

Decolonizing Discourse: Using Mythopoeticism to Overcome Colonial Linguistics

by Elliot Goodell Ugalde

Post-colonial scholars often confront the dual nature of colonial languages. While these languages provide pivotal communication avenues, especially for diverse marginalized groups like certain Indigenous communities, they simultaneously embody colonial biases, making them challenging mediums for emancipatory discourse. This paper proposes mythopoeticism to leverage the extensive reach of such languages, circumventing their constructive norms. We spotlight this through the prism of the Chiapas Mesoamerican communities' mythopoetics during the 1994 National Army of Zapatista Liberation (EZLN) uprising. This investigation aims to enrich contemporary post-colonial thought, presenting Mesoamerican perspectives on mythopoetics as a dynamic instrument for post-colonial dialogue. The discussion first examines the formative influence of colonial languages on meaning and power dynamics. It then transitions to a detailed textual analysis of the Zapatista mythopoetic narratives. Lastly, it considers the assimilation of Mesoamerican insights into current post-colonial frameworks, endorsing mythopoetics as a rejuvenated mechanism for post-colonial endeavors.

Methodology and Theoretical Context

This paper presents its argument structured around several key points. Firstly (1), it highlights that every language contains normative ontological and epistemological assumptions within its morphosyntax. Secondly (2), it discusses how these assumptions in the Spanish language presuppose the diminishing of unique Mesoamerican knowledge(s) and ways of being as a mode of linguistic colonialism. Thirdly (3), it acknowledges a paradox: Although the colonial nature of Spanish syntax complicates the expression of Mesoamerican knowledge(s), the widespread ability to speak Spanish, albeit to varying degrees, makes it a valuable tool for communication and organization among diverse Mesoamerican groups and the broader Mexican populace. Lastly (4), this paper argues that despite Spanish's limitations in conveying Mesoamerican knowledge(s) and its broad

geographical and linguistic reach, the use of mythopoeticism in Spanish, as demonstrated by the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation), enables them to exploit the language's geographical and linguistic capabilities while overcoming its inherent colonial morphosyntax. This thesis suggests that through mythopoeticism, the EZLN has commandeered Spanish for its purposes, navigating its linguistic challenges. Further, this case study helps establish a decolonial paradigm rooted in mythopoeticism for other decolonial projects to employ.

Even acknowledging the limitations of this framework, it is essential to note that while our analysis of Zapatista mythopoetic narratives in Spanish provides valuable insights, it may need to capture the full richness of Mesoamerican oral traditions, which are central to understanding their cultural narratives. Additionally, our focus on Spanish overlooks the diversity of Indigenous languages within these communities, lamentably adopting a pan-Indigenous approach, which can inadvertently contribute to the homogenization of

Elliot Goodell Ugalde is a MA Student at the McMaster University (Department of Political Science, 280 Main St W, Hamilton, ON, L8S 4L8 [goodelle@mcmaster.ca]).

diverse Indigenous epistemologies (Herle 1994). As such, this paper invites further research to explore how mythopoeticism interacts with these various linguistic contexts, potentially offering a more comprehensive understanding of its role as a decolonial tool.

Further, this study draws upon a critical conceptualization of *epistemology*¹ and *ontology*². In such a case, a 'dominant' or 'hegemonic' ontology is understood as a truth claim accepted without question by the prevailing hegemonic society. Similarly, a 'dominant' or 'hegemonic' epistemology is seen as a privileged mode of knowledge acquisition deemed superior to other, often marginalized, ways of understanding. For instance, the prevailing colonial paradigm amongst *Turtle Island*³ and *Abya Yala*⁴ promotes an epistemology that standardizes and naturalizes colonial forms of knowledge. Consequently, within this epistemological construct, alternate forms of knowledge(s) are not recognized on their intrinsic merits but rather for their variance from the accepted norm (Booth 2005). This results in the foregrounding of settler knowledge(s) characterized by terms such as 'empiricism' and 'objectivity.' In contrast, Indigenous knowledge(s) often get relegated to 'tradition' and 'folklore' (Wilmer 1996).

Further, linguistic subjugation to ontological and epistemological conventions can be bifurcated into two primary domains: first, *semantic*⁵ subjugation, where lexicons themselves produce and reproduce hegemonic frameworks, and second, *syntactic*⁶ subjugation, in which prescriptive grammatical norms sustain hegemonic paradigms. An illustrative case of semantic subjugation can be found in modern vocabularies designed to delineate sexual orientations (Dover et al. 2016). Contextualized, in Antiquity, terminologies analogous to 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual' as understood in today's dominant languages were absent. Such orientations were subsumed under the umbrella of *aphrodisia*, a term denoting forms of love (Dover et al. 2016). However, the advent of terminologies specifying homosexual practices, in tandem with prevailing epistemological constructs, created a milieu conducive to the marginalization of queer communities. This eventually led to their systematic classification, segmentation, and subordination through medical discourses underpinned by linguistics informed by such lexicons' semantics (Foucault 1978).

