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*El rescoldo del tlicuil:*

**Visceral Resistance to Coloniality and Generational  
Tension Among Contemporary Nahua Authors**

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This essay explores the apparent generational differences between Natalio Hernández's *Semanca Huitzilin / Colibrí de la armonía / Hummingbird of Harmony* (2005) and Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño's *Cantos en el cañaveral / Cuicatl pan tlalliouatlmej* (2004). Hernández emphasizes in his poetry, though by no means categorically, the value of Nahua cultural identity and history, whereas in Zapoteco's text Nahua identity is secondary, though still vitally important, to denouncing social and economic inequality in the sugarcane fields of Morelos. I argue that Zapoteco and Hernández, while differing significantly in their style and focus, complement one another in employing metaphors closely tied to the Náhuatl language of the heart, flowers, and Mesoamerican deities in order to challenge and rewrite the official history and neoliberal "progressive" rhetoric of Mexican national discourse.

Few scholars have analyzed Hernández's poetry, and only one study goes into significant detail.<sup>1</sup> To my knowledge, none have published anything on Zapoteco's texts. Not many inside or outside of academia have read either Hernández or Zapoteco and even fewer can read the versions in Náhuatl. CONACULTA published 2,000 copies of *Colibrí de la armonía* and funded the publication for 1,000 copies of *Cantos en el cañaveral*. The inadequate attention these texts have received reflects a problem endemic to the examination of indigenous writing. They are relegated to what Arturo Arias terms the "marginality of marginality" and simply panned for content (53). In contrast with such reductionism, this study analyzes these authors' innovative literary techniques and the creative ways in which they deal with their social contexts. Hernández and Zapoteco are representative of the migrants whom Sanjinés describes as the "marrow" of contemporary indigenous movements. These migrants find themselves mediating between the founding experiences in their communities and their jolting encounter with urban settings, and in this milieu they articulate alternative knowledges that question the absolute time and space constructed by modernity. All published Nahua authors have had similar experiences in having to leave their home communities, and this study forms part of a larger project to analyze how these writers dialogue with national discourse and its conjoining discourse of modernity. While there is a significant heterogeneity in the style and thematic of these authors' works, all of them challenge discriminatory practices that construct Nahuas as exotic Others trapped within a pre-historic past.

For this study, I use Javier Sanjinés's theoretical analysis of *viscerality* and the *embers of the past*. *Viscerality* is a "bodily metaphor" that looks at reality with "both eyes," an optic in which class oppression is coupled with ethnic and colonial oppression (*Mestizaje*, 5, 11). This depth perceiving perspective resists the monocular "eye of reason" of modernity

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<sup>1</sup> In her dissertation *Poesía indígena contemporánea de México y Chile* (2008), Sonia Montes Romanillos analyzes how different indigenous authors from the last three decades challenge the idea of a homogenous and monolingual "Spanish American nationality" (1). This study is broad in its scope, and, aside from Hernández, she also researches a Zapotec author, a Mazatec author, and two Chilean Mapuche poets. While valuable in its attention to these less studied writers, this text lacks close readings of the texts in their indigenous languages.

that constructs indigenous subjects as victims of social retardation and irrational traditions. *Embers of the past* relates to *viscerality* in that they are knowledges of the indigenous subject's founding experience that collide with modernity. This alternative imaginary obliges the subaltern subject to see reality "desde un prisma diferente, en conflicto con la mirada prospectiva, rectilínea de la modernidad" (*Rescoldos*, 1). The concepts of *viscerality* and *embers of the past* aid me in identifying how Hernández and Zapoteco employ visceral metaphors to rearticulate elements of the state narrative and imagine a heterogeneous nation-state in which indigenous subjects actively construct historical remembrance and defend their social rights.

*Songs of Injustice or Harmony: Differing Strategies toward Nahua Empowerment*

Zapoteco's *Cantos en el cañaveral* represents a scathing critique of a paternalistic Mexican State that patronizes indigenous subjects<sup>2</sup> with vague promises of "progress" and inclusion. The poetic voice in the poem "Tlaltizapan" outwardly praises the municipality of Tlaltizapán, Morelos for the "historia que tienes en tus templos / de tiempos coloniales, / marca endeble de tu / privilegiada posición / pues escuela espiritual tuviste / así dice tu colonial convento, / o en tu casa revolucionaria / que aún conservas / con gran recelo" (89). A seemingly patriotic tone in this poem with reference to an indelibly "privileged position" conceals a satire of the coloniality<sup>3</sup> that Javier Sanjinés terms the "reverse yet hidden face of modernity" (*Mestizaje Upside-Down*, 4). Coloniality, as Sanjinés

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<sup>2</sup> I use "indigenous subjects" not to suggest homogeneity, but rather as a term that situates Nahuas within state and global politics, and *subject* stresses that they are not passive recipients of imposed policies. Within their communities, Nahuas rarely refer to themselves as indigenous, but rather as *Nahuas* or else members of their local communities. They use *indígena* within geopolitical contexts in defending their social and economic rights.

<sup>3</sup> According to Aníbal Quijano, coloniality is the "codification of 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 others" (1). This codification has not only persisted since the colonial period, but has also constituted an integral element of the discourse of modernity, positioning certain peoples as inferior according to a schematic in which "non-European" phenotypes, languages, and cultural practices are conflated and deemed outside and behind the positivistic advancement toward economic and social perfection.

highlights, does not precede the nation-building process and modernity,<sup>4</sup> but rather constitutes an undergirding element of their rhetoric. Behind the promises of progress and development of the state persists a colonial system of discrimination that invalidates indigenous knowledges and equates them with backwardness. The colonial convent and temples in “Tlaltizapan” spatially represent this coloniality and its’ corresponding “spiritual” education that have persisted through the Mexican Revolution to the present.

Nonetheless, this message lies hidden under hyperbolic praise of the surrounding landscape and altruism of Morelos. Zapoteco himself explains that he wrote in an affected style to obtain funding from government institutions for publication.<sup>5</sup> He mixes poems that on the surface are nationalistic praise and focus on “mere” cultural practices while others explicitly condemn social injustices. In doing so, he is able to be published and at the same time avoid, according to his self-described positioning, being coopted by the state as an *indio permitido*<sup>6</sup> like first-generation

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<sup>4</sup> By “modernity” and “discourse of modernity” I mean a discourse that makes universal claims of superior advancement in economy, government, social practices, science, technology etc. As Walter Mignolo explains in *Local Histories, Global Designs*, the concept of modernity is inseparable from its “dark side” of coloniality, in which subaltern knowledges are invalidated against Eurocentric intellectual traditions (22). In discourse “modernity” is fallaciously constructed and defined as what it supposedly is not (not indigenous, not African, not impoverished immigrants etc.), and indigenous subjects are often treated as the poster children for this Other outside of “modernity.”

