

suicide rate of Indigenous LGBTQ people. He suggests First Nations and reserve leaders can't adequately provide treatment and counseling because of colonization. Desperately needed are "culturally safe mental health facilities" (109). Belcourt argues, however, that the crisis is seen through a settler-imposed Christian lens which judges LGBTQ people. "The emergency isn't one emergency but a pileup of emergencies. On the other hand, the state of emergency can be understood as a singular emergency; it is the emergency of Canadian history" (108).

The 2016 news reports did not mention the possibility that these suicides could be connected to LGBTQ issues. If Belcourt's analysis is correct, it begs the questions: did these reporters miss that detail, did tribal leaders miss it, or did the Canadian government and society at large? Based on the author's perspective, they may all share in the blame.

Belcourt's book provides some much-needed context on why the suicide rate is so high among young Indigenous people in Canada.

Ana Garcia

Master's student in Native American Studies
Montana State University

Emil' Keme, *Le Maya Q'Atzij/Our Maya Word: Poetics of Resistance in Guatemala*. Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2021. 248 pages. ISBN 9781517908089. \$25.00 USD paperback.

Le Maya Q'Atzij/Our Maya Word: Poetics of Resistance in Guatemala by Emil' Keme (a.k.a Emilio del Valle Escalante), whose Spanish Edition was awarded Cuba's Casa de las Américas literary criticism prize in 2020, is a book that, from a personally implicated perspective ("The reader will notice that my position is not merely academic when I employ "I", "us" or "we"', states the author) offers a significant evolutionary and critical overview not only of Mayan literary production in Iximuleu/Guatemala from 1960 to the present, but also of the discriminatory and violent culture in Iximuleu/Guatemala that, according to the author, mainly explains the diversity of the literary expression of the ten Mayan authors studied in the book. This causality not only articulates an explanation of the studied phenomenon (the literary work of contemporary Mayan authors), but also seems to shed light on the motivation of the book itself, as can be deduced from the personal ideological position of denunciation that the author manifests against colonial and Guatemalan nation-state violence. In conjunction with the adoption, without nuances, of decolonial theory and practice as a privileged

theoretical framework to explain and even resolve the complex panorama of tensions and conflicts that condition Indigenous expression not only in Guatemala but in all of Spanish America, this approach can be seen as the main structuring assumption of the research developed by Keme in this book.

Through four chapters, plus an introduction and conclusions, Emil' Keme's study proposes the distinction of three historical moments, or "waves" as he calls them, to organize the development of Mayan literature in Guatemala from 1960 to the present. The first corresponds to the production of Kaqchikel Maya authors like Francisco Morales Santos and Luis de Li3n, who interpret the Indigenous world as a "problem", according to the ideological perspective of the nation-state and the Guatemalan Left. The second corresponds historically to the indiscriminate genocide perpetrated by the Guatemalan nation-state, between 1978 and 1984, especially against the Maya people in the highlands. According to Keme, the poetics of authors such as Humberto Ak'abal (ki'che'), Victor Montejo (pop'ti') and Gaspar Pedro Gonz3lez (Q'anjob'al) belong to this historical moment and should be understood as a literary response that affirms Maya languages and cultural and spiritual specificities in the face of such a violent context. The third wave began in 1996, after the signing of the Peace Accords, and is characterized by the author as a phase in which a new generation of writers took advantage of the opening caused by globalization. This opening allowed, in turn, the development of various literary registers that Keme divides into two groups, each of them addressed in chapters three and four, respectively. In the first place, authors like Rosa Ch3vez (Kaqchikel'/Ki'che'), Pablo Garc3a (Ki'che") and Sabino Esteban Francisco (Q'anjob'al), who publish their texts in a bilingual Indigenous language/Castilian format, are distinguished from the writers of the previous phase (Ak'abal, Montejo and Gonz3lez). These authors are critical, however, not only of the "essentialism", as Keme qualifies, following Spivak, of their aesthetics, but also of the neoliberal economic policies that, in the context of the Guatemalan postwar, have accompanied the process of globalization which, with its openness, paradoxically made possible the emergence of this new Indigenous writing in Guatemala. Finally, the second and last group of writers studied by Keme are authors like Maya Cu (Q'eq'chi) and Manuel Tzoc (Ki'che'). Through writing exclusively in Spanish and an aesthetic marked by the appropriation of avant-garde techniques, the work of these authors, according to Keme, develops "the struggle to affirm their authors' cultural, gender, and dissident sexual identities in the urban spheres". Although Maya Cu's work is framed in a feminist perspective and Manuel Tzoc's in the queer one, both share, as can be deduced from the analysis proposed by Emil' Keme, the same aesthetic (and ideological) intentionality of expanding the Indigenous voice towards spaces that have been historically characterized by silenced subjectivities, even

from inside the Indigenous world itself.

