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# I. Introduction

On behalf of the Editorial Board of *Mester*, the academic journal of the graduate students of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of California (Los Angeles), I am honored to introduce its forty-ninth issue. *Mester XLIX* welcomed submissions for articles, essays, interviews and book reviews written in Spanish, Portuguese, and English from transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches related to Human Rights. *Mester XLIX* also encouraged submissions focused on – but not limited to – Andean and Amazonian perspectives on Ecosocial Human Rights for a Special Topic, underlining the importance of both regions as “intangible zones”<sup>1</sup> whose visibility is a prerequisite for the task of devising strategies to meet the current challenges of global warming<sup>2</sup>.

Human rights are conceived here not only as “ethical demands” whose achievement “can go well beyond legislation” (Sen 319)<sup>3</sup>, but above all as a claim for memory, truth, and justice that surpasses Law<sup>4</sup> (Agamben 18). In this sense, we privilege human rights ideas and practices that emerge from people in struggle and communities of resistance<sup>5</sup>, as well as alternative histories of human rights that go beyond the European tradition, because “since the very beginning of modernity, at different times and in different places, the ideas of natural rights and human rights have been seized upon by colonized peoples to oppose imperialism and abusive national regimes”<sup>6</sup> (Barreto 19). In fact, *Mester XLIX* was inspired by the great visibility and political relevance of human rights discourses in Latin American contemporary social movements and cultural production, as well as by transnational human rights activism. This is why the Special Topic aims to enrich the contemporary debate on the rights of Pachamama in Latin America through mapping different cultures of ethical values and practices, diverse discourses, and other ways of thinking about eco-social human rights from indigenous points of view. In this way, *Mester* contributes to the construction of a Latin American history of human rights.

Furthermore, this edition was motivated by Chilean scholar Hernán Vidal’s proposal that literary and cultural hermeneutics based on human rights have the potential to restore the political dimension

of literary and cultural studies<sup>7</sup>. The result was a timely volume that explores the inextricable connections between the violations of human and non-human rights, the necroextractivist culture/logic of capitalism, the colonial/imperial logic of western modernity, the intrinsic relationship between space and sovereignties, environmental (in)justice issues, and the current climate crisis. We received texts that approach Human Rights issues from a wide range of fields such as Literature, Law, History, Anthropology, Amazonian and Andean studies, Geography, Sociology, and Cinema, as detailed below.

Opening the General Section on Human Rights, in “Condenados da terra: o confinamento dos pobres em campos de concentração no Ceará, Nordeste do Brasil”, Kenia Sousa Rios examines the construction of seven concentration camps in the state of Ceará, Brazil, during the first administration of president Getúlio Vargas (1930-1945). Rios argues that the Brazilian state and the local elites built the camps to control the waves of impoverished migrant families who fled from the arid hinterland during the severe drought of 1932. In their bid for survival, these deprived families fled to Fortaleza, but soon were put in camps and used as a cheap labor force to work on government construction projects, leading the official discourse to declare explicitly that the climate crisis was beneficial to economic development. Rio’s fluid prose offers a stimulating introduction to the subject.

In the second article, “O direito humano fundamental à literatura no Brasil distópico da era bolsonarista”, Duina Mota de Figueiredo Porto examines the dystopian social and political reality in Brazil under the Bolsonaro government through the lens of Ray Bradbury’s seminal dystopian novel, *Fahrenheit 451*. She discusses access to literature as a basic human right and shows how it can be systematically violated in authoritarian regimes, identifying diverse control mechanisms present both in *Fahrenheit 451* and in contemporary Brazil, such as the symbolic burning of books, the use of propaganda, disinformation (*fake news*), and explicit political persecution. Figueiredo Porto argues that, through *Fahrenheit 451*, we can clearly see in Bolsonaro’s Brazil “the disrespect for fundamental rights that we believed to be assured, and the inability to assimilate this by a legion of uninformed non-readers” (my translation).

In the third and last article in this section, “Recordar as crianças de Morélia: a literatura como espaço de construção de memória em

*La Identidad Perdida*”, Theresa Bachmann discusses the singular history of exile of several Spanish republicans’ children in Mexico, and analyses the representation of these children’s experiences in the historical novel *La Identidad Perdida: La historia oculta de los niños de Morelia*, by Lola Moreno. Bachmann states that, unlike the majority of narratives of exile, “in which the authors, mostly children and grandchildren of those who have been exiled, feel compelled to return to the past to connect it to their present identities” (my translation), *La Identidad Perdida* was written from Lola’s contact with some of those children from Morelia during the three years she spent in Mexico. Bachmann examines the process of the novel’s construction and Lola’s careful use of archive and testimonies to dignify the memories of the exiled children.