<sup>5</sup> CONACULTA, Programa de Apoyo a las Culturas Municipales y Comunitarias (PACMyC), and Instituto de Cultura de Morelos funded the publication. According to government records, Zapoteco received \$20,000 pesos for the project “Cuicatl tlen tlalliouatlmej (Cuentos en el cañaveral)” (DGCP 28). He commented on this affected style and getting published in a personal interview in Tlaltizapán on 20 June 2010. During this interview he also read the poem “Tlatizapan” with a very satirical tone to emphasize that it is in fact a critique of the municipal and national government.

<sup>6</sup> Coined by Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, *indio permitido* refers to, in the words of Charles Hale, the “identity category that results when neoliberal regimes actively recognize and open space for collective indigenous, even agency” (Hale, “Cultural Agency,” 284). The use of the word *indio*, to which those in the dominant culture who work with these indigenous subjects might object (preferring the less controversial term *indígena*), highlights that “this newfound respect may be only skin deep” (284). Though Zapoteco does not specifically use the term *indio permitido*, he describes the term as referring to indigenous subjects who allow themselves to be coopted and purchased by the state to serve as the “cosmetic makeup” for government claims to interculturality and inclusion (Personal Interview, 20 June 2010).

Nahua authors.<sup>7</sup> This is a common accusation made by the newer generation of Nahua writers,<sup>8</sup> who, to borrow a dichotomy used among Maya writers in Guatemala, accuse the older generation of being too *culturales* while positioning themselves as *populares*.<sup>9</sup> For this younger generation, the markers of Nahua identity must be coupled with protests against injustices.

Natalio Hernández himself contends that older writers are pigeonholed. In his collection of poems, *Colibrí de la armonía* (2005), he does not focus explicitly on social protest and the anguish imposed by coloniality, but this does not mean that his poetry lacks social commitment. Interestingly, his earlier books of poetry, in particular *Xochikoskatl* (1985), resemble Zapoteco's *Cantos en el cañaverl* in both structure and theme. Nevertheless, especially in the last decade, there has been a significant shift in Hernández's poetic style in which he focuses on achieving an interculturality and harmony among different cultures. He explains that he ceased to write openly about suffering because it had tended to reinforce the stereotypical victimization of indigenous peoples in governmental and academic discourse.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Those associated with this first-generation: Natalio Hernández, Librado Silva, Juan Hernández, Crispín Amador Ramírez, and Idefonso Maya. They all worked as bilingual teachers for the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) from the sixties through the eighties. Resisting SEP assimilationist policies that they themselves were requested to implement, they formed civil organizations and Nahua writing workshops. Their first writings are more explicit in denouncing economic and social discrimination than their more recent texts in the last two decades.

<sup>8</sup> Those associated with the second generation, born in the late seventies and eighties, to which I refer: Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño, Mardonio Carballo, and Martín Barrios. In addition to their writings, these authors stress the importance of political and social activism and to this end have created documentaries and participated in public protests. All of them have had their lives threatened or even suffered assassination attempts due to their protests against landowners and maquiladoras. This is a danger first-generation writers do not experience.

<sup>9</sup> Emilio del Valle Escalante, following Santiago Bastos and Manuela Camus, defines the *culturales* group as those "intellectuals (the majority of whom are professionals)...that prioritize an ethnic adscription and the vindication of indigenous cultural specificities" (4). They strongly advocate the use of indigenous dress, language, philosophy, and religious practices. In turn the *populares*, instead of focusing on cultural demands, "denounce the effects of the violence—past and present—against rural and urban communities" (5). They advocate the use of violent resistance and rebellion if necessary.

<sup>10</sup> Stated in personal interview, 10 June 2010. Hernández is hesitant to do readings of some of his earlier poems such as "Caminemos solos." Now he stresses

*Colibrí* represents what Sanjinés calls a “much more harmonious” project for an “intercultural dialogue” in which nation-state construction is not seen from above or below, but rather “abar[ca] el tiempo lineal de la modernidad y el otro tiempo [subalterno] ‘diferente en sus densidades humanas, sus momentos de condensación y sus claves de significado’” (*Rescoldos*, 33-34). This project displaces modernity’s bywords of “development” and “progress” that have marginalized indigenous knowledges as anachronic and primitive, and imagines an intercultural space in which indigenous subjects participate in the “production, distribution, and structuring of knowledge” (42).

*‘Angustia, eres tú’: Cantos in Coloniality*

*Cantos en el cañaveral* closes with the poem “Angustia.” Though this is the final poem, it helps significantly in framing *Cantos* in its entirety. The poetic voice begins *en media res* describing a “black bulge” on the edge of a sea cliff surrounded by terrible weather and waves that “yell fire and pain” (108). A man “in search of anguish” arrives running and shouts to the black figure, “Angustia, ¿Eres tu? [sic]” (109). This man draws closer to the “black shadow” and frenziedly asks the same question, to which the figure only turns and glances back. This pleading man has a white face, “as white as snow,” and blue eyes that appear “dismal” in the surrounding darkness (109-10). He repeats the question yet a third time and then asks what the black figure is going to do. Suddenly this figure leaps into the sea and disappears under the waves. The white man yells out, “No, no, no, angustia no, / ¿Por qué? ¿Por qué lo hiciste?” (110). The sky then begins to “cry” down rain, which turns to ice and falls upon the whole earth, tearing apart upon “the rock” the body of the man who “no sentía / el cuerpo ya no estaba vivo / ya no vivía” (111). *Cantos* concludes with this sacrificial death.

This violent narrative in “Angustia” masterfully depicts the effects of coloniality upon indigenous subjects. The black figure represents indigenous migrants who have had to work in the sugarcane fields, where the ash from burnt cane blackens their bodies. To a larger extent, though,

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the importance of interculturality and the need of walking together (“caminemos juntos”).

this “bulge” serves as a metaphor for all marginalized by the discourse of modernity and its conjoining coloniality. The white man of the poem seeks desperately to interpolate the black figure as anguish because he represents the “colonial difference” that Sanjinés defines as the “production of situations of colonial submission founded on odious racial differences that, reproduced constantly in everyday encounters, the subaltern must endure most of the time” (*Rescoldos*, 32).<sup>11</sup> The discourse of modernity uses the everyday markers of phenotype, technology, attire, accent, language, and occupation to fashion a deleveling, rather than encourage “development,” in which the subaltern is subject to modern agents due to darker skin (the *black* figure), supposed ignorance of technological innovations, the use of different clothing, corruption of the dominant language, speaking an Other language, and dedication to manual labor (such as field labor). Modernity/coloniality uses indigenous subjects as its Other from which to measure “progress,” and thus it ambivalently claims to redeem him while simultaneously perpetuating the mark of the Other from which to gauge superiority.