Indeed, the linguistic classification and ensuing subordination of homosexuality is not merely an offshoot of an incidental grammatical norm that lamentably facilitates the marginalization of queer identities. Instead, it represents a conscious linguistic methodology produced and reproduced to sustain the extant mode of socio-economic production. Echoing Robert Cox's statement that "theory is for someone and some purpose" (Cox 1981:126), it is

¹ Epistemology, in critical theory, investigates how knowledge is constructed and understood, challenging traditional notions of truth and the power dynamics involved in knowledge production.

² Ontology in critical theory examines the nature of reality and social constructs, questioning what exists and how societal structures shape existence.

³ 'Turtle Island' is a name used by some Indigenous peoples in North America, particularly by many Algonquian-speaking and Iroquois-speaking peoples, to refer to the continent.

⁴ 'Abya Yala' is a term used by the Indigenous Guna people of Panama and Colombia to refer to the American continent.

⁵ Semantics, in linguistics, deals with the study of meaning in language. It focuses on how meaning is conveyed through words in different contexts.

⁶ Syntactics, in linguistics, deals with the arrangement of words in a language and how this arrangement affects meaning. It is primarily concerned with the structure of sentences.

imperative to recognize that the ontological foundations of such theories—inclusive of their prescriptive linguistic components—are intricately linked to their overarching objectives and the chosen medium of communication. For instance, the reproduction of labor power and the emergence of new markets intrinsically demand the hegemonic ascendancy of heteronormativity to maximize the reproduction of labor power (Benderson and Preciado 2013). Furthermore, this hegemonic prominence of heterosexuality is partly anchored in the novel linguistic delineation and prescription of the term's 'heterosexuality' and 'homosexuality.'

In juxtaposition to semantic subjugation, syntactic subjugation, as seen through prescriptive grammar's reinforcement of hegemonic paradigms, can be illustrated by the customary use of gendered pronouns in many colonial languages (Driskill 2016). Such grammatical prescriptions inadvertently overshadow Indigenous notions like the gender-fluid concept of 'two-spiritedness' (Driskill 2016). Analogous to the development of terminologies devised to define sexual orientation, the inclination of colonial languages to employ gendered pronouns is not mere happenstance with unintended marginalizing outcomes. Instead, these prescriptive standards are crafted to perpetuate dominant socio-economic ontological and epistemological paradigms. As an example, the gender binarism inherent in the English language, set against a colonial backdrop, has fostered distinct roles and anticipations tied to each gender (Bigler and Leaper 2015). This not only fosters and recirculates conventional heteronormative beliefs but, in doing so, also binds 'femininity' to the domestic sphere, intended to bolster and preserve unpaid domestic labor in line with Silvia Federici's concept of gendered *primitive*

*accumulation*⁷ (Federici 2004). Such an alignment further cements women's association with unpaid domestic duties (Chhachhi 2011), underscoring how colonial linguistic structures both generate and sustain patriarchal and colonial hegemony.

Despite its constraints, the English language's relatively circumscribed set of pronouns presents avenues for ontological linguistic amendments, notably by introducing gender-neutral pronouns (Speyer and Schleef 2019). In this manner, English's syntactic constraints resemble semantic limitations, granting the possibility of substituting select exclusionary terms. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) adopts this strategy, addressing each other using the non-gendered and non-hierarchical term 'camarada' (EZLN Communiqués 4 2000). However, many colonial *romance languages*⁸, which embrace Luso, Franco, and Hispaño linguistic etymologies, not only gender their pronouns but also their nouns and adjectives. This practice solidifies gender binarism at a deeper grammatical level (Gerken and Lindsey 2012). To rectify this, the EZLN has innovatively employed the semiotic substitution of Spanish's gendered suffixes 'O' and 'A' with a gender-neutral symbol: '@' (Enlace Zapatista 2010). Nevertheless, beyond the immediate challenges this presents for spoken discourse, the modification does not fully grapple with intricate

⁷ Silvia Federici reinterprets Marx's concept of primitive accumulation by emphasizing the role of gender and the body in the formation of capitalism. She argues that the transition to capitalism involved not only the commodification of land but also the subjugation and exploitation of women's reproductive and domestic labour to secure the unpaid domestic labour needed for the production/reproduction of labour power.

⁸ Romance languages are a group of languages that evolved from Vulgar Latin, the colloquial form of Latin spoken by soldiers, settlers, and merchants of the Roman Empire. Extant romance languages include Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, and Romanian.

issues in syntax and phonetics that such languages present.

The persistent challenges underscore the need for a holistic strategy geared towards syntactic reconfiguration. The presence of colonial morphosyntax inherent in romance languages and other linguistically prescriptive practices infused with colonial predispositions underscores the necessity of pivoting to alternative languages encompassing a diverse array of ontological and epistemological vistas. However, ironically, these very colonial languages often serve as invaluable assets for post-colonial activists in propagating their ideologies across linguistically varied terrains. Therefore, arguments can be made to retain colonial languages as a tactical instrument to facilitate expansive decolonization. Additionally, the strategic use of a colonial language can effectively convey concepts to its native speakers, aiming to mobilize their support for the emancipatory endeavors of the colonized. This paper posits that the EZLN's adoption of mythopoetics aptly reconciles this inherent dialectical tension.

