to both ancestral knowledge and survival and a resistance of the post-colonial body.

The recreation of indigenous bodies, especially women's corporeality, is reenacted throughout Sánchez Santiago's poetry. It shows the reader the resistance and the "pain of dislocation" (de Manuel 2004, 103) that surges in postcolonial (and decolonial) spaces and is embodied in postcolonial bodies. Moreover, colonial discourses have influenced how human—especially female—corporeality have been so strongly

associated with nature in Western thought (Alaimo 2006, 240) that indigenous poetry written by women can offer to challenge cultural conventions and dominant discourses about indigeneity and *indigenismo* (Chacón 2007, 96).

The idea of life and death within non-Western cosmovisions challenges the monolithic perspective that the human body, as a flesh, ends with death. In this way, Sánchez Santiago's poem *Nacimiento Dual* (Dual Birth) (2013) plays with the life-death dichotomy: the preservation of life for the peoples of postcolonial state involves resistance and a constant becoming. Hence, that *Nacimiento Dual* connects a transcorporeal perspective of the indigenous *Ñuu Savi* body (Alaimo 2010), thereby challenging the life-death dichotomy through the use of non-Western ontologies by presenting a death contained in life:

Nacimiento Dual

Cuando nací
Nació mi muerte
Desde entonces camino con ella
Hay días que no sé
¿Quién soy?
¿Soy yo o ella?
Pienso que es ella
pero no...
soy yo
mi pensamiento es mío o de ella es mi pensamiento
mi mente está confusa
mi andar con ella es siempre

donde quiera que vaya
en el mercado
en el monte
en las flores
ella esta ahí...
conmigo
hay días que le pregunto
cuándo partiremos...ella sólo contesta
cuando se termine nuestro camino

Dual Birth

When I was born
My death was born
From that day on I walk with her
There are days that I don't know
Who am I?
Is it me or her?
I think it is her
but no...
It is me
my thought is mine or my thought is hers
my mind is confused
my walk with her is always
wherever I go
at the market
in the mount
in the flowers

she is there...
with me
there are days that I asked her
when are we leaving....she just answers
when our path is finished

In this poem, Sánchez Santiago offers an insight into the melancholy of life and the temporality of the human in relation to other lives. The fragility of human life is connected to *la palabra*, that similar vein to Pineda's poetry in relation to a promise of eternal becoming. Sánchez Santiago presents *La Palabra* (the Word) as a symbol of the continuity of indigenous resistance. The connection of *mestizaje*¹⁰² to indigenous languages and literatures is based on the premise that the (postcolonial) body contains the enunciation of resistance, pain and survival. Furthermore, this discussion suggests that indigenous literatures are methodologies of liberation in their own right.

Conclusion: Indigenous Literature as Relational Ontologies

Since indigenous poetry has been ostracized as a form of art and source of knowledge, this chapter presented a discussion on linguistic imperialism and postcolonial states' use of imperial languages toward invisibilized non-Western existences. Work by indigenous women writers from the collection *Voces Nuevas de Raíz Antigua* (2013) has been presented here as an exploration of how political ontologies and ontological conflicts are embedded in indigenous literature. As Mario Blaser (2013) notes:

[...] these kinds of conflicts have gained unprecedented visibility and potentiality, in part because the hegemony of the story of modernity is undergoing a crisis.

¹⁰² See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion on *mestizaje* and coloniality.

Such crisis provides both the context and the rationale for political ontology, a loosely connected project emerging from the convergence of ideas advanced in various scholarly fields (indigenous studies, science and technology studies [STS], posthumanism, and political ecology, among others) (548).

The modern capitalist world system is in crisis, and non-capitalist forms of living are persecuted. Furthermore, a connection between neoliberal practices and patriarchy have been emphasized within feminist scholarship and decolonial feminist groups (Lugones, 2007; Silvia Federeci, 2006 and Julieta Paredes, 2010). The search for different forms of theory, enunciations and aesthetic representations of antisexist, antiracist and anticapitalist practices by “recognizing the incompleteness of all knowledges is the condition of possibility of epistemological dialogue and debate among different knowledges” (de Sousa Santos 2010, 430). Here is where relational ontologies have a fruitful space for discussion of decolonial practices, as well as alternative practices to the “the global, Eurocentered, capitalist model of power” (Lugones 2008, 3). Then, indigenous literatures, especially ones by women, tend to be essentialized as part of an inherent, passive indigenous culture (Paredes 2010; Chacón 2007).¹⁰³

Relational ontologies help us to understand the series of relationships where “there is no distinction between nature and culture but rather the entities that exist emerge from a web or network of relations” (Blaser 2013, 20). Through these relationalities, we may identify political ontological conflicts that are not exclusive in conflicts that

¹⁰³ See Federeci (2015, 107-115) for a discussion on capitalism and sexual division of labor.

involved indigenous people. This is a question of performativity and deployment of non-hegemonic conformism (Blaser 2013).

