SHADOWS OF THE EMPIRE

THE IMPACT OF THE SPANISH INVASIONS OF ABYA YALA ON INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

ROBERT ANTHONY CASTILLO

Polytechnic University of València
Faculty of Fine Arts

Master of Artistic Production
València, Spain • December 2024

Tutors:
Carlos Martínez Barragán
Josep Francesc Sanmartín Cava







TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract 6

Keywords 7

Objectives 8

Methodology 9

Introduction 11

1. Identity & Land 16

1.1 The Term “Abya Yala” 17

1.2 The Impact of Colonization on Indigenous Populations 18

1.3 The Enduring Shadow of Colonization on Indigenous Cultures 19

1.4 Reclaiming Land: Digital Art as a Reflection of Indigenous Territories 20

1.5 The Responsibility to Heal Historical Wounds 23

1.6 Nayda Collazo-Llorens: Mapping Colonial Disconnection 24

1.7 The Role of “Abya Yala” in Indigenous Identity 25

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2. Identity & Language 26

2.1 The Resilience of Maya Language and the Loss of Taíno Heritage 27

2.2 The Nuances of Cultural Expression 28

2.3 Language as a Vessel of Cultural Identity 30

2.4 Comic Art as a Tool for Indigenous Reclamation 32

2.5 A Tribute to Cultural Resilience and Identity 34

3. Identity & Music 35

3.1 Reviving the Hompax 36

3.2 Reviving the Hompax Through Photography 37

3.3 Reviving the Hompax Through Modern Recordings 43

3.4 Resonating Heritage 46

TABLE OF CONTENTS

4. Identity & Religion 47

4.1 The Taíno and Maya Religious Heritage 48

4.2 The Role of Entheogens in Mayan Ceremonies 51

4.3 Representing Mayan Religious Practices through Stone Sculpture 55

4.4 The Intersection of Science, Psychedelics, and Spirituality 61

5. A Path Towards Reconciliation 62

5.1 Modern Examples of Classism and Racism 63

5.2 Engraving as a Mean to Address the Need for Reconciliation 64

5.3 A Personal Journey Through Dry-Point Engraving 68

5.4 Reconciliation and Accountability 71

5.5 Tangible Steps Forward 72

TABLE OF CONTENTS

5.6 Beyond the Shadows 73

Conclusion 74

Image Index 75

Bibliography 81

ABSTRACT • RESUMEN

"Shadows of the Empire" chronicles my personal exploration of the enduring effects of the Spanish invasions of Abya Yala on my Taíno and Maya heritage as well as my identity as a 21st-century mestizo. Through a series of artistic works (digital collage, comic art, photography, stone sculpture, and engraving) created specifically for this project, I investigate how these invasions disrupted connections to land, language, music, and spirituality. My artistic practice reflects the complex interplay of colonization, illustrating the lasting impact on cultural identities, including my own as a descendant of both indigenous and European lineages. This thesis intertwines historical research with my lived experiences, emphasizing the resilience required for cultural reclamation in a world where the legacy of colonialism continues to shape identities. Rather than seeking definitive answers, it invites contemplation of the nuances of hybrid identities and the active engagement necessary for reconciliation. By reflecting on my journey, I aim to inspire others to examine their own connections to history and culture, fostering a broader understanding of indigenous experiences. "Shadows of the Empire" is a call to reclaim and celebrate our diverse cultural heritages, highlighting the potential for healing and renewal through artistic expression.

"Sombras del Imperio" narra mi exploración personal de los efectos duraderos de las invasiones españolas de Abya Yala en mi herencia taína y maya, así como en mi identidad como mestizo del siglo XXI. A través de una serie de obras artísticas (collage digital, arte en cómic, fotografía, escultura en piedra y grabado) creadas específicamente para este proyecto, investigo cómo estas invasiones interrumpieron las conexiones con la tierra, el lenguaje, la música y la espiritualidad. Mi práctica artística refleja la compleja interacción de la colonización, ilustrando el impacto duradero en las identidades culturales, incluida la mía como descendiente de linajes indígenas y europeos. Esta tesis entrelaza la investigación histórica con mis experiencias vividas, enfatizando la resiliencia necesaria para la recuperación cultural en un mundo donde el legado del colonialismo continúa moldeando identidades. En lugar de buscar respuestas definitivas, invita a la contemplación de las sutilezas de las identidades híbridas y el compromiso activo necesario para la reconciliación. Al reflexionar sobre mi viaje, espero inspirar a otros a examinar sus propias conexiones con la historia y la cultura, fomentando una comprensión más amplia de las experiencias indígenas. "Sombras del Imperio" es un llamado a reclamar y celebrar nuestras diversas herencias culturales, destacando el potencial de sanación y renovación a través de la expresión artística.

KEYWORDS • PALABRAS CLAVES

Abya Yala

Colonialism • Colonialismo

Cultural Identity • Identidad Cultural

Language Revitalization • Revitalización Lingüística

Indigenous Resilience • Resiliencia Indígena

OBJECTIVES

Primary Objective

To examine how the Spanish invasions of Abya Yala have left lasting shadows over my Taíno and Mayan heritage, impacting my personal sense of cultural identity. This thesis seeks to explore how the themes of land, language, music, and spirituality can be navigated through artistic practice to confront the enduring effects of colonization and cultivate a pathway toward reconciliation.

Secondary Objecties

To analyze the disruptions in indigenous cultural practices and identities caused by the Spanish invasion of Abya Yala, with a particular focus on the erasure, suppression, and fragmentary preservation of languages, traditions, and spiritual practices across generations.

To illustrate how artistic creation (spanning digital collage, comic art, photography, music, stone sculpture, and engraving) can serve as a transformative tool for connecting with fragmented ancestral heritage and fostering cultural healing in the present.

To investigate the modern responsibilities of colonizers' descendants in addressing historical injustices, exploring how reconciliation can be fostered through an acknowledgment of shared legacies and through active efforts in supporting the preservation and revitalization of indigenous cultures.

METHODOLOGY

This thesis employs a qualitative, practice-based research methodology that combines the hermeneutic approach with artistic exploration. By interpreting cultural, historical, and philosophical texts and creating original artwork, I investigate the enduring impact of the Spanish invasions on my ability to connect with my Taíno and Mayan heritage. The project emphasizes the role of land, language, music, and spiritual practices in shaping identity, and it explores the concept of reconciliation through both academic inquiry and personal artistic expression.

At the core of this research are five original works of art, each serving as a reflective exploration of identity and memory. These works function as experiential acts that engage with my ancestral history. By employing diverse media (digital collage, comic art, photography, music, and stone sculpture) I seek to examine historical wounds while also reclaiming fragments of my lost heritage. This methodology positions art-making as a primary method of investigation, embodying what artistic researcher Graeme Sullivan describes as "thinking through making" (Sullivan, 2010).

The creative process itself functions as a method of inquiry, enabling me to explore the cultural scars left by colonization. Engraving a letter to Spain or sculpting an alabaster homage to Mayan spiritual practices allows me to confront and navigate both personal and collective memories shaped by these histories. This embodied research approach draws inspiration from contemporary artists like Nayda Collazo-Llorens, who uses map deconstruction to craft narratives about indigenous relationships to land, and Ivan Sawyer, whose photographic work captures the ongoing vitality of indigenous music. Both artists use their mediums to probe cultural identity and historical narratives, framing their art within a discourse of resilience and recovery. These influences guide my own practice, situating my work within the broader conversation on cultural reclamation and continuity.

Alongside creative practice, this research includes extensive bibliographic analysis of both indigenous and colonial narratives, as well as philosophical and historical texts that form a theoretical framework for this exploration. Textual sources provide necessary historical context, such as timelines of the Spanish invasions and documented cultural losses, but also allow me to interpret how these events have shaped contemporary identity. Through this dual engagement with theory and practice, I am able to balance historical and cultural analysis with introspective, artistic exploration.

METHODOLOGY

This practice-based methodology creates a dialectical relationship between art-making and scholarly research. Historical data and cultural analysis provide structural foundations, while my art practice reveals personal and emotional dimensions of these histories. By bridging academic research with creative practice, I strive for a holistic understanding of colonization's impact on indigenous identity, specifically my own, while offering a nuanced perspective on reconciliation and cultural healing.

In this way, the project serves as both a scholarly and personal investigation. It uses the creation of art as a reflective and generative tool to understand the complex layers of identity shaped by historical trauma. This methodology underscores the importance of merging traditional research with artistic creation to explore the lasting shadows of empire and chart a path toward reconciliation.

INTRODUCTION

Identity is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond the self to encompass how we relate to the world around us. At its core, identity depends on others and is shaped by how we position ourselves in relation to ideas, people, and places. For instance, to understand myself as a kind person, this identity must exist in relation to another who receives my kindness. This interdependence lies at the heart of how we form and express personal identity. Many identity profiles exist, including personal identity, which relates to our self-perception, and political identity, which reflects our alignment with governmental structures. More recently, the rise of technology has introduced digital identities, centered on how we curate our presence behind screens. Stuart Hall captures the fluidity of this concept, describing identities as "the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past" (Hall, 2022). This statement sets the foundation for understanding how our connection to culture evolves over time, particularly when history is marked by the forces of colonization.

Culture, like identity, is a complex and widely interpreted term. Its roots trace back to 1793, when the Germans first defined "kulture" from the Latin "colere," meaning "to tend" or "to cultivate" (Kroeber, 1985). Charles A. Ellwood's 1944 definition describes "culture" as "patterns of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups" (Kroeber, 1985). Yuval Noah Harari describes culture more poetically as "the immense diversity of imagined realities that Sapiens invented, and the resulting diversity of behavior patterns" (Harari, 2011). Through these interpretations, we understand culture as a shared set of beliefs, values, customs, and traditions that shape how a group thinks, feels, and behaves.

Culture manifests both materially and non-materially through arts, language, rituals, social structures, and belief systems. It includes architecture, craftsmanship, philosophies, worldviews, and ideologies. However, cultures are not static. Cultures evolve, especially when faced with historical events like the colonization of Abya Yala, the land now called the Americas. As Harari notes, "once cultures appeared, they never ceased to change and develop, and these unstoppable alterations are what we call 'history'" (Harari, 2011). The arrival of the Spanish in Abya Yala in the late 15th century set in motion a series of events that irrevocably altered indigenous cultures, wrought through violence, displacement, and forced assimilation, leaving lasting scars on indigenous identities.

INTRODUCTION

I was fortunate to travel to my parents' countries from a young age, with my family taking me to both the Dominican Republic and Mexico before I was even a year old. During these travels, we visited cultural centers in the Dominican Republic, where I began to understand the significance of my Taíno heritage. In Mexico, my father guided us through Mayan sites across the Yucatán peninsula, exposing me to the vibrant remnants of the Mayan culture I would come to identify with more strongly. These early exposures to the culture of my ancestors planted the seed to explore what my lineage has to offer, and to consider how I might form an identity from this past.

It is important to note that I am not attempting to romanticize traditional ways of living. Rather, I place inherent value in diversity, believing that cultural variety, diverse perspectives, and varied approaches to the human experience create a richness in life itself. As my process of discovery and expression has progressed, I have quickly realized how much cultural knowledge and history has been lost due to the Spanish invasions, and how this loss impacts my ability to connect with my ancestral culture.

My heritage is rooted in the Taíno people of the Dominican Republic and the Maya of Mexico and surrounding regions. As someone of mixed heritage, I have grappled with questions of identity. My mestizaje, specific to my lineage, carries a legacy distinct from mestizos in Spain, marked by the shadow of colonization and loss. This project examines how colonization has affected my relationship to my ancestral cultures through five artistic works, each addressing a different cultural facet. A digital collage examines the connection between land and identity, while a comic artwork explores the challenges I have personally experienced in attempting to connect with the language of my ancestors. A photographic series and music compositions delve into remnants of Mayan music and my process of connecting this aspect of my ancestral heritage. An alabaster sculpture, inspired by Mayan stonework, honors Mayan spiritual practices, connecting me with the culture of my ancestors' religious life. Lastly, an engraved letter initiates a dialogue on reconciliation, reflecting on how we might illuminate the shadows left by Spanish invasions on my heritage.

The works created for "Shadows of the Empire" represent an ongoing journey to connect with and honor my indigenous heritage through artistic expression. For years, I have engaged with music and visual art as ways to develop my identity

INTRODUCTION



Figure 0.1
"Portrait of my Father"
Robert Castillo
oil on canvas
2021

with the cultures of my ancestors. My musical background, with an undergraduate degree in jazz bass which included training in music composition, has led me to electronic music production, where I have explored the incorporation of Mayan language into my musical creations. In 2021, I completed a portrait of my father (Figure 0.1), an emotional piece stemming from our complex relationship. To accompany the painting, I wrote a poem addressing the strains between us, which my friend Adolfo Haas translated into Mayan. I then composed music to accompany Adolfo's reading of the poem in Mayan. This piece was displayed at the Kansas City Artists Coalition in May 2021, where viewers could listen to the accompanying music by scanning a QR code, enriching the experience of my artwork through an immersive auditory experience. A deeper discussion of my engagement with music as a bridge to my ancestral culture can be found in the "Identity & Music" section of this paper.