Evidently the white man shows great concern for this bulge, and perhaps even feels that he is attempting to rescue the nameless shadow. This is reflective of the fact that, as Sanjinés explains, European intellectual tradition, “no matter how revolutionary it is, does not see nor feel coloniality, the local glance of the ‘Other,’ of the oppressed, a glance that, with the presence of contemporary insurgent movements, is there to correct and change the injustices that the National Revolution itself completely missed”<sup>12</sup> (32). Here Sanjinés refers specifically to the Bolivian Revolution, but this blind eye to coloniality can equally be applied to the Mexican Revolution. Through these revolutions pervade discriminatory practices that perpetually position indigenous subjects and their knowledges as the wretched of the earth according to modernity’s linear

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<sup>11</sup> Original in Spanish: “producción de situaciones de sometimiento colonial fundadas en odiosas diferencias raciales que, reproducidas constantemente en el trato cotidiano, el subalterno debe soportar la mayor parte del tiempo.”

<sup>12</sup> Original in Spanish: “por muy revolucionario que sea, no ve ni siente la colonialidad, la mirada local del ‘Otro’, del oprimido, mirada ésta que, con la presencia de los actuales movimientos insurgentes, está ahí para corregir y modificar las injusticias que la mismísima Revolución Nacional pasó por alto.”

historical time. Modernity follows the “logic of the ‘gaze’ rather than the ‘glance,’ thus producing a visual that [is] eternalized, reduced to a single ‘point of view,’ and disembodied” (*Mestizaje*, 28). Rather than question who has the power to construct supposed universals, assert authority over inclusion, and define the territory of modernity, the white man in the poem represents a discourse that keeps indigenous subjects outside of decision making and assumes that they must assimilate to his absolute point of view. Under this perspective, the indigenous subject *must* be anguish and *must* need aid from the white man. The poem subsequently rejects this gaze that reduces the indigenous subject to a nameless bulge with no agency.

The question, “Angustia, ¿Eres tú?” resembles Becquer’s well-known “Poesía eres tú” from “Rima XXI,” in which the poetic voice objectifies a woman as poetry: “¿Qué es poesía?, dices mientras clavas / en mi pupila tu pupila azul. / ¡Qué es poesía! ¿Y tú me lo preguntas? / Poesía eres tú.” In “Angustia” the man in whom all “pain of soul and body” has been deposited and who has been reduced to “phantom,” “shadow,” namelessness, and the embodiment of anguish itself refuses to stay poetically posed for the modern colonizer’s objectifying gaze and in defiance throws himself into the raging sea. These waters represent the aggressive side of viscerality that prevents one from anesthetizing reality under “plurilingual and multicultural conceptions of society” and enters into a “combative subject-object dialectic whose central term is the violence that emerges from the hidden nature of colonialism” (Sanjinés, *Mestizaje*, 163, 5). This uprising attacks modern attempts to obscure and “shadow” the colonial difference and make the marginalization of subalterns seem natural.

The waters allude to the rain god Tláloc, but at a deeper level they symbolize the knowledges passed down from the indigenous subject’s ancestors in addition to those gained from experiencing this oppression. As is the case in *Colibrí*, the importance of allusions and references to Mesoamerican deities does not show necessarily a belief in them, but rather they represent a deep connectedness with nature, remembrance of ancestors and their knowledges, and in turn an empowerment and agency inspired in this intellectual tradition. It is with this empowerment that the

poetic voice challenges state narratives. All the poems in *Cantos* are in the first person, and function like a poetic testimony that rises up in denouncing unjust conditions and demands that indigenous subjects be recognized as possessors of valid knowledges, advocating even physical violence if necessary to achieve this. Thus, this testimony enters into a politics of memory that questions government reports of “progress” in the sugarcane fields.<sup>13</sup> The indigenous subject jumps into a well of knowledges / memory from which he is able to resist the rationalist Western discourse that denies validity to his experience and voice.

Indigenous subjects form part of an uprising with the waves of this resistance that then translates into the deadly rain turned to ice. No longer victim or “represented subject,” the subaltern arises as an “agent of a transformative project that may become hegemonic” (*Mestizaje*, 163). This rain sacrifices the white man, a metaphorical embodiment of discrimination and coloniality, upon “the rock” or altar, from which come “surcos de sangre / que corrían / sobre ese bello cuerpo desnudo” (111). The furrow is both an allusion to the oppression in the furrowed sugarcane fields and a common metaphor in Náhuatl to refer to the lines in writing. Through writing and speaking the testimonial poetic voice is empowered and asserts an agency denied it by the hegemonic sector of society.

#### *Visceral Metaphors: Under the Eye of Coloniality*

The poetic voice in “Angustia” does not emphasize that the white man’s body is absent of feeling because he is dead, rather the repetition “él no sentía / el cuerpo ya no estaba vivo / ya no vivía” suggests that this body always lacked feeling to such an extent that he even had to seek out anguish deposited in an Other. This critique of the absence of feeling in the “rationalist” discourse of modernity is common in indigenous literatures, and it displaces the positioning of them within pre-history and irrationality.

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<sup>13</sup> President Felipe Calderón visited sugarcane fields in Morelos in 2008 and focused solely on the need to continue producing more: “Así que para el sector de la caña está claro el dilema, como pienso para muchos sectores en el país: renovarse o morir y juntos nos renovaremos y saldremos adelante. Queremos generar las condiciones que permitan que el sector agropecuario pueda crecer, competir y ganar” (Quoted in Morquecho). Government reports also ignore the plight of the workers and focus on increased production. For an example, see SIAP, “Descripción de la cadena agroalimentaria de caña de azúcar.”

Such a critique conceptualizes an alternative space in which a sensuous body is essential. In contrast with the numb body of the white man, the poetic voice employs the metaphors of flowers, the heart, and Mesoamerican deities to imagine a space in which emotions connected to cultural practices are seen as an integral part of one's reasoning. While Sanjinés does not describe the term explicitly in this manner, the concept of viscerality can be viewed as intimately related to the concept of affective intelligence, in which emotions are treated as an integral part of a person's thought processes.<sup>14</sup> Evident in Hernández's texts as well, this affective intelligence constitutes one of the strongest points of resistance in numerous indigenous movements to state assimilationist projects.