Otherness presents itself within *mestizaje* as indigeneity, blackness, dissident sexualities and genders, and dissident ontologies. The consolidation of decolonial imagination and evidence¹⁰⁴ will eventually bring us to autonomy and freedom (Lewis 2002, n.p.) The capacity to enunciate *other* ontologies is connected to linguistic imperialism. In the poetry presented in this chapter, these power relations refer to relational ontologies within indigenous cosmologies expressed through indigenous poetry.

In light of the reduction of Mexican and Central American literature to literary and poetic production from elite groups, indigenous literatures have revamped discussions on indigenous autonomy, including mass media—particularly indigenous community-based radio stations, which have been attacked due to the character of their work and their capacity to reach and organize communities. The amendments to the Federal Law of Telecommunications in Mexico (2015) targeted non-Spanish language forms of communication. Victor Terán (2015) notes:

There is a very important movement literary production in the first languages of Mexico, and this speaks to the notable vigor of these communities to survive despite the injustices they suffer and have suffered for more than five centuries. This tendency to write in indigenous languages will continue, with or without the support of the Mexican government. The first communities of Mexico have understood that the issue of survival and development does not depend on the government but on their own actions and determination. (iv)

¹⁰⁴ ‘Decolonial evidence’ is defined here as the way to ‘bear witnesses’ of the presence of overlooked, dismissed and annihilated lives and knowledges.

A recent publication in English, *Like a New Sun: New Indigenous Mexican Poetry* (2015), edited by Victor Terán and David Shook, presents contemporary voices in indigenous literatures. This collection includes works by Mikeas Sánchez, Enriqueta Lunez, Briceida Cuevas Cob, Victor Terán, Juan Hernández Ramírez and Juan Gregorio Regino, in both indigenous languages and their English translations. Eliot Weinberger (2015) comments:

As these are contemporary writers, their poetry and fiction is disseminated orally not only in live performance but also on radio shows, and, for the first time in these histories, in books and language-specific magazines. Some of the poets in this book use their native language as a way of enriching the modernist lyric. Others use modernism to re-imagine traditional forms. (iii)

The future is imagined as part of a continuous indigenous existence through *la palabra*. Since *mestizaje* is a condition for indigenous negation,¹⁰⁵ a linguistic approach to *mestizaje* entails an approximation to particular cases of indigenous cosmopolitics, which, through poetry, represents the resistance to total annihilation of indigenous lives (Fenelon 2012).

¹⁰⁵ This also applies to Black negation. See Chapter 2 for a discussion on the corporeality of *mestizaje* and its relationship to (anti) Blackness.

Chapter 6

As a Way to Conclude: Confluence in Critical Times

I have discussed how environmental thought in Mexico have been developed and found particular ways to approach cases of environmental justice. The incorporation of decolonial theory responds to a necessity for a theoretical exercise that is upfront with the necessities of critical social science research and that intend to provide a project for emancipation.

In *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, Anna Tsing (2011) presents the situation of transnational environmental social movements by stating that:

A related set of debates characterizes discussions of the new social movements that arose in the late twentieth century as vehicles of protest: human rights, ethnic identity politics, indigenous rights, feminism, gay rights, and environmentalism. Scholars are divided: some see these movements as expressions of a frightening new force of global coercion, while others portray them as carrying hopes for freedom. The split here is not across disciplines but rather across audiences. Those who address themselves to cultural theorists stress the formation of new kinds of disciplinary power [...]; those who include activists in their audiences stress such movements' potential. The former explain the universalizing logic of liberal sovereignty and biopower the latter tell us of the urgency of particular cases. (Tsing 2012, 4-5)

Considering the multiple relations that socio-environmental struggles contain and the urgency of this topics, this research hopes to contribute to a larger body of discussions around the Global South, South-South relations and how this issues resonate among people of the Global North. For this reason, this research has presented different ways that political ontologies are present in environmental conflicts and the challenges the pose for the modern/colonial/capitalist world system.