Similarly and previous to this thesis, I have used visual art to explore and express my connection to my heritage. I began painting in 2018, when a friend challenged me to produce enough paintings for a solo exhibition. After several months of intense work, I held my first solo show, which featured three large modern interpretations of ancient

INTRODUCTION



Figure 0.2
“Mayan Water Lilly Jaguar”
Robert Castillo
acrylic & coffee on canvas
2022

Mayan imagery. This approach to updating Mayan motifs has continued in my work, notably in my 2022 painting, “Mayan Water Lily Jaguar” (Figure 0.2), which reflects on the jaguar’s role in Mayan mythology as the guardian of the underworld and symbolizes the use of psychedelics in Mayan spiritual practice. A more in-depth exploration of this theme appears in the “Identity & Religion” section, where I also present a previously created Carrara marble sculpture that delves into the spiritual significance of psychedelics in Mayan religious traditions.

I hold a deep belief in the inherent value of diversity, particularly regarding cultural approaches to living and the unique processes and ideas that different societies have developed over history to address individual and collective challenges. This interest in diversity drives my

INTRODUCTION

desire to connect with the cultures of my ancestors. The more I learn about my past, the more it informs my future, enhancing my ability to respect and appreciate the cultures of other groups as I broaden my global awareness. Diversity serves as a rich tapestry of perspectives that enriches decision-making and problem-solving. Engaging with and empathizing with other cultures allows us to gain insights into alternative methodologies, which may offer innovative solutions to shared problems. By embracing these diverse approaches, we cultivate a more comprehensive understanding of the human experience, enabling us to draw from a wider pool of ideas and solutions. This not only enriches our personal growth but also fosters collaborative environments where inclusive dialogue leads to more effective and sustainable outcomes.

Throughout this paper, I use the term “Abya Yala” to refer to the entirety of the Americas. “Abya Yala” originates from the Kuna people, who currently reside in Panama and Colombia, and translates to “mature land,” “living land,” or “blossoming land” (Porto-Gonçalves, 2011). Using “Abya Yala” instead of European terms like "America" (derived from the Italian explorer Amerigo Vespucci) or "Latin" (a linguistic and cultural imposition from Europe) is a deliberate choice. These European names were imposed during colonization, erasing indigenous terminology and forcing foreign identities onto the land. By reclaiming “Abya Yala,” we resist the imperialistic naming conventions that continue to overshadow indigenous history.

This thesis blends historical research with personal reflection and artistic expression. It is a journey through the shadows of colonization, asking how descendants of both the colonizer and the colonized might reconcile with the past. The overarching aim is to interrogate how colonization has shaped my relationship and ability to identify with the Taíno and Maya cultures, while seeking paths to healing and understanding. By holding the Spanish accountable, we begin to move toward a future where the fragments of what remains can come together to illuminate a path forward. Through my art, I bridge personal and cultural history, honoring what has been lost and celebrating what can still be reclaimed.

1. IDENTITY & LAND

One of the most fundamental ways humans form identities is through their relationship with land. Whether it is the land of one's birth, upbringing, or migration, the physical space we inhabit deeply shapes our sense of self. Just as land can be embraced as part of one's identity, it can also be a site of rejection or loss. Throughout history, groups have been displaced or forced to leave their homelands, severing these ties. This severing is evident in the Spanish invasions of Abya Yala, which not only disrupted the lives of its native inhabitants but also fractured their relationship with the land itself.

1.1 THE TERM “ABYA YALA”

The term "Abya Yala," borrowed from the Kuna people of Panama, is used to refer to the landmass that colonizers renamed "the Americas." In the language of the Kuna, "Abya Yala" means “mature land,” “living land,” or “blooming land” (Porto-Gonçalves 2011). The term was first used in a political sense during the Second Continental Summit of Indigenous Peoples in Quito, Ecuador in 2004, and has been increasingly embraced by indigenous groups across the continent as a way of reclaiming their relationship to the land.

The decision to use this indigenous term rather than European names like “Latin America” or “America” reflects an effort to reclaim the narrative surrounding this land. Both "Latin" and "America" are names imposed by European colonizers. “Latin” refers back to the Romans of Italy, and "America," from the explorer Amerigo Vespucci, another European who left his mark on the history of this land. These names carry the weight of imperialism, obscuring the rich diversity of cultures and histories that existed long before colonization. The use of indigenous terms like "Abya Yala" helps resist these colonial impositions, acknowledging the land’s original inhabitants and their enduring presence.

It is essential to recognize the tension in using any one term, like "Abya Yala," to describe a land that was once home to numerous peoples, each with their own names for the places they lived. For the Mapuche of southern Chile and Argentina, the land is “Futra Mapu,” meaning "The Great Land," while the Maya refer to it as “K-nà Luumil,” meaning "Our Mother Earth." The choice to adopt "Abya Yala" is both a political and cultural act, one that seeks to unify indigenous peoples under a shared identity while still honoring the diversity within. If we are going to use a term to refer to this large mass of land (currently “America”), why not have the term be one that originates from the land itself?

1.2 THE IMPACT OF COLONIZATION ON INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

The imposition of European names is just one of many ways colonization sought to erase the connection between indigenous peoples and their land. Before the Spanish and other Europeans arrived, the population of Abya Yala was estimated to be between 57-90 million people (Porto-Gonçalves 2011). The introduction of diseases like smallpox and measles, combined with brutal violence and enslavement, led to the catastrophic decimation of these populations. It is estimated that 95% of the indigenous population was wiped out (Diamond 1997), including the Taíno of Hispaniola and the Maya of the Yucatán Peninsula. Those who survived were enslaved, brutalized, and displaced from their ancestral lands.

The population figures for Abya Yala, both before and after European contact, remain highly contested, with significant regional variation in the extent of population decline. In some areas, the devastation was extreme. David Stannard estimates that within two centuries following European contact, the population of the Florida peninsula alone "was reduced by more than 95 percent, primarily by Spanish-introduced diseases [and] also by Spanish violence" (Stannard, 1994). On Hispaniola (present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic, former home to the Taíno) Stannard states that in just twenty-one years following Columbus' arrival, "nearly 8,000,000 people…had been killed by violence, disease, and despair" (Stannard, 1994). Despite these historical estimates, no definitive count exists of how many indigenous lives were lost across Abya Yala due to European invasions. This uncertainty only deepens the grief associated with the staggering loss of life and the vast cultural heritage that disappeared as a result.

1.3 THE ENDURING SHADOW OF COLONIZATION ON INDIGENOUS

The shadow of colonization looms large over this land, casting long-lasting effects on the descendants of those who were displaced. The land itself, once the site of thriving indigenous civilizations, now holds the memory of both destruction and resistance. My ancestors were among those affected, particularly the Taíno, whose culture and history were nearly obliterated by the Spanish. Very little remains of the Taíno people, and the only written accounts of their existence come from the colonizers themselves. The writings of Columbus, Oviedo y Valdés, and others are riddled with biases and inaccuracies, making it difficult to piece together a clear understanding of the Taíno past (Keegan 2013).

The Maya, though severely impacted, managed to preserve more of their cultural identity. Despite the destruction of their cities and sacred texts, some of their codices survived, and the Maya people continue to live on their ancestral land, though their culture has been deeply altered. Of the thousands of books once written by the Maya, only four incomplete codices remain today (Christenson 2013). The loss of these texts symbolizes the broader loss of knowledge, culture, and connection to the land, casting a shadow that continues to affect modern descendants.

1.4 RECLAIMING LAND: DIGITAL ART AS A REFLECTION OF INDIGENOUS TERRITORIES



Figure 1.4.1
"Abya Yala"
Robert Castillo
digital collage
2024





Figure 1.4.2
Detailed view of tribe names in northern Abya Yala

Figure 1.4.3
Detailed view of tribe names in southern Abya Yala

I sought to explore these connections through the piece "Abya Yala," a digital collage that represents the land once inhabited by native groups before the arrival of the Spanish. The collage is built on a piece of cardboard, painted with acrylic to resemble an old map, with a border created with colored pencil in a style reminiscent of maps from the 1500s, the very time period when Abya Yala was invaded. Layered over this physical background is digital art, highlighting the territories these groups once called home. Due to the scale of the land represented, the text labeling the area of each group is not easily legible unless blown up to a larger degree. This choice allows us to reflect on the more general impact of how many groups once existed, and the breadth of land they occupied.





Figure 1.4.4
Screenshot of raw information from the Native Land Digital website

Figure 1.4.5
Detail of screenshot of raw information from the Native Land Digital website

The location of indigenous territories presented in "Abya Yala" is based on the work of Native Land Digital, a nonprofit that works to foster conversations about the history of colonialism and indigenous-settler relations. The maps used in "Abya Yala" are not static. Rather, they reflect both ancient and contemporary understandings of indigenous territories. Many native groups were nomadic, moving across regions throughout history. This mobility challenges the idea of presenting a static image of land occupancy, raising questions about how we visualize indigenous connection to the land over time.

The depiction of static territories on the map brings up a complex question, since many indigenous groups were nomadic, and their movement across the land was fluid. How can we accurately represent such dynamism in a fixed image? Victor Sauca, Research Lead at Native Land Digital, explains that the maps used are a combination of ancient and contemporary sources, reflecting both traditional and modern territories. Some boundaries represent movement, while others result from forced displacement (Sauca 2024). This fluidity only deepens the complexity of the land's history and the indigenous peoples' connection to it.

1.5 THE RESPONSIBILITY TO HEAL HISTORICAL WOUNDS

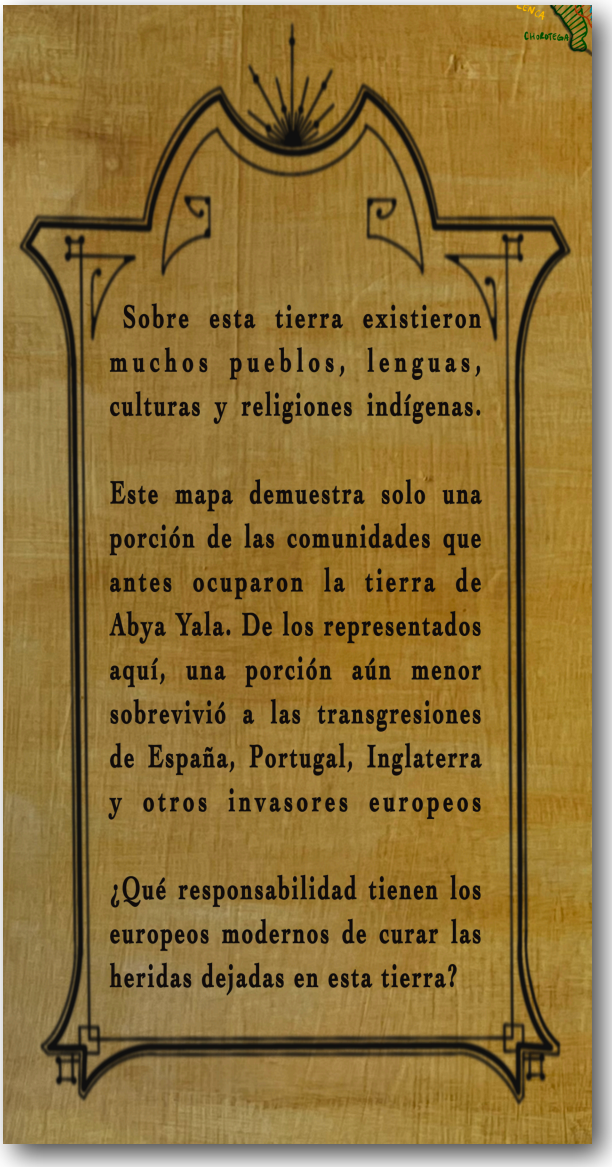


Figure 1.5.1
Detail of text in “Abya Yala”

Within the collage is a text that reads: “Many indigenous peoples, languages, cultures, and religions once existed on this land. This map shows only a portion of the communities that once occupied the land of Abya Yala. Of those represented here, an even smaller portion survived the transgressions of Spain, Portugal, England, and other European invaders. What responsibility do modern Europeans have to heal the wounds left behind on this land?” This inscription, written in Spanish to address the intended audience, serves as both a reminder and a challenge, highlighting the vast scope of destruction wrought by European empires while prompting viewers to consider their role in addressing this enduring legacy. Furthermore, it expands the dialogue to question the responsibilities of European citizens today regarding their consumption of natural resources from countries that have been politically decolonized but remain economically colonized. This critical reflection invites us to consider how past injustices continue to shape present dynamics and emphasizes the importance of accountability in the ongoing process of reconciliation.

This commentary is crucial because it not only acknowledges the vastness of what was lost but also places the responsibility for healing squarely on the shoulders of modern descendants of colonizers. The choice of words “healing the wounds” implies that these historical transgressions are not merely events of the past, but living scars that continue to affect indigenous peoples and their connection to the land. It urges us to move beyond passive acknowledgment to active responsibility, questioning what can be done in the present to address these deep-rooted injustices. The question of modern day responsibility to heal these wounds is discussed later in greater depth in the section “A Path Toward Reconciliation."