These metaphors of affective intelligence, in turn, can be seen as examples of what Sanjinés refers to as *catacresis*,<sup>15</sup> namely words which the subaltern subject uses to describe what the dominant society cannot grasp and for which the dominant language lacks a term. *Yolotl* and *xochitl* lose deeper meanings when simply translated as "heart" and "flower." Through these metaphors indigenous migrants such as Zapoteco and Hernández articulate the tension between modernity and the *embers of the past*, which have "raíces en zonas mucho más subterráneas, vitales y elementales de la psique" (Sanjinés, *Rescoldos*, 7). Within *Cantos*, the poems "In acaualexochitl / Flor de acahual," "In tlatimatiteotl / Un fraile,"

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<sup>14</sup> The concept of "affective intelligence" has its roots in debates surrounding the term "emotional intelligence" used by Daniel Goleman in his best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence* (1995). This emotional intelligence is namely, as Gerald Matthews describes, the "competence to identify and express emotions, understand emotions, assimilate emotions in thought, and regulate both positive and negative emotions in oneself and others" (xv). Emotional intelligence differs from affective intelligence in that its focus is on emotional self-awareness and managing emotions to obtain personal goals. In contrast, affective intelligence, as George E. Marcus posits, is to "conceptualize affect and reason not as oppositional but as complimentary, as two functional mental faculties in a delicate, interactive, highly functional dynamic balance" (2). Solutions to political, economic, and social challenges must be created with the "active engagement and interaction of both mental faculties" (2).

<sup>15</sup> To describe catacresis, Sanjinés gives the example of *lloqla*, used by the migrant to describe the city in one of José María Argueda's novels. Another example is *Pachakuti*, which expresses "el vuelco intempestivo de la realidad" (7). These are "situaciones psíquicas que no pueden concebirse en términos de la modernidad" (7). The indigenous migrant in the position of exteriority / interiority, is able to view and name what seems oblivious to people in the interior. In other words, you cannot observe a "black hole" (a classic example of catacresis) if you are inside it.

“Maguito,” and “Cuicatl in yolomasehualtin / Canto del corazón indio” are key to understanding this tension.

*Cantos* begins with the poem “Flor de acahual,” in which the poetic voice personifies the acahual flower and tells her not to cry because of being from the rural area. The acahual should be proud, the poem states, to participate in the indigenous religious practices along with the flowers *cacaloxochitl* and *cempoalxochitl*. These flowers are contrasted with European ones in the city. The latter remained in the city, “para estar en la casa grande o iglesia / encerradas sin poder mirar al campo, / sin poder oler la hierba, / sin poder sentir” (21). As in “Angustia,” an emphasis is placed on the urban inhabitant’s inability to feel. This spatial dichotomy between the city and the rural highlights the urban as the representation of modernity, constructing an enclosed, insensible perspective that excludes indigenous practices. As the waters from which spring forth resistance in “Angustia,” the rural flowers represent ancestral memory that emerges from water and forms a key symbol of indigenous thought systems, song, language, ceremony, nature, and divinity and thus is intimately connected with the metaphors of the heart and Mesamerican deities.

The second poem, “Un fraile,” contrasts starkly with the acahual flower in the previous poem and represents the “eye of reason” of modernity in a monk. Like the city flowers in large houses or churches, the monk sits in cold silence in the most inaccessible area of the convent and looks outside through a small arabesque window. This window adorned with metal leaves and flowers contrasts with the natural acahual and other rural flowers. Only “escasos rayos de luz” are able to make it through the window and “[al fraile] lo iluminan / allí donde esta sentado [sic] / con la cabeza baja” (23). This viewpoint resembles that of modernity’s “relying exclusively on one eye—the mind’s eye—rather than on the two eyes of normal binocular vision” with a perspectivism “conceived as a lone eye looking through a peephole at the scene in front of it” (*Mestizaje*, 28).

Scarce illumination in “El fraile” suggests the period of Enlightenment or *Iluminismo*, in which such a perspective was made hegemonic. As Walter Mignolo does in *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, the poem connects this period with the Renaissance and the ecumenical

mission of the Catholic Church. These movements claimed a classical tradition and superior intellect to justify the colonization that constituted early modernity, and this coloniality conceives things as “static rather than dynamic” (*Mestizaje*, 28), which is represented by the light that enters the monk’s room and is made artificial and “stamped” on the walls. This poem’s position at the beginning of the book firmly situates modern oppressive practices in the sugarcane fields of Morelos within coloniality.

The monk is hunched over with his head “cubierta por el habito [sic] / que no deja ver ese rostro / no se sabe / si tiene la cara española o mestiza” (23). The poetic voice shows little concern as to whether the monk’s face is Spanish or *mestiza*, as the resulting discrimination is the same. In regards to the discourse of *mestizaje*, Sanjinés explains that in Mexican thought “nationhood and *mestizaje* were equated” (4). A discourse that became pervasive after the Mexican Revolution with Manuel Gamio’s *Forjando patria*, this *mestizaje* emerges as the signifier for a homogenous “national race,” language, and convergence of different cultures into one (Gamio 28). Through *mestizaje* and the Mexican Revolution pervades a coloniality that relegates indigenous subjects and their practices to vestiges of a vanquished past. *Mestizaje* does not differ much from discourses of whiteness, as in both perceived whiteness is “naturally” associated with superior “rationality” and knowledge, and the concentration of capital in the hands of those perceived as “white” has functioned in conjunction with and perpetuated this racism. Ironically, though *mestizaje* idealizes the mixing of indigenous and European “races” to forge a new subject neither “light” nor “dark,” thus ending all racism, those on the “top” of this mestizo spectrum are nearly always perceived as “white” (hence the pleading man in “Angustia” is white).<sup>16</sup>

The poetic voice turns this *mestizaje* upside-down, and describes the writing of the monk as “sobre ese viejo libro / con signos que no / se distinguen bien / ¿qué escribirá? ¿quién sabe? / solo su corazón lo sabe / y las eternas paredes / que lo cobijan” (25). As the Europeans marginalized

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<sup>16</sup> In “Stratification by Skin Color in Contemporary Mexico,” Andrés Villareal gives overwhelming statistical data confirming this privileging of whiteness. He concludes that “dark-brown individuals” have “50.9 percent lower odds than whites of being affluent” (19).