The multiple connections among environmental crisis and conflicts (Tsing 2005) in the Global South and Global North show a constant tendency to dispossess indigenous peoples and the people at the margins of their lands, livelihoods and means. Dispossession, and the material desperation it brings about, often pushes these already marginalized people into exploitative labor relations. Hence, the loss of livelihood and cultures tied to the land, combined with exploitative conditions results in scarcities and traumas that are passed on to the younger generations who are raised in the midst of depressed economic, social, and emotional contexts. This structural marginalization gravely increases the likelihood that generations to come will experience recurrent cycles of violence, further oppression, and therefore more pressures to abandon their traditional ways of living.

Our ‘entanglements’ as Tsing comments, are without doubt complex, and contradictory at times. In this research I have discussed how decolonial feminists perspectives can work with material feminisms, and indigenous cosmopolitics to explain and analyze environmental justice cases in postcolonial settings. Moreover, this research invokes a dialogue between different theories of contemporary debates on the body, its materiality and fleshiness as well as how spaces of research can be configured to include non-conventional forms of knowing. To do so, implies to reconsider one of the basic tenants of modern civilizations: the particularities of *humanity* and the *human* as a Western civilization product. Hence, *the human* constitutes a principle by which it is possible to define and arrange human and non-human relations. As Salleh (2010) points out; “the

positioning of humanity (read man) over nature marks Eurocentric knowledge-making from religion to philosophy to science, and the same convention is complicit in the breakdown of Earth life-support systems.”(186) Then, mestizaje in this case constitutes together with the concept of the human an ordering principle arranging relationships among human and non-humans. With this, we can see how mestizaje conditions the possibilities of an indigenous ontology of the human.. This is not unique to the case of Mexico, but in similarly in places like Bolivia, Peru, Brazil, Colombia and Argentina, the use of mestizaje as a way to invisibilize the consequences of settler colonialism serves to diminish and invalidate the presence of Indigenous and Black uprisings. Then, questions of citizenship, human rights and public policies seemed redundant when considering that the state stays within the same paradigm and its structure stay as unequal and Eurocentric as it was before any changes happened.

The change towards autonomy, emancipation and de-patriarchalization in Latin America has been a long but steady process of recognition of the consequences of settler colonialism in the Americas. Moreover, by finding commonalities with other marginalized groups across the Americas, several groups have found alliances to work for alternatives outside the ‘system’. By mirroring the postcolonial experience, one that is lived beyond the limits of the postcolonial nation state, is possible to enunciate the overlooked lives and recognize the other ontologies are possible.

As Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1986) beautifully points out:

A critical difference from myself means that I am not i, am within and without i. I/i can be I or i, you and me both involved. We (with capital W) sometimes include(s), other times exclude(s) me. You and I are close, we intertwine; you may stand on the other side of the hill once in a while, but you may also be me, while remaining

what you are and what i am not. The differences made between entities comprehended as absolute presences--hence the notions of pure origin and true self--are an outgrowth of a dualistic system of thought peculiar to the Occident (the "onto-theology" which characterizes Western metaphysics). They should be distinguished from the differences grasped both between and within entities, each of these being understood as multiple presence. Not One, not two either. "I" is, therefore, not a unified subject, a fixed identity, or that solid mass covered with layers of superficialities one has gradually to peel off before one can see its true face. "I" is, itself, infinite layers. [...] Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak.

Acknowledging the possibility of being intertwined, as Minh-Ha mentions, opens up a new series of possibilities to react to the series of violent acts, and to react on planning an alternative series of possible answers and projects. In the following sections, I discuss the findings of this research, contributions and possibilities for future research.

Multiple Connections: Confluence in Critical Times

Considering the multiple relations that socio-environmental problems present, this research has been informed, and inspired for those who have been working for self-sufficiency and self-managing projects. At times, it is difficult to engage two distinctive and sometimes contradictory perspectives, academic work and activism. As scientists and self-identified activist Adelita San Vicente Tello commented to me: “sometimes they try to diminish our work by calling us activists.” (San Vicente Tello, interview March 27th 2016) What this shows, is the violence against rebellious practices.