1.6 NAYDA COLLAZO-LLORENS: MAPPING COLONIAL DISCONNECTION



Figure 1.6.1
"Geo Dis/connect 5"
Nayda Collazo-Llorens
2020
The Latinx Project



Figure 1.6.2
Detail of "Geo Dis/connect 5"
Nayda Collazo-Llorens
2020
The Latinx Project

Nayda Collazo-Llorens is a contemporary artist who uses maps and cartography to address the topic of colonization and its lasting impacts. Related to her Puerto Rican roots, her series "Geo Dis/connect" addresses the foreign renaming and reconstruction of Caribbean land and territorial lines. Collazo-Llorens' work "designs disassembled representations of colonial territories that, through its form, saturates its self-referential meaning and makes evident the willful disconnection between real and living territories and mapping" (Rivera 2024). Her approach dismantles the colonial narrative that maps have historically reinforced, inviting viewers to question whose perspectives these representations reflect and whose realities they erase.

1.7 THE ROLE OF “ABYA YALA” IN INDIGENOUS IDENTITY

The digital collage “Abya Yala” engages with these themes, reasserting indigenous perspectives that have been overshadowed by colonial maps and place names. By using indigenous terminology and representing territories as they were understood by native populations, “Abya Yala” attempts to restore a sense of identity and belonging disconnected by colonial cartography. Like Collazo-Llorens, I use the medium to question the imposition of foreign names and borders, reclaiming a visual and cultural narrative that aligns with a general desire and interest of those like myself with ancestry native to Abya Yala to connect and identify with the land and culture of our ancestors.

The digital collage “Abya Yaya” is a reminder that the shadow of the empire still lingers across Abya Yala, affecting both the land and the people who once thrived upon it. It is dedicated to all those who perished at the hands of European invaders and asks us to consider what it means to live in the shadow of such an empire and how we might begin to heal.

2. IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE

Language serves as one of the most profound tools through which cultural groups construct and express their identities, shaping how communities communicate, organize their societies, and preserve their histories. Before European invasion, Abya Yala was a vibrant land of diverse languages and dialects, each inextricably linked to the communities that spoke them. These languages carried not only communication but also deep reservoirs of culture, tradition, and history. These linguistic connections were fractured with colonization, with some languages' existence threatened and others completely erased.

2.1 THE RESILIENCE OF MAYA LANGUAGE AND THE LOSS OF TAÍNO HERITAGE

The resilience of the Maya language offers a testament to this survival. The Maya resisted Spanish conquest for over two centuries, holding out until 1697, when the last Mayan capital, Nojpetén (also known as Noh Petén or Tayasal), succumbed to Spanish forces (Baudez and Picasso 1992). This island city, now Flores in Lake Petén Itzá in northern Guatemala, symbolizes the enduring strength of Maya culture and language. Today, over six million people across Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador continue to speak various Mayan dialects, such as Kaqchikel and K'iche' (Babbel.com and Garces 2023). The Yucatec Maya dialect, the dialect my father speaks, is the most widely spoken.

While the endurance of the Maya language is a source of pride, the loss of the Taíno language reflects the painful shadow of colonization's erasure. Schroeder et al. (2018) note that "the ancestors of the Taíno are thought to have been Arawakan speakers who entered the Caribbean from South America." These communities reached the Caribbean at least 12,000 years ago, with some evidence suggesting even earlier dates (Naranjo Orovio et al. 2019). But in the two centuries following Columbus' arrival, the Taíno population and its language suffered near extinction. Today, "the language of the Taíno [has] ceased to be actively spoken" (Brito 2004). Only a few words, such as "hammock," "tobacco," and "hurricane," survive in modern language as remnants of the Taíno heritage. This linguistic loss creates a disconnect, leaving me grasping at fragments, unable to connect fully with this aspect of my heritage.

Despite these challenges, efforts to preserve the Maya language persist. In 2019, the Congress of Yucatán approved a measure mandating Maya language instruction in schools (Congresos de México, 2019). This initiative marks a significant step toward protecting the language from total loss and actively challenges the legacy of colonialism. However, it is essential to acknowledge that the marginalization of indigenous languages and cultures in modern Mexico, which has been independent since 1821, has often been perpetuated by mestizos within an independent nation. By sustaining the Maya language for future generations, this initiative seeks to revitalize cultural heritage while addressing the ongoing struggle against the marginalization faced by indigenous communities in contemporary society.

2.2 THE NUANCES OF CULTURAL EXPRESSION THROUGH LANGUAGE



Figure 2.2.1
"Cinco 'Idiomas'"
(Five "Languages")
Robert Castillo
digital image
2023

Through the comic artwork “Cinco ‘Idiomas’” (“Five ‘Languages’”) I explore how language constructs cultural identity and how minor linguistic variations can serve as markers of cultural uniqueness. Studying in Valencia, Spain, I became acutely aware of subtle inflections that signify belonging to the Valencian linguistic community. For example, the local pronunciation of “hasta luego,” with a guttural emphasis on the last syllable of “luego,” differentiates Valencian speakers from those who speak Català or Mallorquí. And even at this, the difference goes mostly unnoticed to those from outside the region. Through many conversations with Valencian speakers, I sought to identify the key differences between Valencian and Catalan, but the only definitive distinction I could find was the word for "carrot." In Valencian, it is “carlota,” whereas in Catalan, it is “pastanaga.” While there may be other subtle differences, this raises an important question: is this enough to call them separate and distinct languages?

Linguistic identity often hinges on subtle distinctions that serve as symbols of cultural pride. This phenomenon highlights the privilege of engaging in discussions about linguistic nuances when one’s language remains intact. For those of us whose ancestral languages have been nearly erased, the focus shifts from dialectical differences to the more pressing question of whether the language itself can survive. My access to the Mayan language is minimal, and the Taíno language is entirely lost. This reality reflects the broader impact of colonialism, where the hegemony of dominant languages has often been imposed by force, allowing their speakers to exercise power over others. For many, the survival of their linguistic heritage is the true challenge, overshadowing the evolution of minor distinctions. In this context, the struggle for language preservation becomes a critical act of resistance against the enduring shadows of colonialism.

2.3 LANGUAGE AS A VESSEL OF CULTURAL IDENTITY



Figure 2.3.1
With my father at the ruins of El Rey in Cancún Mexico, 1992

The personal significance of "Cinco 'Idiomas'" in my journey with language and identity runs deep. In the image's bottom panel, a child, symbolizing myself, stands beside an elder representing my father. For years, I have asked my father to teach me Mayan, or to speak it to my nephews in the hope that they might absorb even a small part of our heritage. He has resisted each of my requests. My father and his peers, who attended Spanish Catholic schools in the Yucatán, were physically punished for speaking Mayan. This punishment left him with a deep aversion to the language, a response that only deepened after moving to the United States.

A recent interaction in October 2024 underscores the enduring impact of these experiences during his schooling. During a dinner with my father and a family friend, I shared that my father speaks Mayan. When our friend expressed curiosity to know more, my father responded immediately and bitterly, "they tried to beat that out of us." The conversation ended there. Assimilation in the United States demanded embracing English, the colonizers' language. As a result, my father and I converse in English, not Spanish or Mayan. This disconnection, a direct outcome of Spanish colonialism in Abya Yala, casts a shadow over my connection to my ancestral cultures.

It is important to note that my father's teachers, though enforcing Spanish-speaking norms, may themselves have been mestizos born in Mexico, not necessarily from Spain. The key point here is that the desire to eradicate indigenous languages took root during the Spanish and other European invasions of Abya Yala. Still, it is essential to avoid romanticizing pre-colonial indigenous experiences. Conflicts and linguistic impositions existed among groups native to Abya Yala as well. For example, as the Incan empire expanded, they imposed their language, Quechua (also known as qheshwa simi) onto other groups, despite the Incan royalty having their own their native language, Chimú (Noble, 2007). The term "Quechua" was later popularized by the Spanish, who also referred to it as "runa simi" (people's speech) to distinguish it from their own "kastilla simi" (Castilian speech) (Noble, 2007).

The story of the Incas reflects a broader pattern repeated across Abya Yala and beyond. What I find critical is the inherent value of preserving a language on or near the land where it developed. When a language is spoken on the land of its origin, it retains nuances that reflect the people's relationship to that landscape and history. These details are not simply linguistic relics that connect us to the land and to the cultural ecosystem in which the language evolved. This connection is what I seek to honor in "Cinco 'Idiomas'," highlighting not just the survival of language but its integral role in cultural continuity and identity.

2.4 COMIC ART AS A TOOL FOR INDIGENOUS RECLAMATION





Figure 2.4.1
Cover for Indigenous Voices 1
Kyle Charles
2020
Marvel

Figure 2.4.2
Cover for Phoenix Song Echo
Kyle Charles
2021
Marvel

Choosing the comic book format for "Cinco 'Idiomas'" was a deliberate decision. Prior to this project, I hadn't explored this style, but I embraced it for its capacity to express layered and complex ideas through minimal text and impactful visuals. Comics are often linked to youth, fantasy, and adventure, and depicting myself as a child in the final panel evokes a sense of both personal and cultural loss. In many ways, the shadow of colonization has taken this connection, creating a void where cultural knowledge and language could have flourished.

The work of Cree comic artist Kyle Charles similarly emphasizes reclaiming indigenous voices. Charles, from the Whitefish Lake First Nation, works with mainstream platforms like Marvel to portray indigenous characters with authenticity. Reflecting on the need for indigenous voices, Charles explains, “If we want it done properly, we have to do it ourselves… I don’t want to sit on the sidelines while somebody else scores touchdowns using our stories and our culture” (CBS News: The National, 2020). His approach resonates with "Cinco ‘Idiomas’,” where I employ comic art to confront and reclaim my indigenous heritage, addressing the linguistic disconnection from my Taíno and Mayan ancestors.

Charles also emphasizes empowering future generations, saying, “All I care about are the young indigenous eyes that are going to see my content on screen” (Whyte, 2021). In “Cinco 'Idiomas’,” my aim is similarly to reach audiences who may share the experience of cultural and linguistic loss due to colonization. Both Charles’ and my work emphasize the importance of reclaiming identity through visual storytelling, transforming mainstream formats into spaces for authentic indigenous expression.

2.5 A TRIBUTE TO CULTURAL RESILIENCE AND IDENTITY

“Cinco ‘Idiomas”’ is a reflection on language and identity as well as a personal expression of the lasting shadows of colonialism that shape my connection to my ancestors, heritage, and self. This work confronts the impact of language suppression, evident in my father’s reluctance to pass down Mayan, highlighting colonization's rupture of cultural roots and belonging.

Using the comic format, “Cinco ‘Idiomas’” bridges themes of youth, fragility, and resilience, depicting my father and me as symbols of cultural inheritance and loss. While some communities, unlike the Taíno, retain linguistic survival, others are left piecing together fragments of heritage as a result of the Spanish invasions of Abya Yala. This work is a tribute and challenge to honor those who have preserved their native languages amidst overcasting shadows and to inspire a reclamation and embracing of what remains.

3. IDENTITY & MUSIC

Music is a profound expression of culture, serving as a reflection of a group's beliefs and traditions, and a manifestation of their interaction with the surrounding world. Through the instruments they create and the sounds they produce, people articulate their identity in a way that transcends words. Just as colonization cast long shadows over the land and language of Abya Yala, it also sought to erase the music and instruments that connected indigenous peoples to their spiritual and cultural roots. While there is virtually no record of the musical traditions of the Taíno, the history of Mayan music, which spans more than 2,000 years, provides a glimpse into the role music played in their society (Stacy 2014).

3.1 REVIVING THE HOMPAX

The hompax (sometimes referred to as the hompak, hom-tah, or Mayan trumpet) is one of the instruments that survived this shadow, although barely. The hompax is a long, hollow tube made from wood, clay, or gourds (Katz 2018). The instrument, nearly lost during the Spanish invasion, survives today thanks to fragments of pictorial and sculptural evidence, with only minimal artifact findings to support its historical usage (Stöckli 2011). The hompax, like many other cultural elements, was nearly extinguished by the forces of colonization that swept through Abya Yala, erasing vast portions of indigenous knowledge and tradition.

Due to the lack of recordings and the destruction of so much cultural heritage during the invasion, we can only speculate on how the hompax was traditionally played. However, efforts to revive this instrument began in the 1970s, when the Martínez family initiated its recovery (Ángel 2016). Today, musicians across Mexico are working to bring the hompax back to life. Ángel Cruz, a contemporary Mexican musician who has dedicated himself to this task, notes that the technique used by modern hompax players is borrowed from Aboriginal didgeridoo musicians, given the similarities between the two instruments (Ángel 2016). Based on archaeological research, it is believed that the hompax was not used for melodic or harmonic intricacies but rather to create "sonic landscapes"—an immersive, almost otherworldly experience (Katz 2018).