“systems of writing alien to their own practices” (Mignolo, *The Darker Side*, 1-2), here the poetic voice disregards the monk’s writings as illustrative of an oppressive discourse that is represented spatially by the cramped room in which the monk works. This monk is depicted as practically having no body as his face lies concealed under his cloak. The only part of his body described as present is his hand, which writes “slowly, very slowly” with the monk’s static view of the world (25). Opposed to the flower that represents an affective intelligence in which the body is seen as an integral part of one’s reasoning, this figure is disembodied and wrapped up in his mind’s eye. The poetic voice makes clear the need to resist assimilation to this bodiless and psychologically harmful discourse that the monk preaches as universal.

Rescoldo del tlicuil: *Politics of Memory*

Firmly framed within this context of modernity / coloniality, the poems that follow explicitly denounce the living conditions of indigenous migrant workers in Morelos. These poems are preceded by eight images from the sugarcane fields. Zapoteco worked together in these fields with his brother Noé, an aspiring photographer, who shot these photographs while working. The originals were printed out in large format and have been exhibited in Mexico City and different municipalities of Morelos. The photo of a young boy, entitled “Niño Nahua—Tiempo de Zafra en el albergue—Tlaltizapan, Mor.,” also serves as the image for the front cover of *Cantos*. Covered in ash and in the back of a truck bringing him from the fields, this seven-year old boy looks up at the camera half smiling. His situation reduces him to a person whose name—Mago o Maguito—is lost in his work title “el niño cortador.”



Fig. 1. Noé Zapoteco, *Nahua Child*, photograph from Gustavo Zapoteco Sideño, *Cantos en el cañaveral* (Mexico City: JM Impresiones, 2004; print; 35).

The poem “Maguito” describes his plight. All this boy knows is that he is “un cortador” and his hands are already filled with callouses. His situation is reflective of how, as Aníbal Quijano theorizes, economic subalternity is intimately tied to a colonial system of racism and discrimination that has outlived the era of colonialism. This coloniality associates “races” with “social roles and geohistorical places” (Quijano 3). In the colonial era, indigenous subjects as well as other subalterns were “naturally” associated with manual labor and for the most part prohibited from participating in knowledge production or “higher” professions. This division of labor was transmuted into the social classification of the world’s population under global capitalism as access to capital was concentrated in the hands of the dominant white sector. Government discourse couches this discrimination in economic and classist terms, reiterating the need of the indigenous communities to “develop” and turn a blind eye to any real change in the racist political and social structures that exclude them from knowledge production and decision-making.

Automatically associated with manual labor, Mago “no sabe de cariño... el solo sabe de cortar caña [sic] / de apurarse para hacer bultos” (59). Like the black figure in “Angustia” described as a *bulto* or “bulge” and surrounded by fire, this boy covered in black ash is essentially relegated to a

life of servitude.<sup>17</sup> Under a system that disassociates the worker from what he produces, the boy is figuratively reduced to a pile of burnt cane and treated like a machine. Maguito is reduced to working and obtaining money “para que le compren. su ropita nueva; / para que coman sus hermanitos, / cree que eso es la vida” (59). As such, the boy’s view of life is reflective of the discourse of modernity for which economic progress and development mean everything.

In these protest poems, the first person poetic voice articulates a decolonizing proposal significantly different from those set out by “los discursos desarrollistas” (Sanjinés, *Rescaldos*, 44-45). Following Sanjinés’s analysis of indigenous movements, this proposal seeks “the arcane social demands that have not been satisfied throughout the centuries (the past as a source for the present) be fulfilled, that the vernacular language and originary values be respected and accepted by society”<sup>18</sup> (44-45). The poem “Cuicatl in yolomasehualtin,” translated as “Canto del corazón indio,” represents such a transformation and contains the alternative knowledges connected with the heart, flower, and Mesoamerican deities that are conspicuously absent in preceding testimonial poems. This poem asks how indigenous subjects have survived throughout the centuries under discriminatory systems and ideologies that would kill them “si salimos a la luz” (67). The poetic voice then asserts, “Somos el rescoldo del tlicuil / el suspiro de la esperanza, / seguimos vivos, / estamos vivos, / así debemos seguir / para sobrevivir, / para vivir, / ideas trae el tiempo / el tiempo de tiempos” (67). The “rescoldo del tlicuil” or “embers of the fire” alludes to the sugarcane workers covered in ash and imagines them as embers under this blackness protecting knowledges and practices that have been discriminated against since the colonial period. These migrants represent

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<sup>17</sup> The sugarcane workers earn about \$30-40 pesos (about \$3 dollars) for every ton of sugarcane piled together. The average worker endures grueling work to collect about two tons in one day (Zapoteco, Personal interview, 20 June 2010). Government reports on the sugarcane industry completely ignore these wages, and rather focus on increased production and prices. A ton of sugarcane in Morelos is worth about \$500 pesos (\$40 dollars) (SIAP, “Descripción de la cadena agroalimentaria,” 9).

<sup>18</sup> Original in Spanish: “se cumplan las arcanas demandas sociales que no han sido satisfechas a lo largo de los siglos (el pasado como recurso del presente), que la lengua vernacular y los valores originarios sean respetados y aceptados por la sociedad.”

the “modern peripheral” subjects, according to Sanjinés, who enter a new space that changes their appearance, but who also have “detrás su experiencia fundante, que no es la de su pasado inmediato, sino un rescoldo del pasado” that forces them to see reality from a perspective in conflict with the linear perspective of modernity (Sanjinés, *Rescaldos*, 1). In this poem, the poetic voice makes reference to alternative knowledges as key to their survival and resistance against discrimination.

It is significant that this poetic voice uses the word *tlicuil* in translation as opposed to the Spanish *fogata*, an indication of catacrexis. In his own analysis of catacrexis, Sanjinés gives as an example the word *lloqlla*, used by a figure in one of Arguedas’ novels to describe his perception of the city and his psychological state that cannot be conceived within “terms of modernity” (Sanjinés, *Rescaldos*, 7). These new representations are employed by the traditionally oppressed sectors of society to begin to “nombrar nuevamente la realidad, apropiándose y rearticulando las consabidas construcciones metafórico-simbólicas de la nacionalidad” (10). The term *tlicuil* in Náhuatl elicits metaphors of ash and ember that allude to the act of writing. This word is also used in some regions to refer to writing instruments such as markers. These connections with textual production symbolize empowerment and the ability to name, thus giving the indigenous subject the agency to rearticulate national discourse. The act of writing—especially in Náhuatl—is significant in itself, as the subaltern is stereotypically represented as being unable to do so and his language is considered too poor to communicate important ideas. Light from the *rescoldo* and the hand that writes with it contrasts with the diminished light and the monk’s disembodied hand in the earlier poem.