For Hernandez Castillo (2015), the connection of processes of displacement and violence are part of the processes of accumulation by dispossession. Under this context, the female bodied is understood as a conquerable territory, a terra nullius, a control over “space-body” of the person being attacked. (Segato 2008) Hence, that Hernandez Castillo

mentions emblematic cases where environmental cases that deal with questions about autonomy, territory and racialization of dispossession, also implied violence on the bodies of female activists.

The criminalization of protest became effective on March 28th of 2016, after the governor of the State of Mexico passed a law that allows the use of police or military force to ‘contain’ protests. This law was passed as a response to the continuous opposition from the people of San Salvador Atenco (discussed on Chapter 4) to the construction of the new international airport in communal lands.

The multiple connections among environmental crisis and conflicts (Tsing 2011) in the Global South, show a constant tendency to dispossess indigenous peoples and the people at the margins of their lands, livelihoods and means. Dispossession, and the material desperation it brings about, often pushes these already marginalized people into exploitative labor relations. Hence, the loss of livelihood and cultures tied to the land, combined with exploitative conditions results in scarcities and traumas that are passed on to the younger generations who are raised in the midst of depressed economic, social, and emotional contexts. This structural marginalization gravely increases the likelihood that generations to come will experience recurrent cycles of violence, further oppression, and therefore more pressures to abandon their traditional ways of living.

Contributions of this Research

I present the contributions of this research by dividing them into major topics from this research. These contributions come from the field research that I conducted in

Mexico City, Oaxaca City, Teotitlán del Valle and Huitzo. Here are the five major topics of the findings:

Decolonial research methodologies. As part of this research I have included a discussion on the relevance and use of decolonial research methodologies of social science research. While conducting field research and writing this dissertation I found that decolonial research methodologies embrace different ways of engaging the same research problem.

When studying the use of indigenous poetry writing in both Spanish and in indigenous languages, a decolonial research methodological perspective allowed me to approach the poetry of the indigenous writers also as a political text. Without demeaning the aesthetic value of the poetry, I found that by recognizing that linguistics are also a matter of autonomy and that the use, preservation and education on indigenous languages also is a matter of the politics of enunciation. As a research methodology, decolonial theory serves to recognize the byproducts of settler colonialism and to question the purpose and benefit of the research itself.

Questioning mestizaje as an ordering principle. In Chapter 2, I discussed and analyze the discourse of mestizaje as part of the nation-building process in Mexico. The idea of mestizaje covers other forms of existence and normalizes the deaths of the ones who want to subvert the modern/colonial/capitalist world system as well as the modern/colonial/gender system.

The presence of non-anthropocentric forms of life is a way to engage also in a critique to mestizaje as an ordering principle. The tragedy and loneliness of being by herself/himself within a mestizo civilization is contained in the idea of the complex

uniqueness of the *human*. For this reason, it is possible to say that *mestizo ontologies* are the normative and organizing principles in Mexican society.

The possibilities of an eco-feminism from below. After conducting field research, I found that decolonial theory has found a fruitful environment within academic circles and activists groups. Although environmental activist groups does not identify themselves as decolonial or recognize settler colonialism, they work around intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality identifying the state and government as the root cause of the problem.

There is much work to do around understanding the dynamics of knowledge generation from 'below'. Regardless of what scholars study, groups outside academia and scientific groups are building a world and options of their own. As I observed in Oaxaca and in Mexico City, environmental justice groups often times do consider eco-feminist perspectives. The urgency of environmental crisis sometimes does not allow to reflect upon academic concepts or discussions. Nevertheless, transnational connections make possible the recognition of commonalities and exchange of ideas.

Indigenous Cosmopolitics as embodiment of resistance. In the case of the interviews I conducted, I found that while my positionality in Mexican society, as a mestiza, urban woman have an effect on how I was perceived, I was welcome in spaces as *la maestra* (the teacher). This recognition was more evident in places where formal or informal education is seen as a privilege. Still, as an outsider in indigenous communities, I was perceived as a holder of some sort of knowledge but in need of teaching. One of the moments of teaching, was through language. The host family in the Zapotec town, tried to teach me basic Zapotec and the relevance of the mount, and its connection to the river that runs through the town.