The EZLN, The Linguistic Paradox and Mythopoetics

Within its historical and geographical context, the EZLN originated as an Indigenous revolutionary group from Chiapas, Mexico. Their emergence directly responded to the constitutional amendments introduced by then-Mexican president Carlos Salina. These amendments aimed to dismantle the longstanding collective, *res extra commercium*⁹ land ownership rights of

Indigenous populations. This strategic move was intended to better position Mexico during the forthcoming negotiations of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Khasnabish 2013). Indeed, this backdrop presents a unique conundrum for the EZLN, caught between the dual pressures of the widespread communicative utility of Spanish as a colonial language and the language's inherent tendencies to perpetuate colonial ontological and epistemological biases. Indeed, while Spanish provided the EZLN with a ubiquitous and geographically suitable communication channel amongst its linguistically diverse constituents and broader Mexican civil society, its syntactic structures posed limitations in representing emancipatory ideologies, especially when compared to Indigenous Mesoamerican linguistic alternatives. As such, the EZLN's solution employed mythopoetics as a communicative conduit, permitting them to leverage the broad reach and theoretical scope of Spanish while circumventing the restrictive morphosyntactic colonial impositions characteristic of prescriptive Spanish academic discourse (Alimant and Demuro 2020).

In stark contrast to traditional prose, the domain of mythopoetics, defined for these purposes as the creative construction or interpretation of myths, analogies, and narratives that carry symbolic or cultural significance, is free from the shackles of syntactic norms influenced by colonial linguistic predispositions. Instead, it wields the flexibility to embrace any syntactic structure that aptly conveys the desired concept or philosophical stance (Frank 2003). By melding this syntactic fluidity intrinsic to mythopoetics with deliberate lexicographic choices in crafting mythopoetic compositions, it becomes feasible to sidestep both semantic and syntactic colonial impositions present within a language. Consequently, mythopoeticism emerges

⁹ 'Res extra commercium' is a Latin term that translates to "things outside commerce." This legal concept refers to things that are not considered as items that can be bought, sold, or traded in the marketplace. Typically, these are items that are considered to be beyond the reach of private ownership and commercial transactions due to their nature.

as a potent tool, permitting the broad geographical reach of a colonial language, all while maintaining an encompassing theoretical scaffold capable of transcending the epistemological and ontological limitations posed by colonial linguistics.

For instance, specific emotive nuances pivotal in conveying Mesoamerican philosophical tenets often need to be revised by the stringent syntactic constraints characteristic of standard Spanish prose. The strategic employment of mythopoetics by the EZLN, evident in their public *communiqués*¹⁰ and further manifested in the subsequent writings of sub-commander Marcos, exemplifies its potency in encapsulating the evocative magnetism of a romanticized revolutionary spirit rooted in Mesoamerican thought. This approach has arguably been more resonant than sole reliance on conventional Spanish prose would have been (Stephens 2019). The agrarian reforms initiated by President Salinas were crafted to transition Indigenous landholdings into commodifiable entities, mirroring the historic *enclosure of the commons*¹¹ during the original transition from feudal to capitalist modes of production (Polanyi 2001). Indeed, just as the feudal structures exploited the widespread illiteracy among serfs to sidestep legal hindrances during the enclosure movement (Polanyi 2001), Spanish prose—given its inadequacy in capturing the intricate nuances of Indigenous land relationships in a manner that

could evoke potent political sentiments—bypassed legal obstacles when advancing its agrarian transformation agenda (Cutler and Gill 2014).

This highlights the broader implication that the conceptualization and evolution of alternative modes of production, particularly those diverging from the prevailing dominant system, often grapple with linguistic barriers designed to entrench the status quo. For instance, conceptualizing a society devoid of gendered distinctions becomes significantly more arduous within the confines of a language that inherently underscores gender demarcations. This task is comparatively eased when engaged through the lens of an inherently *agendered* language.¹²

In examining the EZLN uprising, Cynthia Enloe contends that conventional security studies—a discipline invested in discerning threats to state and global stability—suffer from an excessive state-centric bias (Enloe 1996). She asserts that this overemphasis on states as the primary analytical unit impeded security scholars from predicting the EZLN uprising due to their inattention to the political agency of non-state actors. This oversight rendered them unprepared for the potential internal threats a non-state entity could pose to a sovereign nation-state, thus allowing the EZLN to remain unnoticed and underestimated (Enloe 1996:9).

Enloe's critique implies that security studies, despite being a relatively nascent field, have inherited its state-centric proclivity from earlier branches of the social sciences. These disciplines typically frame states within the Westphalian mould—a framework in international relations (IR) that designates nation-states as the

¹⁰ The EZLN's *communiqués* are public statements or manifestos that they have released over the years. These *communiqués* are known for their poetic, evocative language and often include discussions on a wide range of topics including indigenous rights, global capitalism, Mexican politics, and their own ideology and organizational structure.

¹¹ The 'enclosure of the commons' refers to the historical processes in modern and premodern Europe where communal land was transformed into privately owned property, often leading to the displacement of local communities and significant social and economic changes.

