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In his groundbreaking monograph *Gestos ceremoniales: narrativa centroamericana, 1960-1990* (Guatemala: Artemis-Edinter, 1998), Arturo Arias memorably described Central American literature as emerging from “la marginalidad de la marginalidad” (11). What he meant was that if Latin American culture was overshadowed by the behemoth to the North, then within this already marginalized context, Central America was even further removed from the center of production, dwarfed by better-funded spaces like Mexico and Argentina. Arias has dedicated his career to countering the region’s invisibility: analyzing its literary “mini-boom” in the seventies (*Gestos ceremoniales*), probing the *testimonio* genre and the Rigoberta Menchú polemic (*Taking their Word: Literature and Signs of Central America; The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*), and producing a rigorously glossed edition of Miguel Angel Asturias’s criminally understudied novel *Mulata de tal* (Colección Archivos, 2001).

If Central American literature arose from the margins of the margins, then Arias’ latest dive into contemporary Maya narratives in the first volume of his trilogy *Recovering Lost Footprints* marks an even deeper plunge into the margins of the margin’s margins. With this book, Arias examines the narrative production of three foundational Maya writers from Guatemala (referred to throughout the book by its Maya name, Iximuleu). These three authors, Luis de Lión, Gaspar Pedro González, and Víctor Montejo, were trailblazers who laid the groundwork for future generations of Iximuleu Indigenous writers. Arias’ encyclopedic examination of their contributions similarly lays the foundation for future scholars of Central America and postcolonial aesthetics. It provides a comprehensive overview of these writers’ historical and cultural backdrop, and enacts exacting readings of their works: attending closely to their representations of Indigenous subjectivity, strident decolonial critiques, and inventive aesthetic techniques. Previously sidelined by most accounts of Guatemalan literature, the first volume of *Recovering Lost Footprints* makes the case for de Lión, González, and Montejo’s rightful inclusion within any discussion of twentieth-century Central American narrative production.

Chapter One sets the contextual groundwork for the subsequent case studies by detailing how Indigenous peoples in Guatemala have been circumscribed since the conquest by violent histories of

colonialism, displacement, war, and racism. Even today, in spite of institutional attempts to atone for the nation's genocidal history, "Mayas remain non-subjects excluded from conventional discourse ... considered deliria of the secret threads of coloniality" (49). In the twentieth century, (non-Indigenous) Ladino cultural production that acknowledged Indigenous presence often did so through romanticized clichés: offering an idealized, rather than complex portrait of Maya agency. Arias delves into an iconic example of this, exploring Miguel Ángel Asturias' appropriation of Maya culture. He finds Asturias guilty of speaking *for* and not *with* Mayas, but also posits this stance was adequate for the '40s and that *Hombres de maíz* actualized the "maximum possible consciousness to which a Ladino letrado could aspire" (52-53). He subsequently glosses Asturias' condemnation by prominent K'iche' poets like Sam Colop and Humberto Ak'abal in the late '80s, a viewpoint that Arias rationalizes, but ultimately critiques as "validating an essentialist position on Mayaness [that was] the photographic negative of Ladinos' own pernicious racism" (81). These sorts of nuanced discussions about identity and representational politics pop up throughout the book, cautioning the reader against valorizing identity in-and-of-itself, while simultaneously celebrating modes of Maya self-expression. Chapter One also provides the necessary background information to understand the conditions that demarcated emergent Maya writers in the late twentieth century, including the relationship between Mayas and Ladino leftists, the division between *maya populares* and *maya culturales*, the importance of the Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala for standardizing written expression, and the establishment of the first Maya publishing press, Maya' Nimajay Cholsamaj. Arias concludes this chapter with a brief discussion of the current Iximuleu Maya literary scene, which has sadly gone stagnant. Young Maya artists—like their peers across the globe—have drifted en masse toward non-literary modes of expression, from digital media to performance.

Chapter Two dives into the life and literary production of Kaqchikel author Luis de Lión, a "tragic pioneer" who deploys humor as decolonial narrative strategy (85). Although de Lión did not write or speak Kaqchikel, his work explores the traumatic effects of racism on Indigenous peoples. He represents the experience of racialized subalternity through unexpected tactics like parody and sarcasm, fleshing out Mayas' internalized sentiments of inferiority and rage. As in other chapters, Arias touches on de Lión's entire oeuvre, but analyzes one text in greater depth: de Lión's masterpiece, *El tiempo comienza en Xibalbá* (written in 1972, published in 1985). This non-linear, experimental novel evokes the *Popol Wuj*, and is in Arias' estimation, "one of the most complex novels ever written in Central America" (116). Arias' incisive reading of this work compelled me to return to it, and in doing so I felt the pointed lack of a definitive critical edition (in the vein of the now-defunct Colección

Archivos series produced by Mexico's Fondo de Cultura Económica). While University of Arizona Press published a wonderful translation of *El tiempo comienza en Xibalbá* in 2012 (translated by Nathan C. Henne into English, with an afterword by Arias), no such critical edition exists in Spanish.

