

Pachakuti, an Indigenous Perspective on Collapse and Extinction

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37536/ecoazona.2023.14.2.5030>



Abstract

This work aims to examine *pachakuti* as the patent mytheme found in three poems written by different indigenous poets: “Todo está dicho” (“Everything has been said”) by Fredy Chakangana, “La Tórtola, pájaro melancólico” (“The turtledove, Melancholic bird”) by Lorenzo Ayllapán, and “Vivir-Morir” (“To live-to die”) by Vito Apūshana. *Pachakuti* is a key concept in Andean literature, both in mythological and cosmological tales, and in contemporary indigenous narrative. *Pachakuti* is interpreted to symbolize a re-balancing of the world through a chaotic chain of events that manifests itself as a catastrophe or an upheaval of the order of things. As *pachakuti* becomes a recurrent motif (patent mytheme) in the chosen poems, it is explored to show a different narrative perspective of collapse and extinction, as well as to expose how earth-beings (latent mytheme) acquire their own agency in the poems and denounce modern forms of extractivism (such as deforestation and water contamination). Through the earth-beings’ voices the poems contribute to reveal new perspectives about collapse and extinction anchored in indigenous narratives from the Global South.

Keywords: *Pachakuti*, figurative structuralism, ecocriticism, collapse and extinction, indigenous narrative.

Resumen

Este trabajo tiene como objetivo examinar los mitemas encontrados en tres poemas escritos por diferentes poetas indígenas: “Todo está dicho” de Fredy Chakangana, “La tórtola, pájaro melancólico” de Lorenzo Ayllapán y “Vivir-morir” de Vito Apūshana. *Pachakuti* es un concepto clave en la literatura andina, tanto en los relatos mitológicos y cosmológicos, como en la narrativa indígena contemporánea. *Pachakuti* se interpreta para simbolizar el reequilibrio del mundo a través de una cadena caótica de eventos que se manifiesta como una catástrofe o un trastorno del orden de las cosas. Como *pachakuti* se convierte en un motivo recurrente (mitema patente) en los poemas elegidos, este se explora para mostrar una perspectiva narrativa diferente de colapso y extinción y, además, se expone cómo los seres-tierra (mitema latente) adquieren voz propia en los poemas y denuncian formas modernas de extractivismo, tales como la deforestación y la contaminación de las aguas. A través de las voces de los seres-tierra se revelan nuevas perspectivas sobre colapso y extinción, ancladas en las narrativas indígenas del Sur Global.

Palabras clave: *Pachakuti*, estructuralismo figurativo, ecocrítica, colapso y extinción, narrativa indígena.

In accordance with the Mayan Calendar, the year 2012 marked “the supposed end of the world” and countdowns began running in anticipation of the anticipated

great event on December 21, 2012. Websites and chats were devoted to talk about what would or could happen that day, and survival kits were published and sold all over the world to help people survive the apocalyptic event that was predicted to happen. This eschatological episode did not occur, and the world went on as usual. The remarkable issue here is how the concept of apocalyptic events unfolds in Western imaginary. In accordance with Fabry *et al.*, the apocalyptic ending refers to a final dramatic battle between the forces of good and evil; the evil forces prevail, and God intervenes, destroying the dominant powers to restore the good (Fabry *et al.* 13). These apocalyptic imaginings reside also in the indigenous cultures of Latin America or Abya Yala,¹ where it is called *pachakuti* and belongs to the Andean cosmology. Thomson describes *pachakuti* as a concept from the Quechua-Aymara -cosmogony and language- '*pacha*', meaning spatiotemporal twist or the world, and '*kuti*', which means upheaval or revolution (Thomson 450). When putting together the word it can be interpreted to symbolize a re-balancing of the world through a chaotic chain of events that could be manifested as a catastrophe or upheaval of the order of things. The definition of *pachakuti*, as indicated by Bria and Walter and Rivera Cusicanqui, therefore means both catastrophe and renovation (Bria and Walter 20; Rivera Cusicanqui 19) and differs from the Western apocalyptic imaginings.