¹² Gender abolitionists view 'agendered' as a state of having no gender identity, aligning with their aim to dismantle traditional gender roles and norms.

paramount political entities on the global stage, operating under the presumption that these states consistently and predictably (Booth 2005). Consequently, this model neglects to recognize the political agency of non-state entities, including Indigenous groups.

Building on Enloe's observations, one can argue that colonial linguistic norms, which historically muted Indigenous socio-political resistances against the Mexican state, fostered an illusion of a cohesive Mexican national identity. This illusion inadvertently reinforced the Westphalian idea of a uniform and static state entity. By side-lining Mesoamerican languages—arguably the most authentic mediums for conveying Mesoamerican political thought—orthodox security studies remained oblivious to this distinct theoretical realm. Consequently, scholars overlooked Mesoamerican political theory as a credible counter-narrative to the prevailing nation-state-centric paradigm, leading to their inability to anticipate the emergence and impact of the EZLN.

The multifaceted linguistic landscape of Chiapas, with its array of Mesoamerican

languages, indeed enriches the conveyance of Mesoamerican theories more adeptly than Spanish could. However, the lack of substantial linguistic commonalities among these languages poses a challenge (Magallanes-Blanco 2011). The variance in dialects inadvertently catalyzed a scenario that seemed to thwart Indigenous solidarity by establishing distinct geo-linguistic demarcations. Nevertheless, the collective colonial subjugation experienced by these Mesoamerican communities forged an unintentional linguistic unity through the enforced knowledge of Spanish despite the disparities in proficiency across different groups. Indeed, the colonial endeavor to impose Spanish, initially aimed at snuffing Amerindian cultures, equipped these subjugated entities with a shared communicative medium, thereby inadvertently fuelling the possibility for a unified political resistance. Consequently, for an efficacious revolutionary mobilization to take place, employing the Spanish's extensive reach to communicate Indigenous theory emerged as the most plausible strategy and synthesis to such dialectic contraction (Fig 1.).

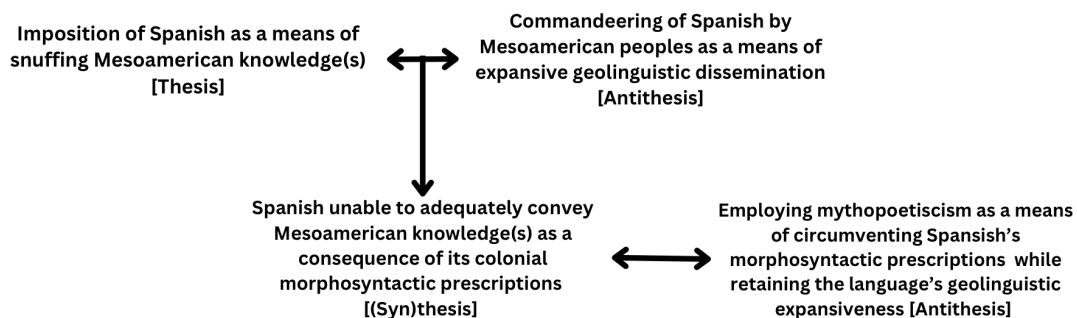


Figure 1. Dialectically, it displays how the mythopoetics employed by the EZLN resolved the contradiction between commanding the Spanish's geo-communicative power and circumventing the embedded colonial prescriptions (Figure is created by Elliot Goodell Ugalde).

Textual Analysis of Zapatista Mythopoeticism

Mexico's confrontation with its own identity, characterized by an ambivalent engagement with Mesoamerican traditions even as it assimilated their symbolism, revealed a potential point of weakness for the state apparatus. Indeed, while national imagery, as evoked by figures like Diego Rivera and prominent personas such as Benito Juárez, is drenched in the aesthetic of a mestizo narrative, the permeation of Mesoamerican theory within Mexican politics is scant, according to Enloe (1996). Given this, the EZLN and the Mexican state posed competing claims to *Emiliano Zapata's*¹³ foundational revolutionary fervor during the Mexican Revolution (Stephen 1997). President Salinas, reflecting his reverence for Zapata, christened his son 'Emiliano' and frequently orated before portraits of the iconic revolutionary (Stephens 2019). Further, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) under Salinas, having dominated the political landscape for approximately seven decades (Khan and Lara-Garcia 2021), promulgated its agenda as an extension of Zapata's revolutionary ideals. Still, contrasting with the PRI's stance, the EZLN's engagement with Zapata's legacy was non-superficial, echoing Indigenous philosophies of spatiotemporal continuity. However, such philosophy's nuanced articulation faced translational challenges in Spanish, primarily due to its rootedness in lexicons shaped by colonial imperatives.