Thus, *Le Maya Q'Atzij/Our Maya Word: Poetics of Resistance in Guatemala* by the Indigenous ki'che Maya scholar and professor of Spanish, Emil' Keme, constitutes a valuable panoramic and intellectual contribution to the knowledge and dissemination of contemporary Maya literary production. From an ideological perspective that, as mentioned above, goes beyond the pursuit of academic objectivity, Keme's work proposes an interpretation of the evolution of Mayan literature, from 1960 onwards, in the light of the historical events that characterize each of the three moments identified by him. However, the undeniable value of Keme's historiographical and hermeneutical endeavour prompts some critical questions that are also important to summarize.

The premise of literary production as a direct reflection of both the historical circumstances and the personal conditions of an author (such as gender or sexual orientation) enriches the analysis presented, especially in terms of the documentary contribution that this type of information represents. Nevertheless, it is also important to remark that, in Keme's book, said documentary dimension (with a sort of testimonial connotation) contrasts, in an unbalanced way, with the moderate textual and literary analysis offered. Likewise, this positivist premise contrasts with the *decolonial* theoretical position stated by the author. It diminishes the possibility of deepening the understanding of other assumptions that also organize a significant part of the argumentation developed in the book. In particular, two concepts are repeatedly mentioned in the book but only explained within the historical and personal conditioning factors of the Maya authors. The first is the assertion that Maya literary production is *diverse*, even more than some "essentialist" Maya authors, as Keme describes them, have been willing to accept. The second, on the other hand, is related to the recurrent reference, both from the perspective of the studied texts and some remarks of Keme himself, to an Indigenous *origin*, to a sort of *original* pre-Hispanic text which, as a hypotext, would give ultimate meaning to the writing of the studied Maya authors. Both premises are undoubtedly very important for the argumentation of the book and have a solid empirical foundation: the diversity of the contemporary Indigenous literary phenomenon is an observable fact that relativizes, as Keme suggests, the importance of the linguistic competence of the Indigenous language user or the authors' belonging to the rural world as privileged markers of identity.

On the other hand, it is also observable that origin is a leitmotif clearly present in most Indigenous texts, not only from Guatemala but from all Spanish America. The reference to an origin is, perhaps, one of the most notable distinguishing features of contemporary Indigenous writing compared to non-Indigenous authors who have also produced work associated with the same traumatic historical contexts or to personal conditions that have also been subjected to violent marginaliza-

tion. Keme's research has the merit of overcoming the essentialism of authors such as Ak'abal, Montejo or González to open a space of inclusion to authors who for various reasons related to colonial violence, do not speak the Maya language or are not fluent in it (like Emil' Keme himself as he states). However, it does not address, in turn, from an analytical point of view, the contradiction of affirming an origin when, at the same time, the "danger" of essentialist approaches are criticized with regards to Maya literary studies. Although the Maya origin of the studied authors and the diversity of Maya writing is unquestionable and recognized as a fact, beyond the linguistic competence they have in the Indigenous language, is it still the same or innocuous if a literary author is native or fluent in a language (Indigenous in this case) or not? Beyond the unquestionable importance of the context of production and the author's condition, does each author's linguistic competence in the Indigenous language play a role in the configuration of the observed diversity? Do the different linguistic competencies of the studied authors also condition, to some degree, the literary aesthetics of their different texts? How does the linguistic competence of each author correlate with how their notion of the *original* is textually deployed? If the authors, their texts and how they aesthetically represent the origin motif are, in fact, diverse, how can the correlation between *diversity* and the various literary representations of the *origin* be explained beyond the historical contexts or the personal conditions of the authors?

These are some of the questions that arise from the reading of Keme's book. These questions remain unanswered or are only explained by the historical evolution of production contexts and the personal condition of the studied authors. Perhaps translation and its impact should be seen as an unavoidable colonial dimension in the context of any *decolonial* analysis. A translation perspective, maybe, would shed some light on the studied literary phenomenon. It is clear both from the studied works and from Keme's analysis that contemporary Mayan literature has a complexity that seems not only to evolve but is constantly differentiating and diversifying itself, like all Indigenous literary expression, by a constant allusion to an *original* text that chronically demands to be translated (written) from beyond the border imposed by the Spanish conquest.

Roberto Viereck Salinas
Department of Classics, Modern Languages and Linguistics
Concordia University