A preface by Roger Rumrill opens the section on Eco-social Human Rights. It is followed by the article “Identity, Displacement and Memory: A Decolonial Approach to Amerindian and African American Literature of the Americas”, by Roland Walter, who examines the representations of identitarian displacement and of colonial past traumas in the works of Amerindian writers Eliane Potiguara, Graça Graúna, and David Aniñir Guilitraro, and in the works of African American writers Toni Morrison, Jamaica Kincaid, and Leslie Marmon Silko. Walter explains that the brutalization of people is not only deeply connected to land expropriation, but also implies a violation of the non-human rights of all species. He argues that writers of indigenous and African descent alike “problematize an ongoing violence that is physical, epistemic and ecological; a genocide that turns them into strangers [orphans] in their traditional homelands”. Walter claims that the space of literary memory is “constituted by inter/transbiotic mnemonic traces and tracks of cultural evidence filled with the writer’s emotion and imagination”.

The third text of this section is the article “Co-Creating Commons with Earth Others: Decolonizing the Mastery of Nature”, by Frédérique Apffel-Marglin, who examines the onto-epistemological process of colonization that “has led to the industrial revolution and the western modern way of exploiting an insentient, inert and mechanical nature”. She explains that this colonizing process is based on a prototypical nature/culture dichotomy that allowed the domination and marginalization of earth others and different social groups associated with “nature”. Apffel-Marglin proposes that it is only

through a non-anthropocentric, non-hierarchical, and reciprocal co-animation between humans and earth others “that we can decolonize the master’s story of nature (as well as of society) and thus be able to create true commons”.

In the fourth article, “Ethical Cosmologies in Amazonia”, Stefano Varese discusses the appropriate epistemological and ethical tools with which to understand Amazonia. He argues that it is not possible “fully to understand and interact intelligently and ethically” with the Amazon if we do not question official cultural and social representations of the forest, as well as “a narrow, temporal synchronic and spatial materialistic perspective” that minimizes its long history and contributes towards its commoditization/privatization. He gives the example of the Kichwa people of Sarayaku in Ecuador to assert that the Amazonian indigenous concept of “socio-nature” and the “ontological shift to the notion of *kawsak sacha-living jungle*” are both ethical responses to plundering by capitalism and the Liberal State. Stefano claims that “the moral treatment of Amazonia and the reverence that all its tangible and intangible beings deserve becomes the fundamental challenge of our times”.

In the fifth article, “Notas sobre la socio-natura ontológica indígena”, Guillermo Delgado-P. proposes the concept of “re/membering” as an ontological re-composition of the “socio-nature” of the indigenous political body. He argues that defending indigenous territories necessarily implies reviving the hylozoism that was discarded by rationalist and dualist philosophy: “[W]hen we speak of the ontological from an indigenous perspective, we are speaking of a living nature (Kallpa Kamasqa), of the ancient hylozoism recognized even in Europe before the emergence of a rationalist philosophy that justified slavery. . . . The declaration of the possession of the Americas as Terra Nullius is, simultaneously, the declaration of the dispossession and the disqualification of the *nomos* of indigenous societies” (my translation). For Guillermo Delgado-P, the indigenous ethical claim of “re/membering” is a radical critique of capitalism.

In the sixth article, “Derechos indígenas en el Perú: Transgresiones y contrabandos normativos”, Alberto Chirif shows that although the Peruvian State signs and ratifies international treaties and conventions on indigenous rights, there are numerous cases in which the State has infringed those rights, hindering the legal recognition of indigenous communities and territories and consequently the titling of their lands.

Chirif discusses important examples such as the Fujimori administration's disregard for the *Indigenous* and Tribal Peoples *Convention* of the *International Labour Organization*, ILO 169, President Alán García's controversial decrees that failed to take into account Indigenous rights recognized by national and international legislation, and problematic distortions of the law of prior consultation of indigenous peoples during the administration of President Ollanta Humala. He argues that all these issues "have to do with the economic interests of the State. Denying indigenous peoples their status as subjects under law and failing to legalize their integral territories are convenient measures favoring extractive companies, which act in conjunction with the executive power" (my translation).

In the seventh article, "Modelo neoextrativista e supressão de direitos territoriais: comunidades ribeirinhas amazônicas em contagem regressiva", Luís Fernando Novoa Garzon and Daniele Severo da Silva examine the process of commoditization of the Madeira River basin and the ways in which corporate and state power act in collusion to legalize large-scale water appropriations in the Amazon. They also analyze official attempts to normalize the dispossession of territorialities and local forms of sociability linked to the great Amazon rivers and the resulting socio-environmental disasters. They expose several mechanisms whereby continued and widespread genocide and ecocide in the Amazon are perpetrated, and argue that "It is in the region that the standard form of appropriation of territorial resources on a large scale is forged: the neo-extractive model that condemns the region — and the country itself — to be an eternal succession of economic enclaves: a huge territorial menu available to private investors" (my translation).

In the eighth article, "El Ecuador retrocediendo a 1492 con el decreto 883", Luz María de la Torre Amaguana examines the calamitous social and economic consequences of Decree 883, approved by the Ecuadorian administration of president Lenin Moreno in 2019. She interprets the widespread popular reaction against the decree in the light of the five ethical imperatives of the Andean Indigenous peoples: *Ama llulla* (don't lie), *Ama shuwa* (don't steal), *Ama killa* (don't be lazy), *Ama shitak* (don't waste), and *Ama wañuchik* (don't kill). De la Torre Amaguana argues that "the same groups of *criollos* — imitators of foreign elites — who founded the independent republics, remain servile, and act as the intermediaries of modern-day plunder" and that the Andean ethical categories "express 'the right to defend

the rights of the people’ with messages that challenge wild and ambitious forms of government” (my translation).