To underscore their affiliation with Zapata's enduring principles to a wider Mexican audience, the EZLN, adhering to Nahuatl linguistic customs, eschewed binary expressions, favoring

metaphors and allegorical narratives (Stephens 2019). This methodological choice, undertaken within a language replete with gendered categories, underscores mythopoeticism's utility. Indeed, an illustrative moment emerges in an interaction with an EZLN guerrilla, where, when probed about their connection to Zapata's legacy, they remarked that such a legacy is akin to "the nourishment of the Indigenous, the lifeblood of the populace and the earth" (Stephens 2019:10). This statement might appear abstract at a cursory glance, rendered within Spanish's structural norms. Yet, it vividly conveys an Indigenous worldview, positioning Zapata's ethos as symbiotically linked to the land sustaining the Indigenous communities of Chiapas. Interpreting this sentiment further, Zapata's principles, if anchored to the land, emerge both as a beacon for the EZLN's sustainable vision and a superficial tool of appropriation for the PRI. This dichotomy emerges from divergent land valuation paradigms: while Salinas' agrarian reforms envisage land as a commodifiable entity (Cutler and Gill, 2014), the guerrilla's juxtaposition of 'people' and 'land' underscores the intrinsic bond between ecological well-being and human flourishing, a perspective often overshadowed in colonial discourses (Magdoff and Foster 2010). Indeed, the EZLN endeavoured to transcend the semantic limitations inherent in the linguistic frameworks established by Spanish colonial hegemonies. They strategically adopted and adapted Nahuatl terminologies, encapsulating intricate ideas that eluded straightforward translation. A salient example is the Nahuatl term "Votán." While in Maya traditions, it corresponds to a deity representing duality and creation (Greenwood 2006), within the EZLN's paradigm, it became intertwined with the ethos of Zapata, evolving into the composite term "Votán-Zapata" (Greenwood 2006). This conceptual fusion symbolically resurrected Zapata's legacy,

¹³ Emiliano Zapata was a leading figure in the Mexican Revolution of 1910, known for his role as a key leader of the peasant revolt in the state of Morelos and as the main proponent of the agrarian reform movement in Mexico.

embedding it within a contemporary Indigenous framework, a nuanced interpretation previously inaccessible to monolingual Spanish speakers due to Spanish colonial linguistic constraints.

To facilitate comprehension of the profound ontological implications of 'Votán-Zapata' among Spanish-speaking audiences, the EZLN, in its seminal expositions, interlaced this term with poetic embellishments. Sub-commander Marcos' lyrical rendition offers an illustrative encapsulation: "Votán-Zapata, light that came from afar and was born here on our land... the man without a face that watches over us" (Stephens 2019:30). Within this narrative, the "light coming from afar" symbolizes the concept's temporal depth, while the "man without a face" signifies its universality, amorphousness, and spatiotemporal ubiquity. Marcos' frequent allusions to the ancient roots of Votán as a Maya deity (Greenwood 2006) further enriched the term's multi-layered significance. Over time, as the readership of Marcos' writings became increasingly conversant with the term's intricate connotations, its application within EZLN discourses matured, gradually detaching from its mythopoetic scaffolding (Greenwood 2006). In this intricate linguistic manoeuvre, the EZLN astutely harnessed poeticism to bridge the conceptual chasm between restrictive Spanish morphosyntactic norms and the nuanced expressiveness of Nahuatl lexicons, illuminating Indigenous theoretical perspectives.

In another text, Marcos engages with a quintessential, pan-Amerindian parable, articulating the premise that for 'someone' to defeat a lion, a force of equivalent potency is required, culminating in the metaphorical act of making the lion confront its reflection in a mirror (Marcos 1996). Perhaps this allegory might have provided a blueprint for the EZLN's efforts to reclaim and reassert the genuine ideological

legacy of Zapata, compelling the Mexican state to introspect on its superficial adoption of the same. However, what truly distinguishes this narrative is its intentional ambiguity concerning the temporality of its characters. By concurrently representing the aforementioned 'someone' as both 'old' and 'young,' the narrative flouts the conventional Spanish linguistic binaries of "viejo" and "joven." Such an ambiguous portrayal encapsulates the Mesoamerican philosophy of time's fluidity, echoing the EZLN's nuanced conceptualization of Votán-Zapata (Le Guen and Balam 2012). Moreover, the narrative's construction remains deliberately nebulous about whether it represents an individual's introspective musings or is a dynamic exchange among multiple entities. As such, the interchanging use of 'joven' and 'viejo' could be perceived as signifying interactions amongst distinct individuals (Higgins 2000), as one individual devoid of temporality or an amalgamation of both.

Further, the text's narrator employs singular and plural pronouns to refer to the tale's central character(s) (Marcos 1996). This strategic choice transcends the traditional Spanish syntactic distinctions between singular (ella, el) and plural (ellas, ellos) pronouns. Instead, it resonates with the Mesoamerican concept of numerical fluidity and spatial transcendence, presenting a stark counter-narrative to the hegemonic linguistic structures of Spanish (Swazo 2013). Through these linguistic stratagems, Marcos, and by extension the EZLN, subtly yet effectively challenges and critiques the linguistic norms underpinned by colonial and hegemonic foundations.

In his research, Gregory Stephens posits that the chronological representation and the number of protagonists in Mesoamerican myths are designed to evolve with each subsequent

narration. He underscores that the articulation of Mesoamerican legends encompasses a distinct method of storytelling, which he describes as "often with false starts, repetition, and a circular pattern coming back to the key point" (Stephens 2019:51). Concerning the narrative of the lion and the mirror, the use of mythopoetic techniques has enabled the superposition of Mesoamerican tenets of spatiotemporal transcendence onto the Spanish vernacular. This act, in turn, emancipates Mesoamerican epistemological frameworks from the linguistic constraints established by colonial prescriptivism.