3.2 REVIVING THE HOMPAX THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHY



Figure 3.2.1
"Sounds Not Forgotten"
Image 1
digital photography
2023



Figure 3.2.2
“Sounds Not Forgotten”
Image 2
digital photography
2023



Figure 3.2.3
“Sounds Not Forgotten”
Image 3
digital photography
2023

Figure 3.2.4
Acre Musicians 1, Brazil
Ivan Sawyer
2021



In the photographs that comprise “Sounds Not Forgotten,” the hompax takes center stage. The instrument represented in this series of images is one I purchased during a trip to Mexico. In the summer of 2023, my father and I visited Bonampak, an ancient Mayan city, where the only known Mayan mural exists today. The mural depicts musicians playing the hompax, among other instruments. In the photographs of “Sounds Not Forgotten,” (taken by Sahira Llivipuma), I am shown holding and playing the hompax in a strong, empowered pose across the three images. This visual representation is not just about the physical act of playing an instrument, it symbolizes the resilience required to revive a cultural legacy nearly lost to colonization. These empowered stances reflect the determination to ensure that the music and the cultural identity tied to it remain relevant in the present day.

Figure 3.2.5
Acre Musicians 2, Brazil
Ivan Sawyer
2021



Ivan Sawyer's photographic work resonates with the themes explored in "Sounds Not Forgotten," capturing the cultural depth of Abya Yala through indigenous music and tradition. As the founder and director of Voces de Amerikua, a media organization dedicated to amplifying indigenous voices, Sawyer works to "support and promote the voices of indigenous peoples of North, Central, and South America and their efforts to protect their Culture, Land, and Rights, using impact campaigns, social media, and documentaries. Voces de Amerikua collaborates with musicians, creators, and the communities themselves to share the reality of environmental and human rights challenges these communities face" (Sawyer, n.d.). Through his photographs, Sawyer captures indigenous musicians with their instruments or engaged in music-making, preserving the vital connection between music and cultural identity. His subjects, often adorned in traditional clothing, create a vivid portrayal of indigenous cultural expression, bridging visual and auditory heritage. In "Sounds Not Forgotten," I echo this form of expression by wearing a feathered headdress, underscoring the hompax's connection to indigenous music and symbolizing a shared commitment to honoring and revitalizing this cultural legacy.

Figure 3.2.6
Bonampak, with entrance to murals highlighted



Figure 3.2.7
Myself with the Bonampak Murals 2021



3.3 REVIVING THE HOMPAX THROUGH MODERN RECORDINGS



Figure 3.3.1
QR to listen to
“Dz'ibil Tialin Sukuùn Elias”

For several years, I have collaborated with Daniel Lima, a musician in Mexico City who specializes in the creation and performance of native instruments. Dani is one of the many musicians who has worked to breathe life back into the hompax, a symbol of cultural perseverance against the shadows of the empire. In 2022, we released an album titled “Contempétnico,” a fusion of contemporary and ethnic sounds. Dani recorded his hompax performances, and I layered harmonies and melodies using digital music software and live instruments. Two of the songs feature poetry read in the Mayan language, with my father as one of the guest speakers. In 2021, my father’s brother passed away from COVID-19, and I asked him to write a poem in Mayan in memory of his brother. This poem became the song “Dz'ibil Tialin Sukuùn Elias” ("Letter To My Late Brother Elias”). The song can be heard by scanning the QR code in Figure 3.3.1 where the lyrics can be found in Mayan, Spanish, and English.

Music composition has been an integral part of my artistic practice since 2015. In 2021, I began collaborating with Adolfo Haas, a friend in Mexico who works as a translator of public service announcements from Spanish to Mayan. My collaborations with my father, Dani, and Adolfo are efforts to reconnect with and preserve the cultural heritage of my ancestors. The photographs of “Sounds Not Forgotten” are my way of honoring the hompax and ensuring that the music of the Maya remains vibrant and alive in a modern context.

Creating music in this way has allowed me to bridge the gap between past and present, connecting the ancient with the contemporary. However, this process is also a confrontation with the shadows cast by colonization. The fact that we do not know how the hompax was originally played, and that we must rely on interpretations and guesses, speaks to the deep cultural erasure caused by the Spanish invasions. It is a reminder that much of what was once known is now lost in the shadows, and what remains has been pieced together from fragments.

The hompax is a perfect metaphor for this broader experience. Its long, hollow form creates sound by channeling breath, a life force, that passes through it. The instrument, nearly silenced by colonization, now resounds again, thanks to the efforts of those who refuse to let this part of Mayan identity disappear. Just as the hompax's sound echoes through time, so too does the music it represents, connecting me to my ancestors while forging a path forward.

3.3.1 MAYAN MUSIC IN POP CULTURE



Figure 3.3.1.1
Pat Boy
Quadratín Yucatán

A contemporary musician also working to preserve the Mayan language is Jesús Pat Chablé, better known by his rapper name Pat Boy. In Mayan, "pat" means "to give shape to something" and Pat Boy states that his "last name comes from [his] Mayan ancestor, Jacinto Pat, who was part of the war of the caste, of the most rebellious group, and here we continue, fighting with our voice and vindicating our culture, our language" (Vargas 2022). Pat Boy's use of rap as a vehicle for the Mayan language reflects a fusion of tradition and modernity, similar to Contempoétnico, showcasing how indigenous voices continue to assert their relevance in a global context. His song "Laayli' Kuxa'ano'one'" (which translates to "We are Also Alive") was selected to be included in the soundtrack for the 2022 Marvel film "Black Panther: Return to Wakanda," underscoring the resilience of the Mayan language, positioning it as a symbol of cultural survival as well as an active, thriving form of expression. This resurgence aligns with the revival efforts surrounding instruments like the hompax, highlighting the determination to reclaim and reimagine our musical heritage for contemporary audiences. Through artists like Pat Boy, the vibrancy of Mayan identity continues to resonate, serving as a reminder that music is a powerful tool to help construct cultural memory and future possibilities.

3.4 RESONATING HERITAGE

“Sounds Not Forgotten" is a celebration of the culture of indigenous music through photography, and a testament to resilience, revival, and the transformative power of cultural memory. The hompax, brought back from near obscurity, and the work of artists like Pat Boy Maya and Ivan Sawyer, illuminate a path toward reconnecting with the past while engaging with the present. This work embodies a commitment to honoring indigenous musical heritage, bridging ancient and contemporary forms of expression to reclaim what colonization sought to silence. In creating both “Sounds Not Forgotten” and “Contempoétnico,” I strive to assert that the sounds, instruments, and languages of Abya Yala are living and thriving parts of history, essential to a future where the stories and traditions of my ancestors continue to shape and enrich how I identity with these lineages.

4. IDENTITY & RELIGION

Religious practices and ceremonies form a vital part of how cultures connect with the Divine and shape their identity. For the Maya, religious rituals were intricately tied to their cultural and spiritual life, often involving the use of psychedelic substances. These substances were not merely tools for altered consciousness; they were gateways to profound spiritual experiences that connected the Maya to their gods, the cosmos, and the natural world. Yet, like many other aspects of indigenous life, these spiritual practices were almost erased by the shadow of colonization, which sought to dismantle indigenous belief systems and replace them with Christianity.

4.1 THE TAÍNO AND MAYA RELIGIOUS



Figure 4.1.1
Page 45 of "Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán"

Almost nothing is known about the religious practices of the Taíno. The severe decimation of their population following Columbus' arrival and the subsequent colonization meant that much of their cultural and religious heritage was lost. In 1494, Fray Ramón Pané visited a Macorix village in northern Hispaniola and recorded the only written account of native mythology (Keegan 2013). However, the native language of this village was neither Taíno nor intelligible to Taíno speakers. While Pané's account is the sole surviving record, it would be a disservice to assume that it accurately reflects Taíno beliefs. This loss of religious knowledge exemplifies the shadows of imperialism and the obliteration of an entire cultural identity, leaving descendants like me with little or no ability to connect with the spiritual practices of my ancestors.

The Maya were more fortunate in preserving elements of their religious culture, thanks in part to their sophisticated writing system. According to Christensen (2013), "Until about five hundred years ago, the Maya were the most literate people in the Americas, preserving their history and culture with a sophisticated hieroglyphic script in hundreds of folded screen books." These books (or codices), written on bark paper and stone, provided a rich account of Mayan religious practices, theology, and worldview. During the Spanish invasions,

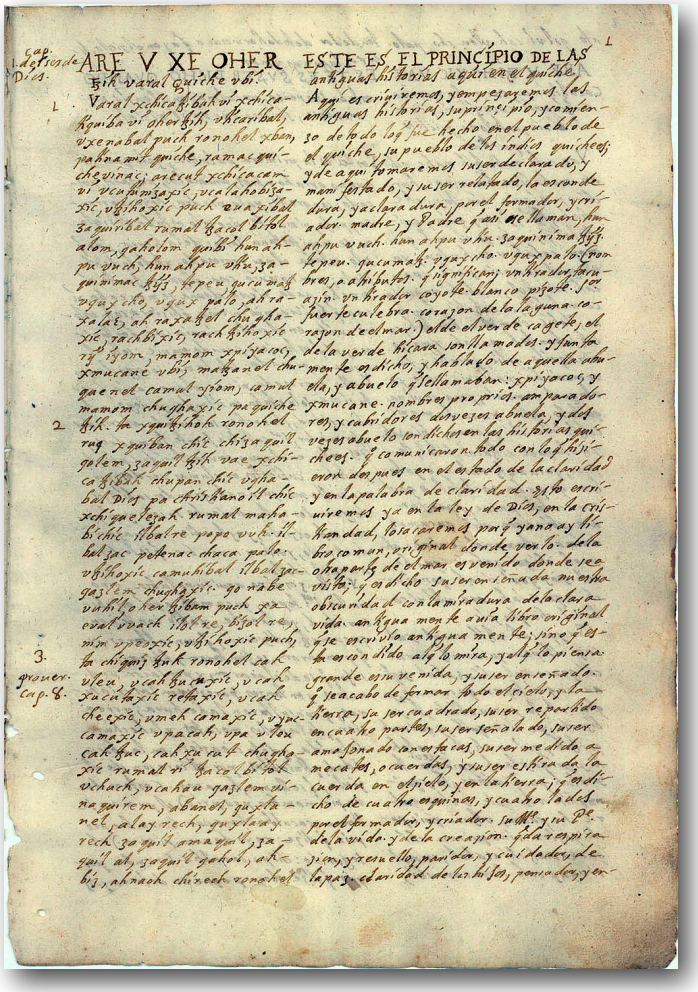


Figure 4.1.2
The oldest surviving written account of the Popol Vuh
Francisco Ximénez
1701

these books were targeted for destruction in a brutal attempt to eradicate indigenous religion. Friar Diego de Landa, a Spanish bishop in Maní, Yucatán, famously led the charge in burning these sacred texts. He boasted in his 1566 book "Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán" that, "we found a large number of books of these characters, and as they contained nothing in which there were not to be seen superstition and lies of the devil, we burned them all, which [the Maya] regretted to an amazing degree and which caused them much affliction" (Christensen 2013).

Despite these devastating losses, the Maya managed to preserve some of their religious practices through the combination of writings known as the Popol Vuh, often referred to as the Mayan Bible. After the Spanish invasion, members of Maya nobility transcribed their sacred texts into a modified Latin script in an effort to safeguard their cultural legacy. The Popol Vuh stands as the most important surviving example of these transcriptions, created by anonymous Quiché Maya aristocrats in Guatemala. This book, along with other surviving codices, offers insight into the spiritual practices of the Maya, including their use of psychedelic substances.

4.1.1 AZTEC RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

The Maya were not alone in experiencing this cultural and spiritual eclipse. Many other religious cultures of Abya Yala, including the Aztecs, met similar fates. Christensen (2013) notes that "for the ancient Aztecs, the highest form of sacred communication was poetry, what they called xochicuicatl ('flower-song')," which were "beautiful hymns meant to be recited orally, often to musical accompaniment." Several Spanish missionaries, including Friar Andrés de Olmos and Friar Bernardino de Sahagún, sought to preserve accounts of Aztec history, poetry, and theology in Latin script, compiling information from elderly Aztec nobility who had committed these traditions to memory. Despite their efforts, these writings were suppressed for fear that they would be used to revive indigenous religious practices. King Phillip II ordered in 1577, "you are warned absolutely not to allow any person to write concerning the superstitions and ways of life of these Indians in any language, for this is not proper to God's service and to ours" (Christensen 2013). Thus, the shadow of empire fell not only over the land and the people but also over their spiritual lives, cutting them off from their traditions.

4.2 THE ROLE OF ENTHEOGENS IN MAYAN CEREMONIES



Figure 4.2.1
Guatemalan stone effigies

Across Abya Yala and the globe, many cultures have used psychedelic substances as a part of their religious practices. Archaeological findings have uncovered mushroom effigies in places as far-reaching as the Sahara, Siberia, Scandinavia, and India (Samorini 2012). These depictions, often engraved on rocks or carved from stone (Figure 4.2.1), suggest the sacred role entheogens played in creating altered states of consciousness, connecting practitioners with the divine. In Mayan culture, mushrooms, along with other psychoactive substances such as peyote, ololiuhqui, balché, pulque, and toloache, were central to religious ceremonies (Carod-Artal 2015). The Mayans also used bufotoxins and performed ritual enemas with these substances (Figure 4.2.2) held in dark caves that were considered to be entrances to the underworld (Carod-Artal 2015). In these underground ceremonies, where the light barely penetrated, the Maya sought access to spiritual realms beyond ordinary experiences that become illuminated by the visionary effects of these powerful substances.