Chapter Three turns to Gaspar Pedro González, who recurs to melodrama to thematize the cruelty endured by Mayas. González's *La otra cara* (written in Q'anjob'al in the '70s, published in 1992) was the first novel published in a Maya language in Guatemala. Within the relatively limited sphere of Iximuleu readers, it was a best seller: 500 copies sold in one year. In it, González blends myth with the real, underscores the ethical centrality of the collective, and details place-based belief systems. Arias argues that *La otra cara*'s accumulation of allusions to Maya beliefs and non-Western concepts is transgressive. It privileges Indigenous readers and keeps Western readers at arm's length, allowing them to "peek inside but not enter" (141). Unfortunately, the novel's English translation did away with much of this opacity, simplifying the content for Anglo readers, "transforming it into a ... complacent story of exotic subalternized subjects making good" (135).

Chapter Four profiles Víctor Montejo, a writer and anthropologist who lived much of his life in the United States after fleeing Guatemala's brutal Civil War. Montejo is a prolific author who has written across many genres: *testimonio*, poetry, fiction, and academic prose. Arias explains that Montejo advocates for the oral tradition as a form of knowledge-making, and has canonized certain legends, such as *Q'anil*, recording for posterity the story of an ancestral hero who models ethics of self-sacrifice and community service. Montejo's book of fables, *The Bird Who Cleans the World*, registers the stories that his mother told him as a boy, tales that theorize the continuity between human and non-human subjects, and articulate an ontology in which "entities surface from interactions ... [and] dialogic relations" (187). Arias also analyzes Montejo's unusual *testimonio*, *Brevísima relación testimonial de la destrucción del Mayab'* which blends fiction and memory, and invokes meta-textual references to Guamán Poma de Ayala. Arias proposes that Montejo purposefully flaunts the truth-telling supposedly requisite of a *testimonio*, instead engaging in "fantasy-like imaginative deliria whose meaning is heard to authenticate, as a contrary way of reconfiguring discursively traumatized Indigenous subjectivities by way of a structure of feeling" (190). Montejo pushes back against expectations that the testimonial genre mediate non-Western knowledge for Western interlocutors, instead privileging affect, myth, and the illusory. In this way, Montejo breaks with "old-fashioned identity politics" that reduce the subaltern to a mythic totem, and instead constructs Indigenous selfhood as a process of contradictory and complex unfolding.

In the Conclusion, Arias makes the case for heightened attention to cultural specificity, rather than a universalizing account of indigeneity. While Indigenous societies across the globe share certain commonalities—such as place-based epistemologies or the violent experience of settler colonialism—Arias cautions that efforts to generalize across experiences end up flattening and conflating “a vast sea of cosmopolitical heterogeneities” (222). Thus while there has been much scholarly interest in fomenting pan-hemispheric studies of Indigenous cosmologies, Arias is skeptical of such efforts because they downplay plurality and produce a reductive notion of universal Indigenous identity. Likewise, this chapter contends that ethical methodologies are key when analyzing Indigenous texts—especially as a non-Indigenous scholar. Arias advises that a scholar should never approach a text with an a priori interpretation in mind. Instead, the text should be allowed to reveal itself to the critic, and guide the direction of the analysis. This sort of methodological approach ensures that a text does not become a passive tool, but rather preserves its agency, and speaks for itself.

The first volume of Arias’ series *Recovering Lost Footprints* will be of great interest to a wide range of readers. It will be of use to scholars interested in postcolonial Latin American literature, scholars of Indigenous studies and critical race theories, and scholars of Central American culture. It is also a good book to use in the classroom, as it does not presume that its readers are already acquainted with Guatemalan history or Maya culture. The comprehensive chapters on de Lión, González, and Montejo provide an excellent overview of the three writers, while also opening the door for future scholars to dive into the conversation. This is already happening; a flurry of noteworthy monographs on contemporary Maya literature has been published this year. Arias’ volumes join Gloria E. Chacón’s *Indigenous Cosmolectics: Kab’awil and the Making of Maya and Zapotec Literatures* (University of North Carolina Press, 2018) and Paul M. Worley and Rita M. Palacios’s forthcoming *Unwriting Maya Literature: Ts’iib as Recorded Knowledge* (U of Arizona P, 2019). Together, these works highlight the aesthetic creativity of Maya voices, and underscore the need to take them into account when analyzing Latin American cultural production today.