

돌 안에 말이 있었다.  
 나는 그 말을 캐내려고 했다.  
 망치와 끌로, 곡괭이와 정으로,  
 돌에서 피가 똑똑 흐를 때까지,  
 그러나 나는 여전히 듣지 못했다  
 돌이 했던 말을.  
 나는 돌을 길가에 던져버렸다  
 천 개의 돌 속으로  
 내가 돌아서는 사이 돌이 외쳤다  
 내 귓속에 큰 소리로 그 말을  
 그러자 내 뺏속 골수가  
 듣고, 답했다.<sup>16</sup>

세계와 언어 사이의 갈등에 대한 르 권의 접근 방식은 생태학적 인식론과 문법의 마찰에서 한 걸음 뒤로 물러나 있어, 19세기의 복잡한 학문간의 얽힘과 이를 잉태한 식민지적 거주에서 벗어난다. 나아가 르 권은 세계 재현의 새로운 형태와 생태계 안에서 존재하고, 생각하고, 느끼고, 말하는 새로운 관계의 모델을 제시하는 상상의 시나리오를 구성한다. 인간과 비인간 사이의 식민지적 분열에 대응하는 르 권의 방법론은 생산주의적 생태학사에서 에코필리아<sup>ecophilia</sup>와 광물 소통의 세계로 이동한다. 그곳은 인체와 대지의 상호작용에서 나온 말들이 생명과 언어의 틈새를 통해 다시 나타나기 시작하는 미지의 공간이다.

1부  
 지형이 되는 언어 형태들

In Tibetan, when referring to the color of earth, the word for “green” རྩོན་པོ་ is the same as the word for the color blue. Blue is partly composed of the word རྩོན་ meaning “before,” alluding to what came prior and what has been: the sky and the earth.

– Shen Xin, ས་གཞི་རྩོན་པོ་འགྱུར། (*The Earth Turned Green*), 2022

Section 1 Language Forms Are Landforms

From the sixteenth century until now, the West has built a way of speaking about nature that presents it as independent from the observer. From the era of colonialism and collection, the voice of the describer has been separated from the phenomena described, whether those are human or nonhuman “others.” This was the origin of modern experimental science: a program for purifying the discourses of nature and society, expunging from each the traces of the other.<sup>1</sup> However, at the height of nineteenth-century Enlightenment, geology and linguistic—stones and words—were entangled not only by the foundational notion of uniformitarianism (the idea that the formation of the Earth’s crust took place through countless small changes occurring over vast periods, and that languages of the past are no different in nature from those of the present), but both their consolidations as modern sciences were, at the same time, also rooted in the deepest and more obscure aspects of our colonial histories.

For the core of modern geology to develop, Western geologists made extensive use of colonial expeditions for transport, access, data, and the collection of exotic specimens. Those

<sup>16</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, “Deep in Admiration,” in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*, eds. Nils Bubandt et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), M17.

<sup>1</sup> Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

specimens were then sent from colonized territories around the world to collections in Europe, forming repositories of minerals, rocks, and fossils that geologists drew on. Early twentieth-century geological mapping played a significant role in identifying lands in the colonized territories of the United States; for example, where resources could be extracted, leading to mining and takeover of these lands through violence and coercion. Similarly, by merging the work of literacy and projects of religious power, early linguistics aided in shaping the territories, identities, and communities that inhabited those areas. As anthropologist and linguist Joseph Errington points out: “the work of fixing languages in writing helped fix speakers in colonial yet “natural” hierarchies.”<sup>2</sup> The grammars, dictionaries, and word lists composed by Protestant and Christian missionaries alike are reports on work that made languages objects of knowledge so that their speakers could be made subjects of power through “languages of colonial command.”<sup>3</sup> The linguistic project of the nineteenth century also served other purposes in regard to land, such as the infamous signing of the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi, a document in which the Māori ceded the sovereignty of New Zealand to the British.<sup>4</sup> All across the world, linguistics, geography, and geology worked together as tools for the spread of colonial extractivist ideology, transforming landscapes into readable texts that redefined the future.

This new world, manufactured with words and stones, came into being in 1492 when the earliest colonialists thought they had discovered a “New World,” and found themselves having to redraw the shape of the Earth and expanding what it constituted. The expansion of known objects and the need to develop Western knowledge around them increased their need for new terms, new words to name new rocks, territories, and peoples. In the midst of what semiotician Walter Mignolo described as “a European celebration of the letter”<sup>5</sup> and the emergence of vernacular languages, naming the newly organized territories in the Castilian language cemented the expansion and rule of the Spanish empire over other economic and political forces within the European territory. The organization of space was, for some, unavoidably tied up with the expansion of language and the forms of history and memory it represented. New names and words meant more power at home.