Figure 4.2.2
Mayan ritual enema
Justin Kerr
The Maya Vase Book, Vol.2

Various depictions of mushroom consumption appear in Mayan imagery. Bernard Lowy points out an image in the Madrid Codex where a Mayan figure, painted in black, offers a mushroom to another (Figure 4.2.3). Lowy suggests that the mushroom offered is Amanita muscaria, known for its warty caps (Guzmán 2003). There are approximately 230 species of hallucinogenic mushrooms in the Psilocybe genus, 54 of which grow in Mexico (Carod-Artal 2015). A. muscaria is commonly found in Guatemala and southern Mexico, where the Quiché Maya refer to it as "kaquiljá" (thunderbolt) and "itzel ocox" (evil mushroom) (Guzmán 2003). Lowy also notes that several pages of the Dresden Codex depict gods in trance states induced by psychedelic mushrooms (Figure 4.2.5) (Lowy 1980).

Figure 4.2.3
Scene from the Madrid Codex of a being giving mushrooms to another



Figure 4.2.4
Madrid Codex on display at the Museo de Las Americas, Madrid

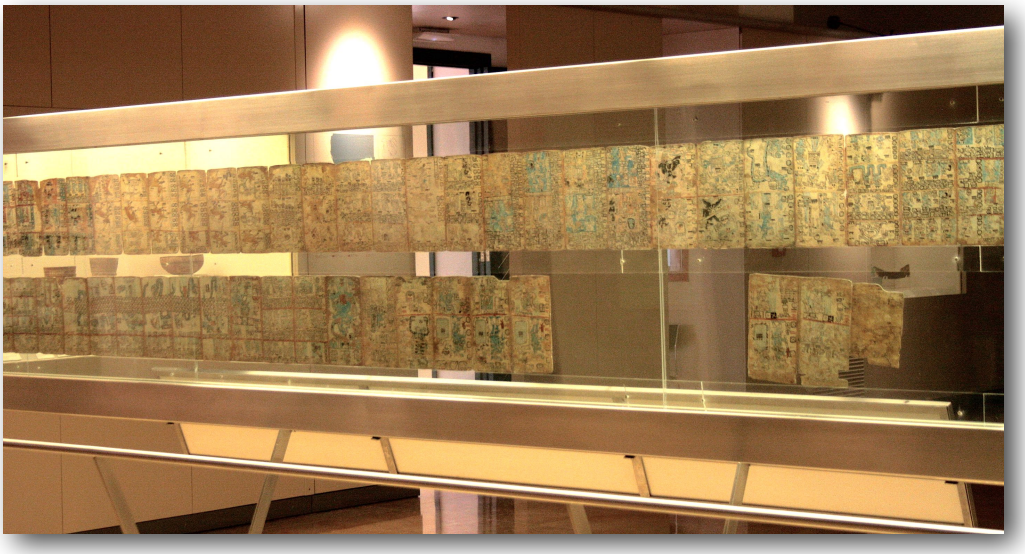




Figure 4.2.5
The Dresden Codex, Page 15
United States Library of Congress

4.3 REPRESENTING MAYAN RELIGIOUS PRACTICES THROUGH STONE SCULPTURE







Figure 4.3.1
"Maya Mycelial"
Robert Castillo
Carrara Marble
2022

Figure 4.3.2
"Maya Mycelial"
side view

Figure 4.3.3
"Maya Mycelial"
top view

In my stone sculpting practice, I have previously explored the role of psychedelics in Mayan religious traditions. I began sculpting in January 2022 and by the following year, I had completed a Carrara marble sculpture, titled "Maya Mycelial," which pays homage to my ancestors' use of mushrooms in spiritual ceremonies. This piece depicts the face of a Mayan figure, with mushrooms emerging from his head and evolving into a complex fungal network that wraps around his cranium (Figures 4.3.1, 4.3.2, 4.3.3). This imagery draws attention to modern studies, discussed further in this section, that reveal the effects of neuroplasticity associated with consuming psychedelic mushrooms, illuminating the potential for cognitive and spiritual transformation through these substances. "Maya Mycelial" is now housed in the permanent collection of the Nerman Museum of Contemporary Art in Overland Park, Kansas, United States.



Figure 4.3.4
“The Unknown Voyager”
Robert Castillo
Zaragoza alabaster
37x37x55cm
2024

Figure 4.3.5
"The Unknown Voyager"
side view



Figure 4.3.6
"The Unknown Voyager"
rear view





Figure 4.3.7
Working on “The Unknown Voyager”

The sculpture “The Unknown Voyager” (Figures 4.3.4, 4.3.5, 4.3.6) is a continuation of using stone sculpture as a means to identity with the religious cultures of my ancestors. Crafted specifically for this project, this sculpture is made from alabaster sourced from Zaragoza and features a creature holding a bouquet of three mushrooms. The form is intentionally ambiguous, evoking a blend of human and monkey features rather than mirroring any currently existing life form. While “Maya Mycelial” centers the human face as a focal point of connection to psychedelics, “The Unknown Voyager” draws on and references ancient Mayan sculptures of anthropomorphized figures that resemble both human and non-human shapes (Figures 4.3.8, 4.3.9). This work also references the creatures depicted in Mayan codices, particularly figures that appear as beings between human and alien, offering mushrooms to a receptive human (Figure 4.2.3). The title, “The Unknown Voyager,” encapsulates a layered meaning. “Voyager” references the journey one undertakes when consuming psychedelics, while “Unknown” reflects the mystery surrounding Mayan culture’s potential trajectory, forever altered by the Spanish invasions.





Figure 4.3.8
Anthropomorphized Mayan sculpture 1
Palenque, Mexico

Figure 4.3.9
Anthropomorphized Mayan sculpture 2
Palenque, Mexico

The process of creating this sculpture followed a fairly traditional approach. When sculpting stone, I generally prefer to use hand tools, as they allow for a deeper, more intimate connection with the material, a vital aspect of my creative process. However, I also embraced the opportunity to explore the use of power tools during the creation of this piece. To begin, I used a radial tool to remove large sections of stone that wouldn't be part of the final sculpture, and in some instances, I employed a pneumatic hammer to expedite the removal of certain areas.

The block of alabaster used in this sculpture was purchased from Jaime Chornet Roig, a professor in the sculpture department at the Universitat Politècnica de València. Jaime originally acquired the stone from Zaragoza, a region renowned for its alabaster mining (Gobierno de Aragón, 2018). It is particularly thought-provoking to use a stone from a land historically linked to colonizers in a piece that seeks to honor and reflect on the experiences of those affected by colonization. The eucalyptus wood base, recycled from the Rio Turia in Valencia, further connects the piece to both the Old World and the New. In this way, "The Unknown Voyager" becomes a symbol of resilience, serving as a reminder that, despite the erasure and shadows cast by colonial legacies, aspects of indigenous identity continue to persist and inspire. This piece embodies my own journey as a mestizo, navigating the complexities of heritage and identity within the context of historical power dynamics.

4.4 THE INTERSECTION OF SCIENCE, PSYCHEDELICS, AND SPIRITUALITY

Modern investigations into psychedelics have begun to confirm their ability to induce mystical and spiritual experiences, providing a link between ancient religious practices and contemporary science. Studies like Kometer's (2015) on psilocybin-induced spiritual experiences show that these substances can enhance insight into life and existence by synchronizing neuronal oscillations. This research suggests that the ancient Maya were not merely seeking altered states of consciousness but were tapping into deeper spiritual realms that modern science is only beginning to understand. As Carhart-Harris (2017) and Zhou (2024) demonstrate, psilocybin, through increasing neuroplasticity (the brain's ability to change and adapt through the formation of new neural connections), produces rapid and sustained antidepressant effects. This may suggest that these ancient practices held knowledge far ahead of their time, and may have influenced the Mayan's advanced studies into mathematics, architecture, and astrology.

As we explore the potential benefits of psychedelics today, we also uncover the shadows of colonization and the knowledge that was nearly obliterated. The Maya understood the profound power of these substances, using them not only to connect with the Divine but to enhance their cultural, spiritual, and intellectual growth. The fact that this knowledge was nearly lost highlights the destructive impact of the empire's shadow, and the journey to reclaim it is an ongoing act of cultural survival.

5. A PATH TOWARD RECONCILIATION

As this project has explored, the legacy of the Spanish Empire has cast enduring shadows over Abya Yala, its indigenous peoples, and those of us with ancestry related to the both the cultural loss and resilience. From the outset, this work has defined identity and culture as frameworks for understanding the immense fragmentation wrought by colonization, seeking to clarify how the Spanish invasion left cultural connections teetering on the brink of existence. This project has been an attempt to navigate these shadows, exploring the limits and possibilities of reconnecting with my Taíno and Mayan heritage, identities deeply tied to land, language, music, and spiritual practice. To find a path toward reconciliation, we must collectively acknowledge and confront the historical injustices of colonization while actively working to revitalize and honor the rich cultural legacies that endure within our communities.

5.1 MODERN EXAMPLES OF CLASSISM AND RACISM

My time in Spain further underscored the layers of discrimination that persist within contemporary Spanish society, where echoes of colonial hierarchies shape social dynamics. Classism and racism pervade, affecting interactions even within European communities. Northern Europeans often disparage southern Europeans, sometimes using the derogatory term "P.I.G.S." to refer to people from Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Spain. Within Spain, regional prejudices persist and is expressed in various ways. Murcia is joked about as "non-existent," while regions like Galicia, the Basque Country, and Catalan-speaking areas are belittled based on linguistic and nationalistic differences. Racism, too, reflects Spain's colonial history, especially in the absence of public memorials or institutions acknowledging the transatlantic slave trade, as Naranjo et al. (2019) point out. Growing up in the United States, where racial discrimination is pervasive, I often faced prejudice due to my brown skin and ambiguous ethnic appearance. In both Spain and the U.S., legacies of colonization and slavery persist, casting long shadows over perceptions of race and belonging in modern society.

During my time in Spain, I encountered numerous instances where Spaniards subtly, and sometimes overtly, distanced themselves from the responsibility of reconciliation, often by downplaying the colonial legacy. In one instance, a professor used the term "disappeared" to refer to the drastic decline in indigenous populations, sidestepping the brutal realities of violence and systemic erasure underlying those losses. In another conversation, a peer deflected any discussion of Spain's accountability by pointing to what she deemed England's even graver impact on Abya Yala, as if one nation's actions could diminish another's responsibility. I also faced direct expressions of prejudice where in one instance, a group of peers, either unaware of or indifferent to my heritage, openly belittled Mexicans directly in front of me, questioning Mexicans' intelligence. These moments underscored the insidious ways denial and evasion persist, echoing Spain's historical reluctance to confront its colonial past and stalling the path toward true reconciliation.

These reflections reveal how deeply the Spanish invasions have affected my ability to connect and shape identities with the cultures of my ancestors in Abya Yala. Thus, Reconciliation is essential to illuminate these shadows and to begin healing the scars left by the invasions.

