

Reflective journal with academic commentary.

Using examples to be found in the literature and personal experience to illustrate your argument, discuss the following proposition: “we are all indigenous to place and ancestors”.

During the fall of 2014 I had the privilege of walking the more than 800 kilometers of the Camino de Santiago in the north of the Iberian Peninsula as a pilgrim; starting in the east in the mountain range of the Pyrenees, and arriving to the west coast to the Finisterre point. This experience made me connect in a unique and profound way to that place and the ancestors of that land; since then, I have a stronger sense of indigeneity to my place and ancestors.

In all traditions it is said, in diverse ways adapted to each time, about the myth of a Supreme Being that is given to itself, that sacrifices itself to create the world. Meaning by sacrifice: making things sacred, honouring them, and surrendering to them. All traditions have a sacred sense of nature, of place; being sacred is the Reality that is situated beyond all the cosmic manifestation. Then nature – and place – would be a book that never ceases to write, in each of its phenomena of beauty and donation, a single verse: everything is one.

The interdependence of the phenomena speaks again and again to those who quietly contemplate the ontological pain of feeling split. Everything unites when, appeasing our insatiable desire to possess externally what we think we lack internally, we begin to dive in the inland seas, turning our gaze to the depths of our being, in search of the only treasure that can quench our thirst for infinity, our thirst for the absolute. These qualities are mysteriously concentrated in a single point, in a single time, in the deepest diving point, in the centre of everyone, in our heart. Every fear of lack is relieved when we recover the responsibility of remembering this essence and radiate that love and beauty, as if creating a mirror where everyone can see, majestically expressed, the essential elements that constitute her or himself.

The ancestral practice of pilgrimage offered me the experience of remembering a connection with a vaster reality through a metaphorical connection with the places that cross the Camino de Santiago. That is why the microcosm, which humanity is, and the macrocosm have a deep bond of union that mankind has to learn or remember to read; not simply with a knowledge of nature as Western Sciences does, which separate and fragment reality in units of observation increasingly smaller, always losing sight of the centre of the circumference, the sense of centrality and totality, which is what brings us closer to the truth of things. Nor it is enough to read that link or union with a special sensitivity to the beauty of nature, no matter how noble this sensitivity is. But recovering the symbolic language in which the different kingdoms of nature are continually talking about their connection to orders of metaphysical reality, beyond matter, in which Western Science usually stays stopped but in

which indigenous and ancestral traditions offer practices, rituals and cosmologies that definitely can help.

For Instance, the Huichol community – who live in the Sierra Madre Occidental of north-central Mexico – have a sense of place that allows their people ‘to form a unified vision of the world in which the community exists in harmony with the world’s natural elements’ (Lawlor 2013: 19). This sense of place comes from a journey, an annual pilgrimage that the Huichol walk through the rugged and remote mountains of the region, and which holds as purpose the annual peyote hunt – a medicinal plant that plays an essential role, along with the deer and the maize too, in their sense of life, community and place (Myerhoff 1974) –. This ‘trinity’ of sacred icons – the deer, the maize and the peyote – tells the Huichol people about the meaning of life and their relationship with the land, creating a sense of place that governs their relationship with the land in regard not only with the place they inhabit or walk during the annual pilgrimage but with the whole world and cosmos (Lawlor 2013).

This sense of place refers to a broader definition than the commonly given as a cultural construction. As many scholars have undeniably noted, the sense of place is inherently a cultural construct, indeed, but it is also a construct informed by the empirical reality of a place itself. In other words, the culture has been previously informed by the natural environment of a specific place (Lawlor 2013). ‘Common to most definitions of sense of place is a three component view that integrates the physical environment, human behaviours, and social and/or psychological processes’ (Stedman et al 2004: 581).

So we have a sacred book: nature, the places in which we live. The primordial revelation, which writes its message of transcendence with the analogy that awakens in the soul with the mists of the morning. The most sublime poetry that exists in the universe when its veils are torn by moments before gusts of wind, the symbol of the spirit; and when the unshakeable mountain appears from nowhere and shows its secrets of majestic stability, of inaction in front of the impermanence of the seasons. Or when a tree raises its branches with the strength that its deep roots give through the trunk, which is the perfect axis; giving the analogy that our spine is also the perfect axis between the sky and earth, and reminds us of the contemplative gaze that is the bridge between worlds, pontiff connecting two shores, the inner and the outer. We are also a plant that seeks to rise. ‘The first glimpse of the desert through a mountain pass... can call forth not only joy but, inexplicably, a sense of recognition as of a pristine and primordial world one has always known. A brief but intense experience is capable of nullifying the past so that we are ready to abandon home for the promised land’ (Tuan 1977: 184).

Learning to read the book is to learn to contemplate natural forms as a reflection of divine qualities. The power of forms to present a reminiscence in the Platonic sense. Or learning to see the face of god everywhere, as the Koran would say. Wherever we look at the metaphysical transparency of phenomena, these give us an image of the Absolute. ‘Through the development of a sense of place, constructed both culturally and organically, the Huichols have managed to bring meaning to their lives; to bring meaning to places they

inhabit and visit; and to construct a worldview that is symbiotic and ecologically conscious' (Lawlor 2013).

However, Western man and its predominance have lost that vision that allows the symbol to offer its treasure. We only see matter, we only see environment, not Mother Nature; we study it, exploit it, devastate it, contaminate it for our own benefit. The cosmic book has become illegible and the sacred scripture has been reduced to only its external meaning.