In a similar vein, the lines that follow “suspiro de la esperanza” are a play on the word *nemi* in the Náhuatl version: “*tenemi monemitimej / tenemi monemitimej / ikuj tenemichanti, / inic huelimejmonemitis, / inic nemilis / ilnamiquemej ixcuajqui in tonalli*” (66, emphasis mine). Partially evident in the translation into Spanish, the root *nemi* has numerous connotations in Náhuatl and can signify *walking, continuing, living, feeling, being* and *thinking*. The embodiment of *nemiliztli* resembles what Erin Manning calls a moving, sentient body that makes the state

uncomfortable as it seeks to maintain people in static categories. Manning speaks of a “politics of touch” in which “affect plays a central role”<sup>19</sup> (xxi). “Bodies disarticulate states. States live in fear of bodies,” argues Manning (xxii). This sentient body is an “agrammatical invention” that, through “atypical expressions,” is able to move outside the strict confines of the state. As such, the concepts of the sensuous indigenous heart, flowers, deities, and other concepts expressed/translated from Náhuatl serve as agrammatical political statements that challenge a state discourse that, even in the guise of multiculturalism, still proclaims a single official history, a hegemonic language (Spanish), and a homogenous identity (the *mestizo* subject). Consequently, “Indigenous heart” in the poem is intrinsically connected with this dynamic concept of *nemiliztli* and represents knowledges and practices that serve to resist—even violently—the modern colonial discourse that assimilates, obscures, and marginalizes them.

*Harmonious Hummingbird: Affective Intelligence and Interculturality*

Though differing from the explicit, often violent protest in *Cantos*, Hernández’s *Colibrí* employs the same metaphors of the heart, flowers, and Mesoamerican deities to displace the “single eye” of modernity. In this text, Hernández advocates an intercultural dialogue between languages and cultural practices, and this approach, which for some smacks of utopianism, has provoked accusations that this is an ad hoc interculturality that anesthetizes the harsh reality described in texts such as *Cantos*.<sup>20</sup> In contrast with Zapoteco’s poems, in which he states that he would like to speak only of flowers but cannot due to social injustices, Hernández speaks of wanting only to contemplate the “flor y canto” and not the “darkness of night” symbolic of suffering (*Colibrí*, 55). In personal conversations and public discourse Hernández repeatedly highlights how focusing on indigenous anguish or on an insurrectionary Indian has reinforced the

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<sup>19</sup> Affect, according to Manning, is what grips a person “first in the moment of relation” (xxi). It is “with-ness of the movement of the world,” the visceral reaction to events (xxi). The closely related term “emotion” is “affect plus an awareness of that affect” (xxi).

<sup>20</sup> While Zapoteco expresses this criticism in private conversation, the Nahua writer and reporter Mardonio Carballo did so publicly on a radio program in summer 2010 while interviewing Hernández.

stereotypical representation of indigenous subjects as either victim or savage.

As the title of the book itself illustrates and as he explains in the introduction, Hernández seeks a harmonious relationship between cultures by viewing intuitiveness and emotions as integral to reasoning. He refers to how *Huitzilopochtli*, “hummingbird of the left,” represented dreams and intuitiveness for the Nahuas, and how this coincides with the identification in contemporary science of the brain’s left side as the principal location for dreams (11-13).<sup>21</sup> Hernández plays on this meaning and explains how he thought about writing a book entitled *Huitzilmactli*, “hummingbird of the right,” to emphasize rationality. He quickly discarded this idea though because “la racionalidad de nuestro tiempo nos está llevando al precipicio” (13). He instead argues that it is necessary to “integrar la parte intuitiva y emocional, con la parte racional de nuestra naturaleza humana” (13). From this springs the idea of a “hummingbird of harmony” in which both the left and right brains are integrated into one. He clearly argues for an affective intelligence as the basis for intercultural dialogue, and such an approach, as Martha Nussbaum describes, “adopt[s] plausible rather than implausible pictures of ethical change, and we understand (in connection with our normative arguments) what it might mean for a political community to extend to its citizens the social bases of imaginative and emotional health” (15-16). With affective intelligence, the visceral metaphor of the heart combines with the flower images and Mesoamerican deities to give an alternative genesis and framework to modernity. Hernández hopes that these songs will find a place in the *yolotl* or “heart” of the readers and will “flower” within them (13).

The poem “Semanca Huitzilin” (translated as “Colibrí de la armonía”) at the beginning of the text describes this hummingbird of harmony as having a big heart and a vision focused on dreams. *Semanca*, whose root is the number “one,” means *oneness* or *perfection*. Yet, rather than allude to any homogenizing project, this *oneness* is identified as seeing emotions as an integral part of reasoning. This viewpoint differs from the

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<sup>21</sup> This is presumably from the perspective of someone looking at another person, as the right-hand side of the brain is the side commonly believed to be the main location for dreams.

all-imposing view of modernity and, though not suggesting encounters free of conflict, highlights the importance of not positioning oneself hegemonically as the center of knowledge production. Rather, a key part of this affective intelligence is, as the term “affect” denotes, having a “withness of the movement of the world,” being *affected* by one’s surroundings and reacting viscerally (Manning xxi). Reacting accordingly, the poetic voice exclaims: *niyolpaqui* and *nimoyolchicahua* (“I laugh with my heart” and “I strengthen myself with my heart”) (26). In doing so, the hummingbird *moyolitia*, “is brought to life/heart,” and blooms like a flower (26). The last two references to the heart are lost in translation into Spanish as “fortalece el espíritu” and “cobra vida” (27). The metaphor of the heart appears numerous times in many poems and might seem overly repetitive without recognizing the deeper meaning of this vital organ in Nahua culture.

“Being brought back to life/heart” alludes to the hummingbird emerging from its six month winter hibernation. This, in turn, symbolizes how the affective intelligence that this bird represents and that has been marginalized for centuries is now able to awake. Appropriately visualizing this metaphor of the hummingbird, “Semanca huitzilin” is a poem in the shape of a bird’s wing (a calligram). The short verses in it and throughout most of *Colibrí* seek to imitate the flapping of these wings and their dynamic movement.