5.2 ENGRAVING AS A MEANS TO ADDRESS THE NEED FOR RECONCILIATION

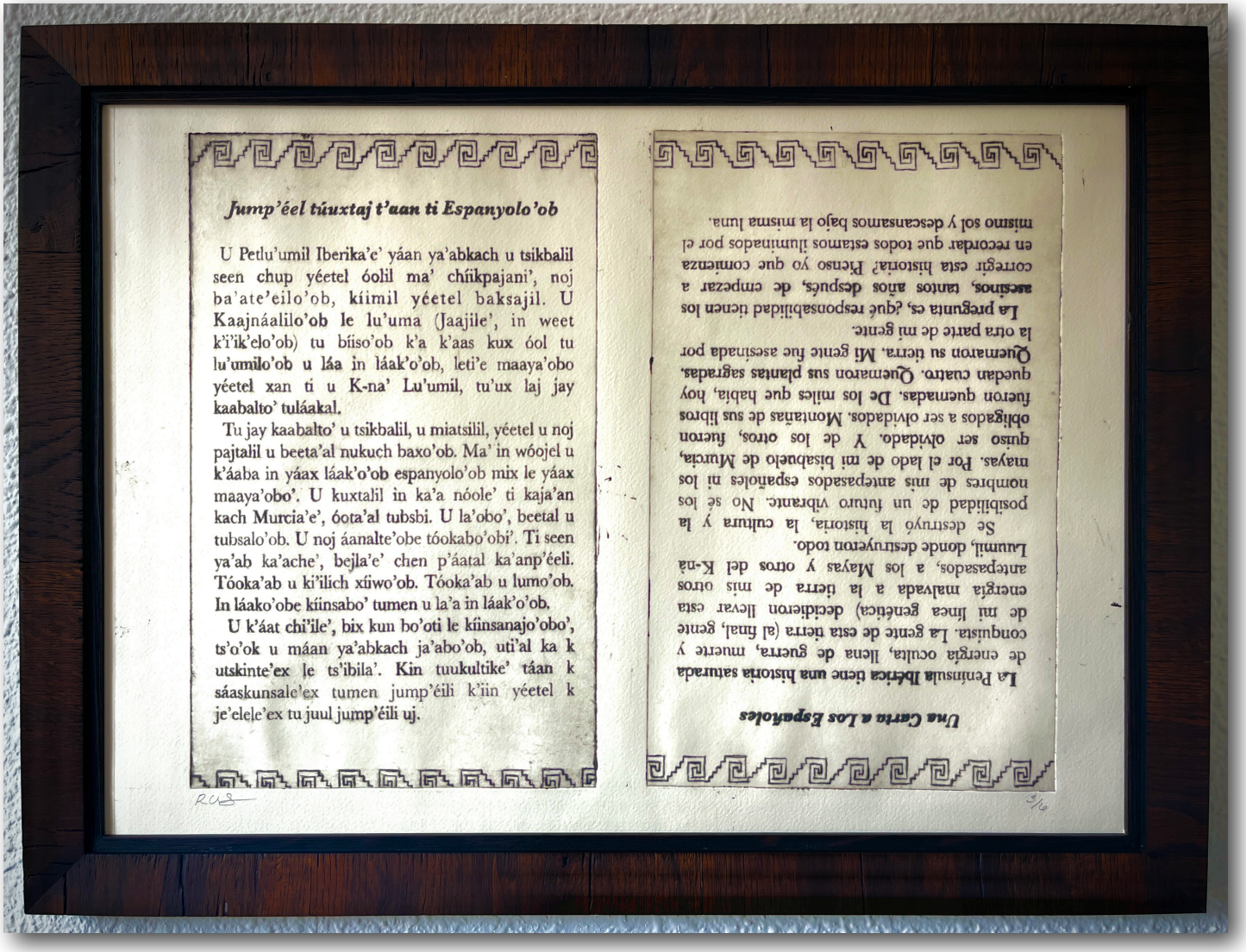
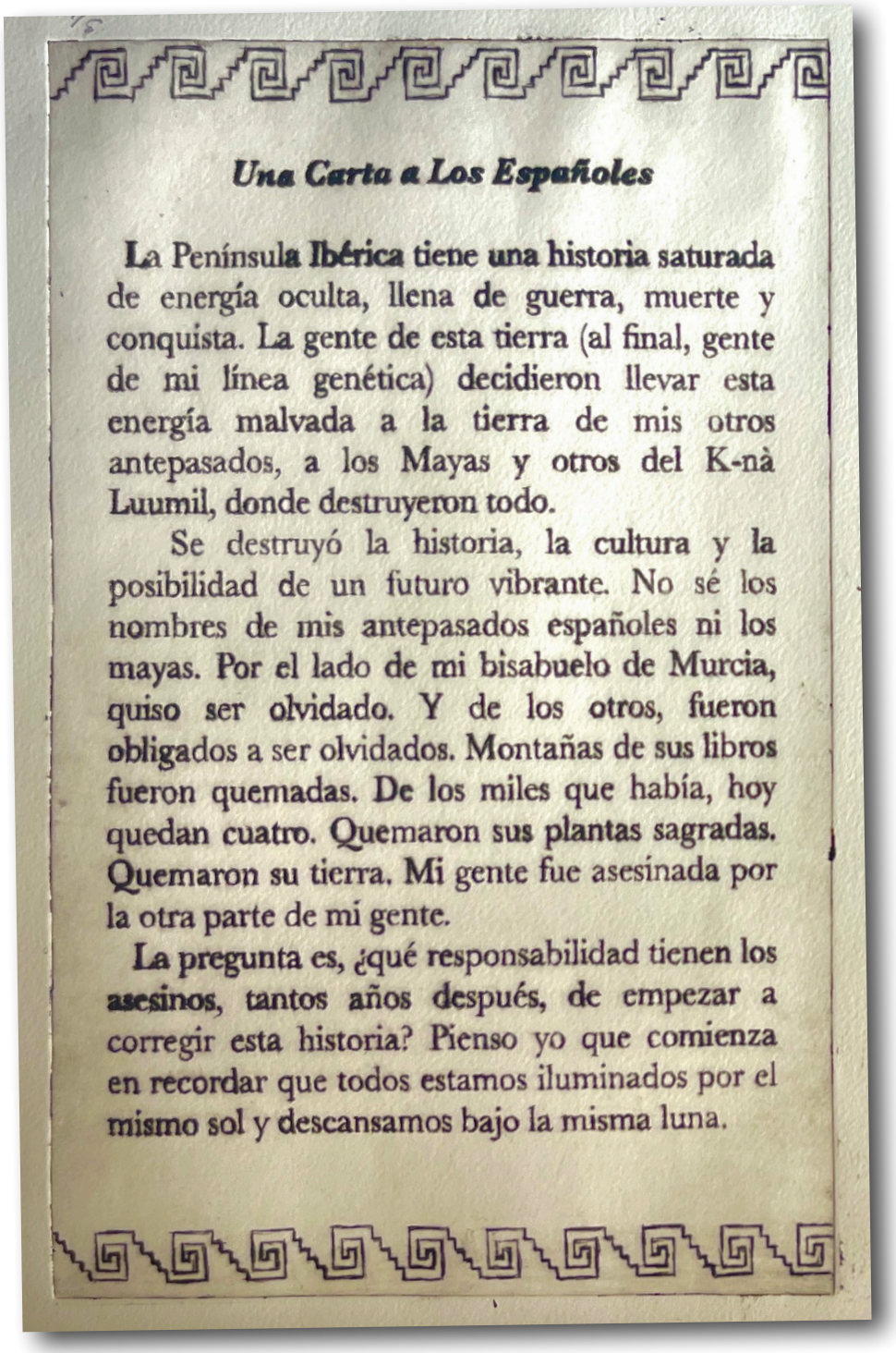


Figure 5.2.1
"Una Carta a Los Españoles" (A Letter to the Spanish)
Robert Castillo
dry point engraving on acetate on paper
55x40cm
2024



Una Carta a Los Españoles

La Península Ibérica tiene una historia saturada de energía oculta, llena de guerra, muerte y conquista. La gente de esta tierra (al final, gente de mi línea genética) decidieron llevar esta energía malvada a la tierra de mis otros antepasados, a los Mayas y otros del K-nà Luumil, donde destruyeron todo.

Se destruyó la historia, la cultura y la posibilidad de un futuro vibrante. No sé los nombres de mis antepasados españoles ni los mayas. Por el lado de mi bisabuelo de Murcia, quiso ser olvidado. Y de los otros, fueron obligados a ser olvidados. Montañas de sus libros fueron quemadas. De los miles que había, hoy quedan cuatro. Quemaron sus plantas sagradas. Quemaron su tierra. Mi gente fue asesinada por la otra parte de mi gente.

La pregunta es, ¿qué responsabilidad tienen los asesinos, tantos años después, de empezar a corregir esta historia? Pienso yo que comienza en recordar que todos estamos iluminados por el mismo sol y descansamos bajo la misma luna.

Figure 5.2.2
"Una Carta a Los Españoles"
Spanish text, right side up



Jump'éel túuxtaj t'aan ti Espanyolo'ob

U Petlu'umil Iberika'e' yáan ya'abkach u tsikbalil seen chup yéetel óolil ma' chíikpajani', noj ba'ate'eilo'ob, kíimil yéetel baksajil. U Kaajnáalilo'ob le lu'uma (Jaajile', in weet k'i'ik'elo'ob) tu bíiso'ob k'a k'aas kux óol tu lu'umilo'ob u láa in láak'o'ob, leti'e maaya'obo yéetel xan ti u K-na' Lu'umil, tu'ux laj jay kaabalto' tuláakal.

Tu jay kaabalto' u tsikbalil, u miatsilil, yéetel u noj pajtalil u beeta'al nukuch baxo'ob. Ma' in wóojel u k'áaba in yáax láak'o'ob espanyolo'ob mix le yáax maaya'obo'. U kuxtalil in ka'a nóole' ti kaja'an kach Murcia'e', óota'al tubsbi. U la'obo', beetal u tubsalo'ob. U noj áanalte'obe tóokabo'obi'. Ti seen ya'ab ka'ache', bejla'e' chen p'áatal ka'anp'éeli. Tóoka'ab u ki'ilich xíiwo'ob. Tóoka'ab u lumo'ob. In láako'obe kíinsabo' tumen u la'a in láak'o'ob.

U k'áat chi'ile', bix kun bo'oti le kíinsanajo'obo', ts'o'ok u máan ya'abkach ja'abo'ob, uti'al ka k utskinte'ex le ts'ibila'. Kin tuukultike' táan k sáaskunsale'ex tumen jump'éili k'iin yéetel k je'elele'ex tu juul jump'éili uj.

Figure 5.2.3
"Una Carta a Los Españoles"
Mayan text

The engraved work “Una Carta a los Españoles/Jump’éel túuxtaj t’aan ti Espanyolo’ob (A Letter to the Spanish)” encapsulates much of the emotional and historical tension at the heart of this project, striving to carve a path toward reconciliation. Engraved using the dry-point technique, this letter reflects on Spain’s historical atrocities and calls for accountability. The juxtaposition of the Mayan text printed upright and the Castilian text inverted aims to create a disorienting effect, creating an inversion of power that prompts the Spanish viewer to confront their role in this history. The letter reads:

"The Iberian Peninsula has a history saturated with dark energy, full of war, death, and conquest. The people of this land (ultimately, people from my own genetic line) decided to take this evil energy to the land of my other ancestors, to the Maya and others from K-nà Luumil, where they destroyed everything. History, culture, and the possibility of a vibrant future were obliterated. I don’t know the names of my Spanish ancestors nor my Mayan ones. On the side of my great-grandfather from Murcia, he wanted to be forgotten. And as for the others, they were forced to be forgotten. Mountains of their books were burned. Of the thousands that existed, only four remain today. They burned their sacred plants. They burned their land. My people were killed by the other part of my people. The question is, what responsibility do the assassins have, so many years later, to begin to correct this history? I believe it begins with remembering that we are all illuminated by the same sun and rest under the same moon."

This passage embodies the profound internal conflict of reconciling a dual identity as a descendant of both the colonizer and the colonized. The line “My people were killed by the other part of my people” captures the weight of inheriting these conflicting heritages. This duality becomes more complex with the knowledge that my father’s grandfather was from Murcia, Spain. While little is known about him, my father's family believes he left Spain to sever ties with his Spanish identity in search of a new life in Mexico. Whether he carried with him ideologies that contributed to the suppression of indigenous cultures remains uncertain. I have not felt compelled to explore his history further, perhaps because the enduring impact of colonization, manifested in the erasure of Mayan books, sacred plants, and cultural knowledge, resonates deeply within my own sense of identity and belonging. This enduring shadow shapes my journey toward reconciliation, a reconciliation that exists within each of us. As mestizos, we embody the reconciliation of violence, and by acknowledging this mixed heritage, I hope to invite others to reflect on their own complex identities and the histories that shape them.

5.3 A PERSONAL JOURNEY THROUGH DRY-POINT ENGRAVING

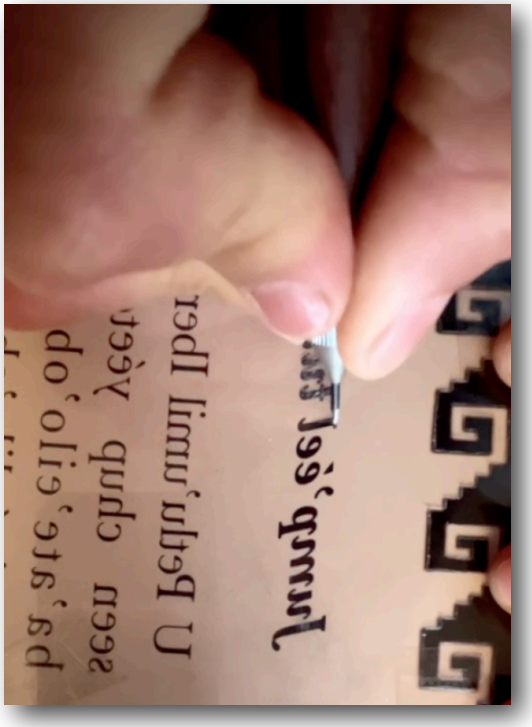
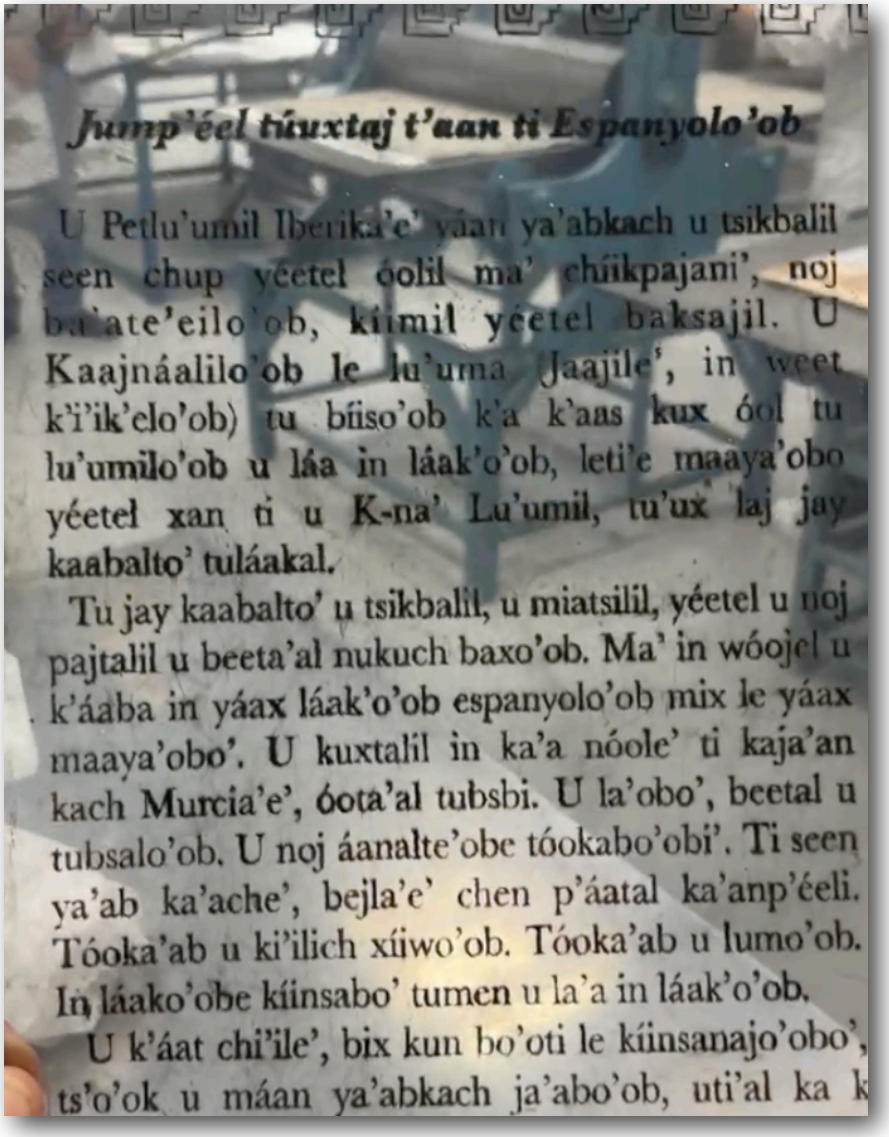