Indeed, from a historical-materialist perspective, the categorization of intangible constructs, such as time, is fundamentally rooted in a society's prevailing material conditions (Marx 1996). For example, colonial ontologies often linearly conceptualize time, a viewpoint primarily based on material circumstances oriented towards a unidirectional economic progression, leading to a hegemonic historical teleology and culminating in a metabolic rift (Marx 1996). In stark contrast, Mesoamerican cultures interpret time cyclically, informed by periodic environmental events (Gloade 2021) and devoid of a predetermined teleological path toward an ultimate point of expansion (Higgins 2000). This ontological grasp of fluid temporality is mirrored in the linguistic structures and semantics of the Nahuatl languages.

Building on this idea, Marcos reflects on his encounter with Mesoamerican mythopoetic narratives, expressing ambiguity regarding "the temporal context in which the Mesoamerican communities were communicating... suggesting that their tales might span recent events from the preceding week... to foundational myths from the inception of the world" (Higgins 2000:364). Indeed, a historical-materialist examination suggests that much like our understanding of teleological time, which mirrors our mode of

production centered on linear progression and economic development, Mesoamerican modes of production resonate with a cyclical perception of time. This perception is intricately linked with the rhythm of recurring agricultural cycles (Le Guen and Balam 2012). Consequently, grasping the Mesoamerican temporal perspective is crucial for a nuanced understanding of Indigenous collective land ownership, moving beyond the colonial delineation of commodified land, labor, and capital. This notion underscores the interconnectedness of material conditions and ideological frameworks. Drawing an analogy with a previously discussed notion, endeavoring to conceptualize an atemporal perspective using a temporally bound language is akin to the complexities of envisioning a post-gender society within the parameters of a gendered linguistic system.

Contemporary Post-Colonial Applications of Mythopoetics

Mesoamerican cosmologies exhibit several congruences with contemporary post-colonial critical theory. Mesoamerican perspectives underscore the inclusion or 'peripheral' (Enloe 1996) epistemologies, challenge monolithic narratives, and advocate for a critical stance towards entrenched normative ontological and epistemological assumptions (Alimant and Demuro 2020). This focus on the inclusion of multiple ontologies and epistemologies, or pluriversality—captured by the phrase "a world in which many worlds fit" (Marcos 1996: 5)—parallels post-colonial theory's rejection of the hegemonic imposition of a single colonial worldview. Mesoamerican and post-colonial epistemologies resist 'epistemicide'—the erasure and suppression of alternative or marginalized knowledge systems that challenge the dominant Western discourse. Such a discourse often

perpetuates and enforces exploitative material conditions and solidifies socio-political dominance. When Mesoamerican thought contemplates temporal transcendence, it does not merely allude to an adherence to a singular ontological meta-narrative of 'transcendence.' Instead, it posits that time can be understood through myriad unique perspectives (Alimant and Demuro 2020). This is a counter-narrative to colonial models of temporal teleology, where time is inherently bound to a universal, linear progression. Similarly, Mesoamerican interpretations of spatial transcendence suggest that conceptions of space, too, are shaped by an array of distinct cosmologies.

While there are evident parallels between Mesoamerican knowledge systems and post-colonial theory, the methods each employs to convey its ideas diverge significantly. Originating in the postmodernist milieu, post-colonialism predominantly communicates its tenets through conventional academic prose, articulated in languages deeply influenced by Eurocentric epistemologies of knowledge(s) construction (Grosfoguel 2008). As such, postmodern critiques often delve into the colonial manipulation of linguistic semantics and syntax to sustain ontological and epistemological supremacy. Intriguingly, this critique often unfolds within the confines of the linguistic structures that post-colonialism seeks to deconstruct. These dynamics position post-colonialism in a seemingly contradictory space, where it critiques colonial linguistic hegemony while simultaneously being encapsulated within its boundaries. Again, this is reminiscent of the quandary faced by post-gender scholars attempting to advocate for gender abolition using a gendered linguistic medium. Such methodologies can appear inherently contradictory and overly complex.

Taking a cue from the EZLN, post-colonialism could benefit from integrating mythopoeticism as a strategic medium to circumnavigate the restrictive norms of colonial languages. Advocating for the organic evolution of language that fosters ontological pluriversality is imperative. Mirroring the EZLN's innovative use of mythopoetics in modifying the Spanish language to incorporate the notion of 'Votán-Zapata,' there is a compelling case for employing mythopoetic devices to facilitate the emancipation of other languages' colonial morphosyntactic bondage.

The EZLN's 1995 "History of the Mirrors" exemplifies leveraging mythopoetics to frame pluriversality (Marcos 1995). This narrative unfurls a succession of mirrors, each nestled within its predecessor. Each mirror hosts its unique storyteller, offering interpretations of political events through varied ontological prisms. Evocative of nested matryoshka dolls, these mirrors present a layered meta-analysis, where each mirror critically reflects upon its antecedent. While one mirror delves into a Mesoamerican cosmology, another adopts the viewpoint of Mexican civil society. Subsequent mirrors channel the partisan perspectives of conflicting Mexican political factions, namely the PRI and PAN.