Translated into Spanish by Hernández and into English by Donald Frischmann, these translations suggest an even relationship among the three languages, which is significant considering that Náhuatl is still often seen as an inferior “dialect.” Though differing significantly from Zapoteco’s *Cantos* with its violent resistance, *Colibrí* is similar in challenging the discourse of modernity that equates certain languages and knowledges with “progress” at the cost of others.

### *I Look for My Body: The Sentient Space of the Tonal*

In the poem “Notonal” (“Mi tonal”) the poetic voice searches for his body, and as he does so the chiasitic structure of this poem equates the dream state with waking up. In the first four lines Hernández describes

how he travels through dreams in search of his *tonal*, which is then followed by the line set apart, “Busco mi cuerpo” (39). The final four lines describe how he then interrupts his dream and thus finds his tonal on the earth. The tonal is the inner energy of the body, and at a deeper level it is related to the sun, *tonatiuh*, who (not “that”) gives off this energy. This, in turn, is intimately connected to the hummingbird, who also symbolizes the sun. This poem masterfully represents the conjoining of intuitiveness and reasoning via metaphors. The poem itself is also a calligram subtly depicting the left and right lobes of the brain, representing the area of dreams on the left and an awakened state of reasoning on the right. The line “Busco mi cuerpo” serves to join these two parts and highlights the formation of a sensuous subject who embodies affective intelligence.

The poem “In Coyotl” (“The Coyote”) follows a structure similar to that of “Notonal” and gives greater insight into the meaning of tonal for the nahual. The poetic voice describes the coyote as a “yolcatl tlamatini,” which is translated into Spanish as “animal sabio” (89). “Tlamatini” literally means “one who knows things,” but it has a deeper meaning related to the wise elders of Nahua intellectual tradition and contemporary communities. The coyote is a transmuted “nahual” who fasts, a clear allusion to Nezahualcōyotl, whose name means “coyote who fasts.” While there are heated arguments as to whether Nezahualcōyotl authored any poetry or instead represents merely a construction to feed nationalist symbolism, these debates are irrelevant, as Eric Hobsbawm theorizes in *The Invention of Tradition*, once people embrace these perhaps fictional narratives as reality.<sup>22</sup> The underlying argument for this lauding of Nezahualcōyotl is that Nahuas have a valid intellectual tradition and philosophy, which this figure has come to represent. Thus, these ideas should be taken seriously in contemporary social, political, and economical debates. The coyote

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<sup>22</sup> Hernández’s poetry is highly influenced by the texts of his close friend Miguel León Portilla, one of the leading scholars in popularizing Nezahualcōyotl, and the primary colonial documents that he analyzes. In his dissertation *Filosofía náhuatl* (1956), León Portilla emphasizes that Nahuas had philosophy, an idea that seemed to “some an insane suggestion” (“Kalman Silvert Award,” 4). León Portilla defines philosophy as a “human concern, fruit of admiration and doubt, that leads one to ask and inquire rationally regarding the origin, being and the destiny of the world and man” (*Filosofía náhuatl*, 4). Hernández differs with León Portilla though in correlating the practices found in these colonial Náhuatl documents with present-day practices.

represents this intellectual tradition and the poetic voice goes in search “del *tonal* del coyote / deseo transformarme / en coyote” (89). In this sense Hernández provincializes<sup>23</sup> the European intellectual tradition and opens a space for alternative worldviews.

The final line, “Nimocoyocuepas,” means literally “I want to transform myself like a coyote,” and would be rather jolting for a Nahuatl speaker, most likely eliciting laughter, confusion, or perhaps even accusations of betrayal. *Coyotl* popularly refers to people from the city and at a deeper level anyone who does not respect indigenous thought systems and practices. Thus, this poem cleverly resignifies what *coyotl* represents. This appropriation of the animal is ironically similar to the appropriation of the term *indio* in Hernández’s poem “Na ni indio” in the book *Xochikoskatl* (1985), in which *indio* is positively resignified as opposed to the *coyotl* who oppresses. In the poem “nimocoyocuepas,” this appropriation of *coyotl* asserts a place for previously marginalized cultural practices and intellectual traditions in the construction of the nation-state and knowledge production, thus displacing the hegemonic *coyotl* from his position as the center of valid knowledge production.

Consequently, the animal as *nahual* and its intimate connection with the *tonal* represent a visceral resistance to previous marginalization. The *nahual* is an animal that has a deep connection with the *tonal*, or inner energy of a person, and if one protects this *nahual* then the animal protects the person.<sup>24</sup> From this concept of the *nahual* and the *tonal* arises an ethic that includes a deep respect for nature and that recognizes the body as affectively connected to its surroundings.

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<sup>23</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty uses *provincialize* to describe the shift from “the loci of Europe” toward a decentered approach in which previously marginalized intellectual traditions are treated as equally valid. He argues that “provincializing” Europe does not entail a full rejection of European thought, but rather seeks how that thought can be “renewed from and for the margins” (16). The hegemonic Eurocentric intellectual tradition created a center of knowledge production in relation to which all other traditions were “provincial,” pre-political, pre-history, and pre-philosophy. The spatial metaphor of the *provincialization* of Europe displaces this intellectual tradition from its hegemonic position.

<sup>24</sup> This resistance is similar to that of Pancho Culebro in the novel *Pancho Culebro y los naguales de Tierra Azul*, in which the naguales / nahuales serve as protection against the destructive force and discourse of modernity.

*Chicomóztoc: An Alternative Time*

In addition to this alternative sentient space, *Colibrí* also represents an alternative time. “Canto de Nanahuatzin” describes the god Nanahuatzin on the verge of sacrificially leaping into the fire that would transform into the fifth sun. She describes that “Ya puedo saltar, / la luz penetra / en Chicomóztoc, / lugar de las siete cuevas” (60). Chicomóztoc, “place of the seven caves,” is the mythical place from which the different Nahua peoples originated. The story of the creation of the sun refers to a cycle of different suns, and we currently live under the fifth. A cyclical solar sequence and Chicomóztoc represent an alternative genesis, which subsequently ties to the contemporary divine figure Chicomexóchitl “seven flowers” in the poem “Ofrenda a Chicomexóchitl.” This poem describes a ceremony performed in Veracruz that shows gratitude to this deity who represents the seven basic staple foods in Nahua communities. This ceremony represents the foundational symbol of a community fasting, sacrificing, showing patience, and working. The symbol of this creation, the *tlaquimiloli*, is a bundled offering left in the *tepeyolotl* or heart of the mountain. The poetic voice describes how the sacred music played at the ceremony stays in the memory with the community and “en el andar cotidiano de la gente” (64). Again the sacred number seven, coincidentally symbolically similar to its function in Christianity, represents a genesis but also an alternative creation intimately connected with a collective ethic leading one to have a deep respect for nature and contrasting with the perspective of modernity.