Figure 5.3.1
Working on "Una Carta a Los Españoles"

"Una Carta a los Españoles" was created using the dry-point engraving method, a technique I had not previously explored. I embarked on learning this process only due to a requirement in my Master's Engraving class, which specified dry-point engraving. Typically, text is not represented in dry-point engravings. The only engraved text I have come across is in the of M.C. Escher, though his engraved text was created with an awl rather than through dry-point engraving (Figures 5.3.4, 5.3.5). My professor, Fernando Evangelio Rodríguez, shared that a specific machine could produce cleanly engraved text, but I felt compelled to engrave each letter by hand to achieve the effect and experience I sought. Using an acetate sheet as my plate, I mirrored the text so that it would appear correctly when printed on paper. I then spent many hours scratching and carving each letter. Each deliberate scratch became a reflection on the scars left behind by the Spanish invasions. The act of engraving each word, letter, and sentence slowly and painstakingly mirrored my own yearning to connect with and understand my ancestral roots, while simultaneously serving as a reminder of the limits of this connection. These scratches represent not only the tangible work of my hands but also the intangible wounds on my soul and on the collective hearts of those of us with indigenous heritage left with an enduring longing to fully grasp a past that colonization rendered inaccessible.



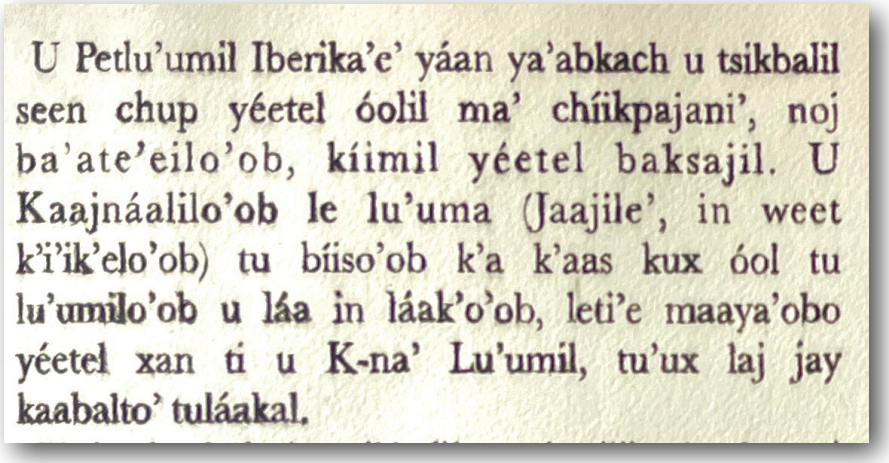
Jump'éel túuxtaj t'aan ti Espanyolo'ob

U Petlu'umil Iberika'e' yáan ya'abkach u tsikbalil seen chup yéetel óolil ma' chíikpajani', noj ba'ate'eilo'ob, kíimil yéetel baksajil. U Kaajnáalilo'ob le lu'uma (Jaajile', in weet k'i'ik'elo'ob) tu bíiso'ob k'a k'aas kux óol tu lu'umilo'ob u láa in láak'o'ob, leti'e maaya'obo yéetel xan ti u K-na' Lu'umil, tu'ux laj jay kaabalto' tuláakal.

Tu jay kaabalto' u tsikbalil, u miatsilil, yéetel u noj pajtalil u beeta'al nukuch baxo'ob. Ma' in wóojel u k'áaba in yáax láak'o'ob espanyolo'ob mix le yáax maaya'obo'. U kuxtalil in ka'a nóole' ti kaja'an kach Murcia'e', óota'al tubsbi. U la'obo', beetal u tubsalo'ob. U noj áanalte'obe tóokabo'obi'. Ti seen ya'ab ka'ache', bejla'e' chen p'áatal ka'anp'éeli. Tóoka'ab u ki'ilich xíiwo'ob. Tóoka'ab u lumo'ob. In láako'obe kíinsabo' tumen u la'a in láak'o'ob.

U k'áat chi'ile', bix kun bo'oti le kíinsanajo'obo', ts'o'ok u máan ya'abkach ja'abo'ob, uti'al ka k

Figure 5.3.2
Acetate plate



U Petlu'umil Iberika'e' yáan ya'abkach u tsikbalil seen chup yéetel óolil ma' chíikpajani', noj ba'ate'eilo'ob, kíimil yéetel baksajil. U Kaajnáalilo'ob le lu'uma (Jaajile', in weet k'i'ik'elo'ob) tu bíiso'ob k'a k'aas kux óol tu lu'umilo'ob u láa in láak'o'ob, leti'e maaya'obo yéetel xan ti u K-na' Lu'umil, tu'ux laj jay kaabalto' tuláakal.

Figure 5.3.3
Mayan text detail



Figure 5.3.4
M.C. Escher
"Vase"
1931
woodcut



Figure 5.3.5
M.C. Escher
"Lute"
1931
woodcut

5.4 RECONCILIATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

This reflection leads to the heart of reconciliation, a journey that, as Valerie Kaur underscores, "rests on accountability. It requires perpetrators to accept full responsibility for their actions" (Kaur, 2020). For modern Spain, this accountability demands more than acknowledgment. It calls for active steps to reconcile with its colonial legacy. Kaur cautions that genuine accountability "cannot be bypassed or diluted by comparisons to the actions of other European powers" (Kaur, 2020), reminding us that historical harm inflicted on indigenous cultures is not lessened by the culpability of other nations. As she poignantly states, "Why should a perpetrator be held accountable for what [they] did years ago? Because the survivor lives with the consequences of these actions for the rest of [their] life" (Kaur, 2020). I live with the consequences of the Spanish invasions of Abya Yala, manifested in my inability to fully connect with my ancestral culture. As generations pass, the proximity to indigenous history only becomes more remote, suggesting that the work of reconciliation will always be ongoing. The shadows of Spain's actions will continue to impact individuals like me who seek to build identities rooted in ancestral connections, underscoring that the path toward healing requires enduring commitment

Reconciliation is not a passive act. It requires active engagement, reparation, and a deep willingness to confront the pain inflicted. As Kaur observes, "…our willful forgetting keeps re-creating the conditions for all that suppressed grief, rage, and shame to erupt in cycles of violence" (Kaur, 2020). Spain's reluctance to confront its colonial history allows these shadows of empire to persist, fostering divides that continue to shape social attitudes. Reconciliation is, therefore, not merely about acknowledging harm, it is a commitment to actively work toward repair and healing.

5.5 TANGIBLE STEPS FORWARD

From my perspective, reconciliation by the Spanish government, institutions, and individuals requires concrete actions that go beyond mere acknowledgment of past atrocities. On a governmental level, reconciliation could begin with a formal public apology that recognizes the lasting impact of colonization on Abya Yala's indigenous peoples. This apology could be supported by initiatives to preserve indigenous culture in affected regions, such as funding for educational programs and historical research led by indigenous communities. Spanish school curriculums could include accounts of how indigenous groups in Abya Yala were directly affected by Spanish invasions and how the current political, social, and economic situations of many countries of Abya Yala are results of the Spanish invasions. Additionally, institutions like museums and universities in Spain could reframe how they present colonial history, incorporating indigenous voices and narratives to offer a fuller picture of the colonial experience. This might include repatriation efforts, such as returning stolen artifacts to their rightful places in Abya Yala, and investing in programs that foster cross-cultural exchange. A tangible manifestation of this could be the Museo de Las Americas in Madrid returning the "Madrid Codex," one of the four surviving Mayan codices, to Mexico, perhaps to the Museo Nacional de Antropología in Mexico City.

On an individual level, Spaniards can contribute by educating themselves about the colonial past, acknowledging how their privileges and perspectives have been shaped by that history, engaging in open dialogues that challenge denial or evasion of Spain's colonial legacy, and accepting the actions of their Spanish ancestors. These steps, rooted in active accountability, signal a commitment to genuine reconciliation, honoring the memories of those who suffered and fostering understanding between present and future generations.

5.6 BEYOND THE SHADOWS

The metaphor of shadows weaves through every aspect of this project, symbolizing both the erasure imposed by colonization and the resilience that endures despite it. Shadows cannot exist without light. The title "Shadows of the Empire" reflects both the darkness cast by the Spanish invasion and the enduring light and strength of the cultures targeted for erasure. Though much has been lost, the fragments that remain offer a foundation for reclamation and a new understanding of identity.

Reflecting on the ideas and themes that would foster a path toward reconciliation, I am reminded of Carl Sagan's reflection in "Pale Blue Dot" on humanity's shared responsibility to care for one another and for the "only home we have ever known" (Sagan, 1994). In the vastness of the cosmos, distinctions between colonizer and colonized seem almost negligible. Yet the shadows of history persist, and the responsibility to address the legacy of colonization lies not only with governments and institutions but with each of us as individuals. By confronting these shadows directly and committing to the path of reconciliation, we create an opportunity for healing and a future where all our identities, interwoven through loss and resilience, can coexist in the light.

CONCLUSION

In my journey through "Shadows of the Empire," I have delved into the intricate ideas of identity, cultural resilience, and the enduring impact of colonization on my Taíno and Maya heritage. This exploration deepened my understanding of the many ways the Spanish invasions of Abya Yala disrupted not only the tangible aspects of indigenous cultures like language, music, land, and spirituality, but also the very fabric of identity that connects individuals to our ancestral roots. By weaving together historical context with my own narratives and artistic expressions, I have sought to confront the shadows of colonization, recognizing the scars it has left while also embracing the possibilities for reclamation and healing.

In examining the significance of land, I felt how physical displacement resonates deeply with emotional and cultural disconnection, underscoring the importance of place in shaping my identity. The term "Abya Yala" stands out for me as a powerful reminder of the vibrant cultures that once flourished here, challenging the narratives imposed by colonialism. In acknowledging the painful loss of language, I confronted the reality of linguistic erasure and the struggle to reconnect with my heritage. My comic artwork, "Cinco 'Idiomas,'" reflects this sense of disconnection but also celebrates the resilience present in the survival of the Mayan language, noting the strength of those who continue to honor their cultural identities.

Music has emerged as a vital thread in my narrative, embodying the struggle against erasure and my desire to revive cultural practices nearly lost to time. Through the photographs in "Sounds Not Forgotten," I have expressed the urgency of reclaiming musical traditions and the importance of honoring the ancestral sounds that resonate with my roots. The revival of the hompax, along with collaborations with contemporary musicians, symbolizes my ongoing effort to bridge the past and the present, affirming that these cultural expressions are living facets of my identity.

In exploring the spiritual dimensions of my heritage, particularly through psychedelic practices, I have reflected on the historical and contemporary significance of these rituals. The Maya's understanding of the divine, intertwined with their use of entheogens, presents a profound connection to the cosmos that speaks to me on many levels. My sculpture, "The Unknown Voyager," is my way of honoring this legacy and acknowledging the richness of spiritual practices that continue to inspire both healing and understanding.

CONCLUSION

This thesis is a call to action and a recognition that reconciliation requires more than merely acknowledging past atrocities. It demands active engagement and responsibility from those of us living in the aftermath of colonization. My engraved letter, "Una Carta a los Españoles," encapsulates this need for accountability, urging modern descendants of colonizers, myself included, to confront our heritage and reflect on our roles in the ongoing legacy of colonialism.