After one day of staying with the host family, the Gonzales' I asked about Zapotec traditions. I was told that they have some, naming the activities related to the Catholic Church. After I asked about the river and the mount, named 'Picacho' the son of the host family introduced me to the stories around the river, and of the mount, at that moment I compared this experience what I previously read in Marisol de la Cadena's work. Nevertheless, I have read about it and considered myself well aware of indigenous cosmologies, 'living' the relevance of the 'Picacho' materializes at 6:00 am while hiking up to the top. I was invited together with a group of students and colleges. We were told that the 'Picacho' is part of the Zapotec culture and also for Catholic rituals. This was a turning point for me personally, and for my research. First, it is a long path to learn how non-Western political ontologies are embedded into our lives. Second, for an 'outsider' and a person embedded within Western cosmologies, the process of learning and experiencing political ontologies requires a long term commitment with the people and to the forms of life that indigenous cosmopolitics entail.

The embodiment of resistance in indigenous cosmopolitics take different forms: linguistic autonomy (like in the case of indigenous literatures and the use of indigenous languages in community radios), preservation of socio-economic forms of organization based on indigenous traditions, preservation of memory through media, and collaboration with other groups through aesthetic representations such as documentaries and indigenous TV channels.



Image 15. Picacho mount in Teotitlán del Valle, Oaxaca. 2013.

Commonalities through the trans-corporeal. In Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, I discussed how the concept of trans-corporeality serves as a theoretical entry point to discuss the dynamics of mestizaje and postcoloniality in contemporary Mexico. After the field research in Mexico City and Oaxaca, I observed how the focus on the materiality of the body, race, gender and sexuality has different forms to be expressed. For example, in Teotitlán del Valle, Oaxaca most of the people preserve and practice Zapotec traditions. One of these practices, is the preservation of Zapotec language as well as the confluence of political ontologies, both embedded in *mestizo ontologies* and indigenous cosmopolitics.

A limitation of this research is the capacity to engage in a discussion that engages in indigenous cosmopolitics. It is a long term project to learn to listen and emerge oneself to other ways of living rather than the dominant ones.

Future Possibilities

While writing this dissertation, several people lost their lives in Mexico, others were disappeared, and killings of activists, women, migrants, journalists are among the daily ‘happenings’ in Mexico. To make sense of this violence which is not exclusive to

environmental justice, I have engaged in an interdisciplinary research. Yet, this may not serve to explain the causes of the violence, or to restore and heal the wounds opened by settler colonialism.

I have presented different options to explain and bring alternatives to the intersections of race, gender, class in environmental justice cases. As discussed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, it is possible to expand this research into a study of developmentalism and underdevelopment using a feminist decolonial perspective from scholar and activist circles. Moreover, this research can serve as a basis for the study of South-South and North-South conversations around social movements of resistance and the construction of alternative ways of living.

A fundamental component of *mestizaje* in Mexico is the negation of Black presence. In the future, I hope to expand my research on the study of embodied memory, trans-corporeality and Black presence. I have attended events regarding Afro descendant communities in Oaxaca and Mexico City and found a group of activists that are engaging in discussions on autonomy, alternative forms of organization and the recognition of their own existence by the state.

Considering the study of expert knowledge and expertise in South-North and South-South relations, I plan to expand my research into study how scientific claims can work with indigenous knowledges and any non-hegemonic knowledge towards a project for emancipation and autonomy.

Finally, this research went hand in hand with ‘practical activities’ like building a wall for a structure with manure, soil and other materials. Also, learning about eco-techniques implied getting rid of my fear of dirt and bacteria. I recall an article about the

politics of pollution, discard matter and its relation to the politics of the ‘material’. This experience made me realize that no matter how much I have read, commented and theorize about ‘the environment’, nothing compares with engaging on what I speak about: engaging in a decolonial feminist project requires a communitarian perspective too.

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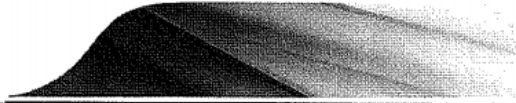
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APPENDIX A

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD PROTOCOL

IRB APPROVAL DOCUMENT



Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To: Doris Provine
WILSN

From: *for* Mark Roosa, Chair *MR*
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 06/17/2013

Committee Action: Exemption Granted

IRB Action Date: 06/17/2013

IRB Protocol #: 1306009303

Study Title: Mestizaje in Mexico; Construction of an Embodied National Experience.

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.