Consistent with the signature style of EZLN mythopoetic constructs, the narrative eschews conventional temporal linearity and lacks a spatiotemporal anchor. Challenging the singularity of a universal ontological metanarrative, certain mirrors resonate with Western philosophical frames, whereas others venture into realms where lakes and mountains take anthropomorphic forms (Alimant and Demuro 2020). Staying true to the essence of the matryoshka doll metaphor, the concluding mirror—visualized as the overarching

meta-perspective encapsulating all others—reveals Durito, a guerrilla ensconced amidst the Chiapan wilderness. Notably, the narrative's poetic license ensures that Durito, who symbolizes the quintessence of the EZLN, remains unfettered by specifics of gender, age, or even definitive characterization (Alimant and Demuro 2020). The tale reaches its zenith as Durito pens down the EZLN's war manifesto.

The mythos elucidates that the EZLN's knowledge(s) is an intricate tapestry woven from many ontologies. Crucially, these ontological foundations do not operate autonomously or offer isolated insights into the EZLN's understanding of pluriversality. Rather, the symbiotic melding and dynamic interplay of these varied ontological perspectives define the EZLN's worldview. The dialogue between the myriad ontologies becomes apparent through the reflective meta-analyses undertaken by successive mirror narrators. Engaging in what appears to be a dialectical fashion, many of the narratives within this mythos contravene or contradict their preceding counterparts. The dialectical progression reaches its crescendo with Durito's war proclamation, representing the ultimate synthesis.

However, echoing the previously discussed Mesoamerican theoretical frameworks, there is an inherent rejection of a linear teleological endpoint. This introduces the possibility of a cyclical or recursive dimension to these ontological narratives, mirroring the Mesoamerican conception of time as both mutable and recurrent. One might speculate that if a subsequent mirror following Durito's were to materialize, it could reverberate an ontological perspective encapsulated in an earlier mirror. Such an interpretation accentuates the cyclical perpetuity and interwoven fabric of perspectives, emphasizing the mosaic of ontologies that underpin the EZLN's ideology and actions.

Indeed, through the masterful crafting of this narrative, the EZLN deftly challenges and reimagines the traditional confines of Spanish literary expression, upending its conventional structure and anticipated trajectories. Consequently, readers find themselves submerged in a profound mythopoetic odyssey that dives deep into the Amerindian ethos of pluriversality—an intimate engagement with the profound notion of "a world in which many worlds fit" (Marcos 1996:5). This narrative strategy not only elucidates but also viscerally embodies the multifaceted essence encapsulated by this axiom.

In summation, post-colonial theory is ensnared in a dialectical conundrum deeply rooted in the foundational structures of colonial languages. While these languages offer invaluable bridges across diverse terrains, facilitating political cohesion, they reinforce and perpetuate colonial ontologies through their intrinsic morphosyntactic structures. This paper posits the EZLN's adept employment of mythopoeticism as a viable pathway to navigate and resolve this paradox. By harnessing the power of mythopoetics, one can sustain the expansive reach of a colonial language while artfully sidestepping its ontological constraints.

Given the striking congruences between Mesoamerican worldviews and modern post-colonial theoretical frameworks, it stands to reason that post-colonialism would benefit immensely from assimilating the EZLN's mythopoetic methodologies. Such integration would arm post-colonial praxis with a potent rhetorical arsenal, enabling it to articulate intricate concepts with clarity and finesse, all while challenging and subverting the inherent restrictions of colonial linguistic frameworks. The amalgamation of these strategies holds significant potential in rejuvenating post-colonial discourse, bolstering the representation and resonance of

diverse narratives, and furthering the global dialogue on decolonization and emancipation. Nonetheless, this paper calls for further scholarly inquiry into how post-colonialism, in adopting mythopoeticism, can circumvent the prescribed morphosyntactic colonial norms imposed on peoples who practice distinct ontologies and epistemologies.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to express his sincere gratitude to Dr. James Ingram at McMaster University and Dr. Marlea Clarke at the University of Victoria for their academic guidance and mentorship which have been invaluable in shaping his academic vocation.