As I look to the future, I believe it's crucial to foster dialogues that challenge denial and promote understanding between cultures. Reconciliation can only be achieved through recognizing shared histories and committing to preserving indigenous narratives and practices. By embracing our collective responsibility to address the shadows of the past, I hope to pave the way for healing and understanding, renewing a sense of identity that honors the complexities of our intertwined histories.

In closing, "Shadows of the Empire" is both a personal exploration and an invitation to reclaim cultural identity and forge connections across time and space. This thesis stands as a testament to the resilience of indigenous peoples in the face of historical violence and an affirmation of the enduring strength found in cultural expression. By illuminating the paths of reconciliation, I aspire to cultivate a future that acknowledges the weight of history while celebrating the vibrant, living cultures that persistently continue to thrive.

IMAGE INDEX

Introduction

Figure 0.1
"Portrait of my Father" 13

Figure 0.2
"Mayan Water Lilly Jaguar" 14

1. Identity & Land

Figure 1.4.1
"Abya Yala" 20

Figure 1.4.2
Detailed view of tribe names
in northern Abya Yala 21

Figure 1.4.3
Detailed view of tribe names
in southern Abya Yala 21

Figure 1.4.4
Screenshot of raw information
from the Native Land Digital
website 22

Figure 1.4.5
Detail of screenshot of raw
information from the Native
Land Digital website website 22

Figure 1.5.1
Detail of text in "Abya Yala" 23

Figure 1.6.1
"Geo Dis/connect 5" 24

Figure 1.6.2
Detail of "Geo Dis/connect 5" 24

IMAGE INDEX

2. Identity & Language

Figure 2.2.1
"Cinco 'Idiomas'" 28

Figure 2.3.1
With my father in Mexico 30

Figure 2.4.1
Cover for Indigenous Voices 1 32

Figure 2.4.2
Cover for Phoenix Song Echo 32

3. Identity & Music

Figure 3.2.1
"Sounds Not Forgotten"
Image 1 37

Figure 3.2.2
"Sounds Not Forgotten"
Image 2 38

Figure 3.2.3
"Sounds Not Forgotten"
Image 3 39

Figure 3.2.4
Acre Musicians 1 40

Figure 3.2.5
Acre Musicians 2 41

Figure 3.2.6
Bonampak entrance 42

Figure 3.2.7
Myself with the Bonampak
murals 42

IMAGE INDEX

Figure 3.3.1
QR to listen to Mayan Poetry 43

Figure 3.3.1.1
Pat Boy 45

4. Identity & Religion

Figure 4.1.1
Page 45 of Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán 48

Figure 4.1.2
Popol Vuh excerpt 49

Figure 4.2.1
Guatemalan stone effigies 51

Figure 4.2.2
Mayan ritual enema 52

Figure 4.2.3
Scene from Madrid Codex 53

Figure 4.2.4
Madrid Codex on display 53

Figure 4.2.5
The Dresden Codex, Page 15 54

Figure 4.3.1
“Maya Mycelial” front view 55

Figure 4.3.2
“Maya Mycelial” side view 55

Figure 4.3.3
“Maya Mecelial” top view 55

Figure 4.3.4
“The Unknown Voyager” front view 56

IMAGE INDEX

Figure 4.3.5
"The Unknown Voyager"
side view 57

Figure 4.3.6
"The Unknown Voyager"
rear view 57

Figure 4.3.7
Working on "The Unknown
Voyager" 58

Figure 4.3.8
Anthropomorphized Mayan
sculpture 1 59

Figure 4.3.9
Anthropomorphized Mayan
sculpture 2 59

5. A Path Towards Reconciliation

Figure 5.2.1
"Una Carta a los Españoles" 64

Figure 5.2.2
Spanish text, right side up 65

Figure 5.2.3
Mayan text 66

Figure 5.3.1
Working on "Una Carta a Los
Españoles" 68

Figure 5.3.2
Acetate plate 69

Figure 5.3.3
Mayan text detail 69

IMAGE INDEX

Figure 5.3.4
"Vase" by M.C. Escher 70

Figure 5.3.5
"Lute" by M.C. Escher 70

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Ángel Cruz, M. (2016, March 31). Hom Pax; un instrumento musical de origen maya. (G. Mazzini, Interviewer) [Interview]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrzzpWLNHL4
2. Baudez, C.F. and Picasso, S. (1992). Lost cities of the Maya. London: Thames And Hudson.
3. Beatriz Carrera Maldonado, & Zara Ruiz Romero. (2017). Abya Yala Wawgeykuna.
4. Brito, R. (2024). Reuniting a linguistic family: From the ancient Taíno of the Caribbean to the modern Tariana of the Brazilian Amazon in the times of COVID 19 | The Cairns Institute Research in Tropical Societies. [online] The Cairns Institute. Available at: https://www.cairnsinstitute.jcu.edu.au/reuniting-a-linguistic-family-from-the-ancient-Taíno-of-the-caribbean-to-the-modern-tariana-of-the-brazilian-amazon-in-the-times-of-covid-19/#:~:text=Chief%20Jorge%20Baracutei%20Estevez%20Jorge [Accessed 20 Jan. 2024].
5. CBS News: The National. (2020, November 18). Edmonton artist features in Marvel's Indigenous Voices issue. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEsu1d_1bdY
6. Cabrera, R. (2004). Virtual Analysis of Maya Trumpets: Hom-Tahs of Bonampak. Available at http://www.tlapitzalli.com/rvelaz.geo/bonampak/hom.html.
7. Cansinos, A. (2021). Race and Class: The Rise of Racial Classism Through Ideologies. International Conference on Advanced Research in Social Sciences, 3, pp.176–183.
8. Carhart-Harris, R. L., Roseman, L., Bolstridge, M., et al. (2017). Psilocybin for treatment-resistant depression: fMRI-measured brain mechanisms. Scientific Reports, 7, 13187. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-017-13282-7

9. Carod-Artal, F.J. (2015). Hallucinogenic drugs in pre-Columbian Mesoamerican cultures. Neurología (English Edition), 30(1), pp.42–49. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nrleng.2011.07.010.
10. Christenson, A.J. (2013). Popol Vuh. University of Oklahoma Press.
11. Congresos de México. (2019, December 10). Congress of Yucatán approves introduction of mandatory Maya lessons at school. Nationalia. https://www.nationalia.info/brief/11273/congress-of-yucatan-approves-introduction-of-mandatory-maya-lessons-at-school#:~:text=Author%3A%20Congresos%20de%20México%20%40%20Twitter,Maya%20language%20in%20the%20schools
12. Diamond, J. (1997). Guns, germs, and steel: the fates of human societies. Norton.
13. Gattuso, J. J., Perkins, D., Ruffell, S., Lawrence, A. J., Hoyer, D., Jacobson, L. H., Timmermann, C., Castle, D., Rossell, S. L., Downey, L. A., Pagni, B. A., Galvão-Coelho, N. L., Nutt, D., & Sarris, J. (2023). Default Mode Network Modulation by Psychedelics: A Systematic Review. The international journal of neuropsychopharmacology, 26(3), 155–188. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijnp/pyac074
14. Gobierno de Aragón, Departamento de Industria, Comercio, y Turismo. (2018, April 3). Alabaster in Aragón (Spain). http://www.aragon.es/estaticos/GobiernoAragon/Departamentos/IndustriaInnovacion/Areas/Mineria/alabaster%20in%20Aragon.pdf
15. Goffman, E. (1959). The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life. New York: Anchor Books.
16. Guzmán, G., Gómez-Pompa, A., Allen, M. F., Fedick, S. L., & Jiménez-Osorio, J. J. (2003). Fungi in the Maya culture: past, present and future. The Lowland Maya Area. Food Products Press. Nueva York, USA, 315-325.
17. Hall, S. (2022). 2 'CULTURAL IDENTITY AND DIASPORA.' In Crossref (pp. 131–138). Edinburgh University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474470674-024
18. Harari, Y.N. (2011). Sapiens: a Brief History of Humankind. New York: Harper Perennial.

19. Houston, Stephen (2012). "The Good Prince: Transition, Texting and Moral Narrative in the Murals of Bonampak, Chiapas, Mexico". Cambridge Archaeological Journal. 22 (2): 153–175. doi:10.1017/s0959774312000212.
20. Katz, J. C. (2018). Gentle Flutes and Blaring Horns: An Analysis of Ancient Maya Music and Musical Instruments in Daily and Ceremonial Activities. University of California, Riverside.
21. Kaur, V. (2020). See no stranger: A memoir and Manifesto of Revolutionary Love. Random House Audio.
22. Keegan, W. F. (2013). The "Classic" Taíno (pp. 70-83). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
23. Kometer, M., Pokorny, T., Seifritz, E., & Volleinweider, F. X. (2015). Psilocybin-induced spiritual experiences and insightfulness are associated with synchronization of neuronal oscillations. Psychopharmacology, 232(19), 3663–3676. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00213-015-4026-7
24. Kroeber, A.L., Untereiner, W. and Kluckhohn, C. (1985). Culture : a critical review of concepts and definitions. New York: Vintage Books.
25. Lowy, B. (1972). Mushroom symbolism in Maya codices. Mycologia, 64(4), 816-821.
26. Lowy, B. (1980). Ethnomycological inferences from mushroom stones, Maya codices and Tzutuhil legend. Interamerican University of Puerto Rico.
27. Mann, C. C. (2005). 1491: new revelations of the Americas before Columbus. Knopf.
28. Mann, C. C. (2011). 1493 : uncovering the new world Columbus created. Knopf.
29. Naranjo Orovio, C., González-Ripoll, M. D., & Ruiz del Árbol, M. (Eds.). (2019). The Caribbean: Origin of the Modern World. Aranjuez, Spain: Ediciones Doce Calles.
30. Native Land Digital. (n.d.). NativeLand.ca. Native-Land.ca - Our Home on Native Land. https://native-land.ca
31. Noble, J., & Lacasa, J. (2007). Introduction to quechua: Language of the Andes. Dog Ear Pub.

32. Porto-Gonçalves, C. W. (2011). Abya Yala, el descubrimiento de América. Bicentenarios (otros), trasiciones y resistencias (39-46). Buenos Aires: Uma Ventana
33. Ricento, T. (2009). An introduction to language policy : theory and method. Blackwell.
34. Rivera Santana, C. (2024, June 11). Remapping coloniality: The Puerto Rican art of decolonial cartography. The Latinx Project. https://www.latinxproject.nyu.edu/intervenxions/the-puerto-rican-art-of-decolonial-cartography
35. Sagan, C. (1994). Pale blue dot: A vision of the human future in space. Random House.
36. Samorini, G. (2012). Mushroom effigies in world archaeology: from rock art to mushroom-stones. The stone mushrooms of Thrace, EKATAIOS, Alexandroupoli, 16-44.
37. Sauca, Victor. Re: Question about Territories, 5 Feb. 2024.
38. Schroeder, H., Sikora, M., Gopalakrishnan, S., Cassidy, L. M., Delser, P. M., Velasco, M. S., Schraiber, J. G., Rasmussen, S., Homburger, J. R., Ávila-Arcos, M. C., Allentoft, M. E., Moreno-Mayar, J. V., Renaud, G., Gómez-Carballa, A., Laffoon, J. E., Hopkins, R. J. A., Higham, T. F. G., Carr, R. S., Schaffer, W. C., … Willerslev, E. (2018). Origins and genetic legacies of the Caribbean Taíno. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences - PNAS, 115(10), 2341–2346. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1716839115
39. Sawyer, I. (n.d.). About Me. [Ancient Futures]. http://ancient-futures.com/
40. Stacy, A. (2014). Of the Same Stuff as Gods: Musical Instruments Among the Classic Maya. The Collegiate Journal of Anthropology, 2. Retrieved from http://anthrojournal.com/issue/may/article/of-the-same-stuff-as-gods-musical-instruments-among-the-classic-maya on October 25, 2015.
41. Stannard, D. E. (1994). American holocaust: The conquest of the New World. Oxford University Press.
42. Stöckli, M. (2011). Trumpets in Classic Maya Vase Painting: The Iconographic Identification of Instrumental Ensembles. Music in Art, 36(1/2), 219–230.

43. Sullivan, G. (2010). Art practice as research: Inquiry in the visual arts (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
44. Vargas, A. (2022). Laayli' Kuxa'ano'one': canción en maya que sonará en cines de todo el mundo. Quadratín Yucatán. https://yucatan.quadratin.com.mx/cultura/laayli-kuxaanoone-cancion-en-maya-que-sonara-en-cines-de-todo-el-mundo/
45. Whyte, A. (2021). Kyle Charles brings Indigenous stories to Nelvana. [kidscreen]. https://kidscreen.com/2021/07/12/kyle-charles-brings-indigenous-stories-to-nelvana/
46. Williams, R. (1959). Culture and society. New York: Anchor Books.
47. Zhao, X., Du, Y., Yao, Y., et al. (2024). Psilocybin promotes neuroplasticity and induces rapid and sustained antidepressant-like effects in mice. Journal of Psychopharmacology, 38(5), 489-499. https://doi.org/10.1177/02698811241249436