A new genesis is also represented in the poem “Canto nuevo a Moctezuma Xocoyotzin.” The poetic voice speaks to the *tlatoni* Moctezuma, telling him to abandon sadness and no longer afflict himself. This is indicative again of Hernández’s rejection of indigenous victimization, of which Moctezuma is the symbol par excellence in national narratives. This poetic voice tells him that his children still remain “en la nación mexicana” (115). Yet it is interesting that “Mexican nation” can refer to Nahua communities instead of the Mexican nation-state. In this manner Hernández indirectly refers to a pluri-nationality within Mexico, in a context in which speaking openly of different nations within the state is commonly rejected by the Mexican political system. Hence, the poetic voice

displaces the idea of a homogenous nation, as the peripheral Nahua is thus claimed to be more Mexican than the prototypical mestizo subject.

“Canto de Nanahuatzin” goes on to state that “un sol / ya nos alumbra” (115), thus appealing to a different genesis with the cycles of suns. This contrasts sharply with President Vicente Fox’s use of the same metaphor in a speech to an indigenous community in Oaxaca: “Nunca más un México que discrimine o dé maltrato, o abandone, u olvide a sus comunidades indígenas. Estamos frente a un nuevo amanecer para México. Estamos frente a un nuevo amanecer para las comunidades indígenas.” Fox stated this in 2000 as he introduced an indigenous woman, Xóchitl Gálvez, who would become the commissioner for the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI), and who, according to Fox, came from “one of the poorest communities in the country.” Framed within the context of economic development, Fox reacts in a paternalistic way and victimizes the indigenous people in Mexico. Such a narrative framework “leaves unchanged the power relations between those who are in a position to include and those who are supposed to passively accept being included” (Sanjinés, *Mestizaje*, 10). In its stead Hernández offers an alternative time and space in which indigenous subjects construct the nation-state, have access to political power, and offer alternatives to narratives of progress.

This different space and time is also represented in the poem near the end of the text, entitled “Itlamiya cuicatl” (“Final del canto). This poem describes people as different colors of corn, alluding to the creation of men from corn reminiscent of the *Popol Vuh*. The poem indicates that “el rojo, el blanco, / el amarillo, el negro / se han mezclado” and formed “rayos multicolores” beneath the sun, thus signaling the arrival of the sixth sun (167). While this might be interpreted as an anesthetized multiculturalism, this metaphor takes on deep significance when one takes into account the sun’s relation to the heart, flowers, Mesoamerican deities, and the tonal. This does not involve a celebration of (market) diversity, as in neoliberal multiculturalism, but rather the treatment of Nahua knowledges as valid and hence displacing modernity as the center of knowledge production.

Such criticism of modernity is made explicit in the poem “Llora por ti Argentina” (a reference to the song in “Evita”, “No llores por mí,

Argentina”). Here Hernández tells Argentina to cry for itself because of its false progress, “un sueño de la modernidad,” and for the policies of the nation-state that in the nineteenth century killed off most indigenous communities in the country (120). This is narrated from his small house in the countryside, “sentado en mi icpali [traditional Nahua chair],” where he is presumably seeing chaotic images during the 2001 crisis in Argentina on television. Analogous to Zapoteco’s poems, Hernández here creates a dichotomy between rural life and the city, in which the city represents modernity, thereby reflecting the social conflict that Sanjinés describes as a struggle that “between linear time and cyclical time was—and remains—a cognitive problem, a problem of consciousness, which has repercussions in literary forms. For the dominant, development and progress are everything” (*Mestizaje*, 22-23). The dream of this modernity in Argentina “empieza a desmoronarse / para dejarnos desnudos / para matarnos de hambre / para destruir nuestra raíz / para borrar nuestro rostro / y enterrar nuestra historia (*Colibrí*, 120). It attempts to destroy local knowledges and “apropriarse de sus símbolos” (120). Hernández hopes that this social pain may lead to the “Sun of dignity,” an allusion to the creation of a new sun which would leave behind ages of coloniality.

*Scattered Language: Displacing Homogenous National Narratives*

While Zapoteco and Hernández differ significantly in their literary styles, they both question the “horizon of expectations” of modernity and imagine a space in which indigenous knowledges and practices are recognized as valid for the present. To this end, Zapoteco advocates the use of physical violence if necessary and, in other poems not analyzed in this article, makes clear allusions to the Zapatista rebellion. This is also suggested in the poems analyzed in which the references to faces covered in black allude to Zapatistas with their iconic ski masks. By contrast, Hernández focuses on an intercultural dialogue that displaces the centeredness of the discourse of modernity and creates a dialogue on even ground between different knowledges (the indigenous and the Western). In both texts the metaphors of the heart, flowers, and deities play a key role in

the visceral resistance to the discourse of modernity and imagine a different space and time in which affective intelligence is a key component.

In *Cantos Zapoteco* translates and transforms the term “colonial” in Náhuatl as *tonalcaxtilian*, literally the *Castilian day*. This also can be translated as the *tonal*, or Castilian spirit. Clearly, Castilian refers to the Spaniards and to the legacy of coloniality via the Castilian language, which, according to Gamio, functions as the homogenizing language for the national mestizo race. As Sanjinés describes it, “el sector mestizo ubicado en el poder se afana en organizar, con una finalidad política, su complicado orden social y discursivo, sometiéndolo a la búsqueda de una identidad tanto más homogénea cuando más quebradiza” (*Rescaldos*, 2). Nonetheless, the migrant “como que deja que su lenguaje se esparza, contaminándolo todo” (2). Hernández and Zapoteco carry this out in the very political act of writing in Náhuatl and, as noted, questioning the homogenizing national discourse.

This study highlights the need to explore this language and the innovative ideas and styles contained in contemporary Nahua literature. *Innovative* is not a word applied to indigenous knowledge production, and in debunking the depiction of indigenous subjects as always “behind on the times” I have argue for Nahua creativity and ingenuity. As Mignolo notes, decolonization can only take place when coloniality is deconstructed by those on the margins (*Local Histories*, 45). Hernández and Zapoteco imagine a space of affective intelligence in which this coloniality has been displaced and indigenous subjects participate actively in the construction of the nation-state, transforming a political and social structure that, from its inception, was configured to dispossess them.

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