In the meantime, across the ocean, the first encounters between European colonizers and the American territory produced what Malcolm Ferdinand calls “colonial inhabitation,” a way of living and relating between humans and nonhumans.<sup>6</sup> Most often beginning with violent land grabbing, exploitation, and slavery, colonial inhabitation involved brutality against the land and non-European bodies, not only by the relentless extraction of materials and labor, but also through the preceding act of renaming such land and the imposition of languages over existing ones. Thus, the renaming of Abya Yala,<sup>7</sup> the oldest recorded name for the Latin American territories or what was known of them, as the “New World” was not just an illegitimate baptism, but also part of a long process of reconceptualizing the Earth. Naming was key to this process, as is evident from Columbus’s immediate renaming of the island of Guanahani upon his arrival in 1492, from then on known as San Salvador, which translates into something biblical like “Saint Savior.” As Mignolo explains: “Columbus’ rage of naming reveals the commercial and political dimensions of this enterprise,

2 Joseph Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World: A Story of Language, Meaning, and Power* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 7.

3 Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World*, 99.

4 The dubious translation of the treaty, written and read aloud both in English and Māori, incorporated the sounds of the translated words. According to Errington: “When these unintelligible sounds had been uttered in the presence of ears which could not grasp their meaning, or the import of the act of reading itself, the gathered chiefs made their marks at the bottom of the paper, contributing to a ritual of literacy whose context and effects they could not understand.” Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World*, 99.

5 Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 29.

6 Malcom Ferdinand, *Decolonial Ecology: Thinking from the Caribbean World* (New York, NY: Polity Books, 2021).

7 Abia Yala or Abya Yar (land of blood, young land, always being born) is the name given by the Kuna people, who are indigenous to the American continent. According to the oral history of the Kuna people, the Earth has passed through four historical stages in its evolution up until today. A different name of the continent belongs to each stage: Gwalagun Yala, Dagargun Yala Yaladingua Yala, and, lastly, Abia Yala, land of blood in its broadest sense. Its use to replace the name “Latin America” was popularized by Aymara leader Constantino Lima, also known as Takir Mamani, in the 1970s and officially adopted in the Consejo Mundial de Pueblos Indígenas (World Council of Indigenous Peoples) in 1977. See Çebaldo de León Inawinapi, “Abia Yala,” April 22, 2019, *Dicionário Alice*, <https://alice.ces>.

subsequently pursued by the House of Trade and the Council of the Indies. ... Like mapping, naming is also a semantic move attached to the political and economic strategies of the Crown, as well as the religious crusade engineered by Rome.”<sup>8</sup>

The practice of renaming, replacing, and reproducing the European imaginary continued in the naming of mountains, volcanoes, cities, and countries, and brought along specific agricultural, religious, and scientific practices that would transform all orders of social life in the colonist’s image, breaking the rooted relations between land and language. While Abya Yala, which comes from the words “Abe” and “Yala” that refer to blood and space or territory, means land of vital blood, in full maturity, land of life, as well as noble land that welcomes everyone and land in permanent youth; the name “America” reflects the imperial act of land grabbing through cartographic mapping and the reproduction of the emerging European capitalist world-system. A name detached from the nature of its object, and forever bound to its occupation.

8 Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 288.

9 Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 5.

10 Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, 227.

11 Maristella Svampa, *Neo-extractivism in Latin America: Socio-environmental Conflicts, the Territorial Turn, and New Political Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 3.

12 Suely Rolnik, *Esfemas de la insurrección: Apuntes para descolonizar el inconsciente* (Buenos Aires: Tinta Limón, 2019).

13 Anibal Quijano, “Bien vivir: entre el desarrollo y la des/colonialidad del poder,” in *Des/colonialidad y Buen Vivir. Un nuevo debate en América Latina*, ed. Anibal Quijano (Lima: Universidad Ricardo Palma Editorial Universitaria, 2014).