References Cited

- Alcoff, Linda Martín. 2013. Foucault's normative epistemology. In *A companion to Foucault*. C. Falzon, T. O'Leary and J. Sawicki, eds. Pp. 207–225. Chichester: Wiley
- Alimant, Israel and Demuro, Eugenia. 2020. Reading the world anew: Zapatista stories, the denial of singularity, and the creation of a plural world. *Journal of Post-colonial Writing* 56(6): 830–844.
- Booth, Ken, ed. 2005. *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers,
- Bigler, Rebecca S. and Leaper, Campbell. 2015. Gendered language: Psychological principles, evolving practices, and inclusive policies. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 2(1): 187–194.
- Chhachhi, Amrita. 2011. Nancy Fraser. *Development and Change* 42(1): 297–314.
- Cox, Robert W. 1981. Social forces, states, and world orders: Beyond international relations theory. *Millennium* 10(2): 126–155.
- Cutler, Claire and Gill, Stephen. 2014. *New constitutionalism and world order*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Enlace Zapatista. 2010. Declaration por la liberated de los presos de atenco campana primero nuestrxs presxs. <https://enlacezapatista.ezln.org.mx/2010/07/01/declaracion-por-la-libertad-de-los-presos-de-atenco-campana-primero-nuestrxs-presxs/>
- Dover, Kenneth. 2016. *Greek homosexuality*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Driskill, Qwo-Li. 2016. *Assegai stories: Cherokee queer and two-spirit memory*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Enloe, Cynthia. 1996. Margins, silences, and bottom rungs: how to overcome the underestimation of power in the study of international relations. In *International theory: Positivism and beyond*. S. Smith, K. Booth, M. Zalewski and I. Maurice, eds. Pp.186–202. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- EZLN. 2000. *EZNL Communiqués 4: The war against forgetting – August 28, 1998, to November 4, 1998*. AGIT Press.
- Federici, Silvia. 2004. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the body and primitive accumulation*. New York: Autonomedia.
- Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The history of sexuality*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Frank, Richard. 2003. Fracastoro: poetry vs prose. *International Journal of The Classic Tradition* 9(4): 524–534.
- Greenwood, Elizabeth. 2006. Constructing the Votán-Zapata narrative. *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 18(1): 45–53.
- Grosfoguel, Ramon. 2008. Transmodernity, border thinking, and global coloniality. *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais* 80: 1–24.
- Gloade, Gerald. 2021. How the Mi'kmaq know. *Kayak* Dec: 10–13.
- Gutiérrez, Gerardo. 2015. Identity erasure and demographic impacts of the Spanish caste system on the Indigenous populations of Mexico. In *Beyond germs, native depopulation in North America*. C. Cameron, P. Kelton, and A. Sewlund, eds. Pp. 120–142 Tuscon: The University of Arizona Press.
- Herle, Anita. 1994. Dancing community: Powwow and Pan-Indianism in North America. *Cambridge Anthropology* 17(2): 57–83.
- Higgins, Nicholas. 2000. The Zapatista uprising and the poetics of cultural resistance. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 25(3): 359–374.
- Khan, Mohammad Azeem and Lara-Garcia, Andrea 2021. A “Perfect Dictatorship”: The PRI, Corruption, and Autocracy in Mexico. *Arizona Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 7: 26–45.
- Khasnabish, Alex. 2013. *Zapatistas: Rebellion from the grassroots to the global*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Le Guen, Olivier and Balam, Lorena. 2012. No metaphorical timeline in gesture and cognition among Yucatec Mayas. *Frontiers in Psychology* 3: 271.
- Lindsey, Brittany and Gerken, Louann. 2012. The role of morphophonological regularity in young Spanish-speaking children's production of gendered noun phrases. *Journal of Child Language* 39(4): 753–776.
- Lund, Joshua. 2012. *The mestizo state: Reading race in modern Mexico*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Magallanes-Blanco, Claudia. 2011. Zapatista Media (México). In *Encyclopedia of Social Movement Media*. J. Downing, ed. Pp. 563–565.
- Magdoff, Fred and Foster, John. 2010. What every environmentalist needs to know about capitalism. *Monthly Review* 61(10).
- Marcos, Subcomandante Insurgente. 1995. La historia de los espejos. *Palabra EZLN*. https://palabra.ezln.org.mx/comunicados/1995/1995_06_09.html
- . 1996. Fourth declaration of the Lacandon jungle. *Schoolforchiapas*. <https://schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Fourth-Declaration-of-the-Lacandona-Jungle.pdf>
- . 1996. Los otros cuentos. *Schoolforchiapas*. <https://www.schoolsforchiapas.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/The-Other-Stories.pdf>
- Polanyi, Karl. 2001. *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time*. New York: Beacon.
- Marx, Karl. 1996. *Das Kapital*. Washington: Regnery Publishing.
- Preciado, Beatriz. 2013. *Testo junkie: Sex, drugs, and biopolitics in the pharmaco-pornographic era*. B. Benderson, trans. New York: The Feminist Press
- Speyer, Lydia and Schlee, Erik. 2019. Processing 'gender-neutral' pronouns: A self-paced reading study of learners of English. *Applied Linguistics* 40(5): 793–815.
- Smith, Steve. 2005. The contested concept of security. In *Critical security studies and world politics*. K. Booth, ed. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Stephens, Gregory. 2019. *Poetics of Indigenismo in Zapatista discourse: The Mexican revolution revisioned through Mayan eyes*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Stephen, Lynn. 1997. Pro-Zapatista and pro-Pri: Resolving the contradictions of Zapatismo in rural Oaxaca. *Latin American Research Review* 32(2): 41–70.
- Swazo, Roberto. 2013. *The bilingual counsellor's guide to Spanish: Basic vocabulary and interventions for the non-Spanish speaker*. New York: Routledge.
- Wilmer, Franke. 1996. Narratives of resistance: Postmodernism and indigenous world views. *Race, Gender, and Class* 3(2): 35–58.