In the last article in this section, “Megamineração de nióbio em Goiás, Brasil: territórios fraturados a céu aberto”, Ricardo Júnior de Assis Fernandes Gonçalves examines the violent territorial implications of niobium extraction in open pit mines in the Brazilian state of Goiás, which holds one of the largest deposits of niobium not only in Brazil, but worldwide. He argues that mining corporations control the territories through state ownership of the subsoil, which “authorizes current exploration, whether for research or mining, anticipates the guarantee of future access to the resource, and still inhibits access by competing companies” (my translation). Through a rigorous analysis of the data, Fernandes Gonçalves clearly shows that the destructive impact of mining on the life of peasant communities and on local landscapes is irreversible.

The section on Cinema includes the journalistic essay, “Luz rebelde: sob o sol do cinema paraibano” by Fernando Trevas Falcone, and the interview “‘Em um futuro distópico, não existe mais lugar para onde ir’: Uma entrevista com o cineasta Dhiones do Congo” by Barbara Galindo and Ludmila Porto. Trevas Falcone’s essay is a delightful introduction to the aesthetic relevance of film production in the state of Paraíba to Brazilian cinema as a whole. It discusses two pioneering political key figures, Walfredo Rodrigues and Linduarte Noronha, as well as film representations of the *sertão* as a geo-political paradigm of Brazil’s profound social inequalities. The essay ends with a brief but precise analysis of the science fiction film *Ultravioleta*, by Dhiones do Congo, which depicts the daily routine of a family of *sertanejos* surviving in an underground hideout because of the unbearably high temperatures above ground. In the interview that follows Trevas’ essay, with questions by Galindo and Porto, do Congo comments on his trajectory as a screenwriter and film director, as well as on the dystopian representation of the *sertão* in *Ultravioleta*. Our last section concludes with three book reviews: Isaac Giménez writes about the audiobook *Anticorpo: A parody on the colonial ambition* (expected publication in 2020) by Patrícia Lino; Ludmila Porto reviews the Portuguese translation of Silvia Federici’s book *Witches, Witch-Hunting, and Women*, published in Brazil under the title *Mulheres e caça às bruxas* (2019), and Jason Araújo discusses *Borges, Buddhism and World Literature: A Morphology of Renunciation Tales* (2019) by Dominique Jullien.

In conclusion, I must say that completing this issue would have been impossible without the hard work and enthusiasm of many incredible people. I am very thankful to all the authors and their generous contributions to this volume. I am deeply grateful to this year's Editorial Board, comprised of Benjamin Burt, Cristina G. Vázquez, Esther Claudio, Isaac Giménez, Julia González Calderón, Leandro Arsenio Hernández, Madison Felman-Panagotacos, Mary Hood, and Verónica García Moreno, as well as to this issue's guest contributing editors, Kristal Bivona, Ludmila Mota de Figueiredo Porto, and Patrícia Lino. I would also like to thank Maria Teresa Monroe, and Renee P. Rivera, the past Editors-in-Chief of *Mester*, as well as the current Editor-in-Chief, Isaac Giménez, for their support throughout. I am very grateful to *Mester* XLIX's Faculty Advisor Professor Adriana Bergero, and to the great support we received from our Chair Rosina Becerra. I would also like to thank the director of the GSA Publications Office, Amira Hassnaoui; the GSA Vice-President of Academic Affairs, Letty Treviño, and the staff and student body of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. Lastly, I wish to express my recognition of the indispensable work of our layout editor, William Morosi.

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## Notes

1. See Macarena Gomez-Barris, *The extractive zone* (2017).
2. In *Facing Gaia* (2017), Bruno Latour explains that the Republicans' adviser Franz Luntz suggested replacing the expression "global warming" with "climate change" to neutralize the discussion on the causes of global warming: "the description of the facts is so dangerously close to the prescription of a policy that, to put a stop to the challenges addressed to the industrial way of life, one has to cast doubt on the facts themselves" (25).
3. Sen, Amartya. "Elements of a theory of human rights." *Philosophy & public affairs* 32.4 (2004): 315-356.
4. Because, as Giorgio Agamben states, the "ultimate aim of law is the production of a *res judicata*, in which the sentence becomes the substitute



for the true and the just, being held as true despite its falsity and injustice” (18). See Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The witness and the archive*. Zone books, 1999.

5. As Upendra Baxi says, in *The Future of Human Rights*, “True, many a human rights wave flounders on the rocks of state sovereignty. Yet, these very waves, at times, gather the strength of a tidal wave that crumbles the citadels of state sovereignty as if they were sandcastles. . . . originary authors of human rights are people in struggle and communities of resistance” (xiii-xiv).

6. See Barreto, José-Manuel, ed. *Human rights from a third world perspective: Critique, history and international law*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012.

7. Vidal, Hernán. *Socio-historia de la literatura colonial hispano-americana: tres lecturas orgánicas*. Minnesota: Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literature, 1985.