And so, long before geology and linguistics turned into modern sciences that designed a neatly systematized world, and to enable this systematization, the colonization of space and language produced a dominant notion of language and of charting territories that became synonymous with the real by obstructing other possible alternatives.<sup>9</sup> Through the act of semantic appropriation—the organization and naming of space—the word became more real than the stone, creating a disruption between the materiality of nature and its description. This apparent solution to a philosophical conflict between realism and idealism (between the world and the word),<sup>10</sup> in fact, produced a fracture between nature and culture based on difference. Difference, then, produced new categories of what would be considered human and what would not, constructed and enforced as “natural,” reorganizing the world into hierarchies of exploiters and exploited, of race, gender, and class. Based on this new order, ancestral worldviews, languages, and forms of life that were more than human were dismantled, along with the solidarity and reciprocal relationships that made life on Earth a sustainable cycle, in a way that inevitably “affects and threatens the necessary function of nature and the reproduction of life.”<sup>11</sup> These divisions persist in the world today, in what theorist Suely Rolnik calls the modern-colonial-capitalistic world-system.<sup>12</sup>

Colonization, however, does not imply immediate suppression but the coexistence of languages, literacies, memories, and spaces. Vital languages, knowledges, and practices remained latent in people and in the land, transmitted from generation to generation, against the pressure of violence and the threat of marginalization and death. Ancestral languages survived and with them other forms of inhabitation that up until now resist the devouring forces of capitalism and their current form: neo-extractivism. In 2010, sociologist and writer Anibal Quijano published the first version of his essay about “Bien Vivir,” the concept of “Good Living” or “Living Well,” which translates from the Quechua or Quichua “sumaq kawsay” and the Aymara “suma qamaña,” and was also taken up by Central American Indigenous leaders from the “Balu Wala” concept in the Kuna language of Panama.<sup>13</sup> Quijano’s proposal of an alternative mode of existence stems from the reemergence of Indigenous modes of living together that are based on principles

of community and reciprocity, social organization, and community economies. It also might ultimately entail the establishment of plurinational states, such as Bolivia and Ecuador, and thus plurilingualism as a national policy, officially recognizing Indigenous languages and incorporating them into the structures of civic institutions and social life.

For cultural theorist Rita Segato, *Bien Vivir* enables an assemblage between archaic forms of living that are revitalized and historic projects of the present: historic lines and interrupted memories are restored, rekindled, and reach continuity.<sup>14</sup> According to Segato, *Bien Vivir* does not imply a regression in time or the search for a utopian village community that never really existed. It is a strategy to heal the wounds inflicted so long ago by stitching together past and present. Like *Abya Yala*, some names and the worldview they are attached to have endured the passing of time and hold on to the land and the rocks from which they emerged. Names like *Madinina* (Martinique), *Ayiti* (Haiti/Santo Domingo), *Anáhuac* (Tenochtitlán), and *Karukera* (Guadeloupe) bridge time and evoke other ways of living or, as Ferdinand proposes, a form of “decolonial inhabitation.” These ancestral names call not for a return to the past, but project us towards other futures, if not utopian, at least more optimistic.

In the same way renaming was a key operation of the colonial enterprise, reconnecting land and language and the ability to listen to the land seem to be fundamental acts of resistance to a neo-extractivist present. According to sociologist Maristella Svampa, by 2013 a process of reprimarization began to accompany the advancement of the commodification of economies and an expansion of neo-extractivism across ideological differences of the political spectrum, from neoliberal to progressive governments. This happened without regard to the consequences and impact of large-scale mining, the construction of mega-dams, the expansion of oil extraction frontiers, the naturalization of agribusiness models of monoculture, and the deepening of territorial and social injustices.<sup>15</sup> A clue as to how to rekindle the connection between stones and words might be found in author Ursula K. Le Guin's poem “Marrow,” a lesson in listening through an abstract bodily language, which though buried deep within the Earth, could hardly be erased:

There was a word inside a stone.  
I tried to pry it clear,  
mallet and chisel, pick and gad,  
until the stone was dropping blood,  
but still I could not hear  
the word the stone had said.

I threw it down beside the road  
among a thousand stones  
and as I turned away it cried  
the word aloud within my ear  
and the marrow of my bones  
heard, and replied.<sup>16</sup>

Le Guin's approach to the conflict between the world and the word steps away from the frictions of ecological epistemologies and grammars leaving behind nineteenth-century scientific entanglements and the colonial inhabitation that birthed them. It configures a possible scenario for an imagination that renews the forms of representation of the world and enunciates new relational models of being, thinking, feeling, and speaking within the ecosystems of the present. Working through the colonial fractures between the human and the nonhuman, Le Guin shifts from a productivist ecocide to a world of ecophilia and mineral communications. An uncharted space where the words that emerged from the interaction between human bodies and the land start to reappear through the crevices of life and language.

<sup>14</sup> Rita Segato, “Anibal Quijano y la perspectiva de la colonialidad del poder,” in *La crítica de la colonialidad en ocho ensayos y una antropología por demanda* (Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2018), 217.

<sup>15</sup> Svampa, *Neo-extractivism in Latin America*, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, “Deep in Admiration,” in *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene*, eds. Nils Bubandt et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), M17.