Only if we recover the lost roots of those traditional and indigenous sciences, from which all other modern sciences derive, we will be able to approach the Mother Earth with the poetic softness that gives the understanding of its sacred dimension. Observe her with the astonished devotion in front of so much wonder that never ends, in front of the daily miracle of the sun coming from the east to illuminate the day and that lies every night letting itself roll with millimeter precision on the west side. Or when falling on my knees before the starry nights of the Camino, plagued by myriads of messages from above, and be mute in that contemplation. That crazy dialogue of a hyper-stimulated mind, which conditions in such a way our vision that instead of seeing a mother we see a set of resources to take advantage of to satisfy a greed and gluttony that has no limits. If the vision is not cleaned and we contemplate the reality without perceptual filters generated from a pathological selfishness; there will not be a river without pollution, nor an ocean without decimating, nor a piece of land that will give us pleasant fertility, nor an air to breathe.

But how do we remove those filters? How do Western worldviews recover visions of the ineffable spiritual reality that runs from us? The traditional sciences and different indigenous cosmologies support this contemplation of the cosmos as an icon: they give ways of how to recover the eye of the heart, the intellectual organ for many traditions.

Scholars like Terence McKenna speak about the reconciliation of humans with the nonhuman world, for example paying attention to plant behaviour or nature behaviour to organize our life (McKenna 1992).

This would be in line with the idea that the disassociation of man from nature has often been developed more in monotheistic religious cultures – with the figure of an alienated God from other beings and the earth itself – than in animistic or polytheistic cultures connected to the land through earth-based spirituality (Lawlor 2013). It is in that connection to the earth, to a specific place and ancestors, that the key to provide humans with a more respectful with life and nature cosmology resides.

In the West, many centuries ago, our tree renounced its traditional roots to the limits that we are seeing today an unprecedented crisis, not only ecological but civilizational, which its global dimensions threaten the disappearance of life itself. We have lost the wisdom of our ancestors. However, not everything is lost. We can perceive more and more cracks everywhere; people who rebel and break the program of the consumer zombie, those trained only to produce and buy and begin to doubt.

Doubt attracts the question and questions open the search. The dream has been interrupted.

The Western monopoly of Science is cracked; science begins to not be a single Western invention anymore, but just a science with its specific history and particular culture. For instance, physicists like F. David Peat (2002) and David Bohm (2002) have proposed an alternative view of science based on quantum physics relationships, which demonstrates parallels with Native science or ways Indigenous people have always sought to understand their world (Cajete 2000). 'The ultimate aim is not explaining an objectified universe, but rather learning about and understanding responsibilities and relationships and celebrating those that humans establish with the world' (Cajete 2000: 13).

As Cajete notes, 'the word "science" has only recently been used to depict systems of knowledge that refer to the multidimensional world of nature and people's ways or traditions of relationship with the world' (Cajete 2000: 12). While this use of science remains controversial within some biased Western scientists, indigenous people had already embraced this use of science in their cosmologies. 'Indigenous consciousness has always included, along with the practical relationships of the natural world, aspects such as the direct relationship of communities of people with the spirit of the place in which they have lived and the places they have come to know and understand' (Cajete 2000: 13).

Reconstructing the facts of a worldview or cosmology where life does not matter would be endless; to delineate other life possibilities based on the unfolding of our inner potential is more interesting.

Long ago, our indigenous ancestors were marginalized, discriminated, alienated and enslaved, their cultural matrix destroyed, their souls killed, their bodies condemned to live evicted, and forced to adapt to a life without identity or nature. The grandmothers and grandparents, however, left their traces, so that in silence they tell us, how life was, when life was the most important thing. That is the indigenous worldview that remains deep in the places we inhabit and that we want to talk about today. 'Indigenous science mirrors and celebrates the cycles of time, space, and being, in individual action, community action, ritual and ceremonial activities, and direct relationships with the land' (Cajete 2000: 14). We are all indigenous to place and ancestors.

Maybe this is the time to come out of silence and grasp our identities. Maybe it is the time for Western societies to (re)discover our sense of place with our ceremonies and rituals learning how to live in the world. Maybe this is the time to break the glass of prejudice, which makes us look different to what we are. Maybe this is the time to reduce the distance, to open the eyes of the heart and discover the possibility of other valid and interesting lifestyles. The sky of the future darkens when we reduce hope to one way of thinking and living. Life should be a date with the sacred: a multidimensional artisan where everything is one and everything is alive. There is not only what our eyes see; looking exclusively outside, we run the risk of losing sight of the inner potential that we all have, forgetting how to access to a powerful internal technology.

The certainty that everything is one and everything is alive does not come from conceptual analysis or rational efforts; reason is valid and powerful but not an exclusive instrument. The beam of its light is very narrow. The energy of the subtle bodies that we are, are the branches of the universe that we also are. So, we do not need to huddle in this dimension alone or sink our eyes in what seems to be normal reality.

A reality constituted by magic waits for us, that was the science of the ancestors; we know that the stones are also alive, only that they inhabit another time. We know that trees sing, that they speak to those who reconstructed their sensibility and freed themselves from the dictatorship of a reason, with pretence of exclusivity. We also know that animals are part of our evolutionary history. We only need to purify our energy to understand that we are from a big tribe where everything is alive, everything is connected, and everything is evolving. With all these different worldviews and cosmologies, let's celebrate unity in diversity.

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