The concept of *pachakuti* was introduced in the seventeenth century by the nobleman Guamán Poma de Ayala in his book *Nueva Corónica y Buen Gobierno* (1615). Guamán Poma presented the concept as an interpretative device combining “the icon of Lucifer and the promise of divine punishment with the Andean belief in the cosmic, cyclical destruction and renovation of the universe” (Adorno 456). According to Adorno the concept is used by the nobleman as a uniquely Andean phenomenon that refers only to Andean events, not to outsiders to the culture. This means, according to Adorno, that not even the Conquest is included in the concept (Adorno 456), though, in recent time, other authors do take this into account. In this respect, Rivera Cusicanqui describes the Conquest and Colonization as an initiation of a “cycle of violent domination best expressed by the Andean concept of *pachakuti*” (Rivera Cusicanqui 19). This perception can be corroborated by Robins who expresses that for the indigenous population of the Andes, the Spanish conquest was perceived as a cataclysm that transformed their lives, but at the same time helped them as well to adjust to the changes brought by the new order of things (Robin 36). In 1613, parallel to Guamán Poma de Ayala’s work, Juan Santacruz Pachakuti Yamqui, a noble descendant of the ruling Inca people, drew a picture of the cosmos as his ancestors believed it to be. Vilca describes the picture that illustrates the cosmos as a house in which there dwells a cosmic egg that hatches to give rise to an infinite diversity of beings that divide themselves in dualities; in the centre of the house lives Viracocha (Sun God), to his right stands the sun and to his left rests the moon. The world is subject to a kind of game where both the joyful and the disastrous coexist together.

¹ Abya Yala, in Kuna language (Panamá), means “land in its full maturity”. This term is assigned by the indigenous movements to denominate the American continent in its totality (Arias *et al.* 10).

That is why humanity (in the house), is depicted besieged by four elements that at any given time could turn their existence upside-down, in other words *pachakuti* (Vilca 4-5).

Thus, the aim of this study is to analyse three poems written by indigenous poets Fredy Chakangana, “Todo está dicho” (Everything has been said) (Rocha Vivas 294-95); Lorenzo Ayllapán, “La Tórtola, pájaro melancólico” (The turtledove, melancholic bird) (Huenún 31), and Vito Apüshana, “Vivir-Morir” (To live-to die) (Apüshana 68). These poets’ narrative could be placed in the category called *oralitura*,² which means that the authors use their oral narrative traditions and put these down in written words as a tool to support the narrative art among indigenous writers, or as Chihuailaf indicates, “It takes place beside my people’s oral tradition, beside my elders (with respect for them and their way of thinking)” (Mora Curriao 322).

In the chosen poems I will examine *pachakuti* as a mytheme that belongs to Andean cosmovision, mythological tales and contemporary narrative. I will contend that the *pachakuti* exposes a different form of narrative about collapse and destruction, which provides new viewpoints, anchored in indigenous narratives from the Global South, as a way to denounce the destruction and exploitation through the practice of extractivism in their territories. This literary narrative points out two aspects of the *pachakuti* notion. On the one hand, it reveals the interrelation between humans and “earth-beings” (*seres-tierra*), as Marisol de la Cadena named them, who pertain to the Andean cosmology (de la Cadena, *Earth Beings* 164). These beings are needed to maintain and renew the world to an equilibrium or “living well” (*Buen Vivir* or in indigenous concepts *Sumaq Qamaña*, *Sumaq Kawsay*, *Küme Monge*), meaning fostering “relations of conviviality with all forms of existence” (Prádanos and Figueroa Helland 9; “El Vivir Bien” 137-38, 145-46, 189-90). On the other hand, it denounces through the earth-beings’ voices the extractive activities perpetuated by the multinational corporations that affect and destroy “living well”. Indigenous people acknowledge the fact that the current world system is in crisis; that is the reason for promoting living well by defending Mother Earth to turn the existing *pachakuti* from collapse and extinction to a renewal of the world. Indigenous people are acquainted with *pachakuti*, since this is not a new phenomenon for these cultures. On the contrary, for indigenous people the world has already ended several times, such as in pre-Incan times, the conquest and colonization of the Spaniards, and the mythological apocalypses of *Popol Vuh’s* narrative, all events that have shaped their present world (Bold 13-14).

Since the concept of *pachakuti* is associated with a repetition of cycles, it has its place in Durand’s figurative structuralism and its methodological theory; the mythocritical method that means a narrative text can be examined in the same way as a myth, as explained in *Mitos y sociedades* (Durand 154). Durand’s theory has its

² The concept of *oralitura* was first used by Elicura Chihuailaf (winner of the Chilean literary prize in 2020) during “Primer Taller de Escritores en Lenguas Indígenas” in Tlaxcala Mexico, in 1995.

foundation in the human imaginary, which he calls “the anthropological structures” named in *Las estructuras antropológicas del imaginario* (Durand 44). These structures constitute a force system that includes all the symbolic expressions that define and establish the imaginary, such as images, symbols and archetypes embedded in the mythical discourse. The most important aspect in this method is the identification of mythemes. Durand, in *De la mitocrítica*, deepens and widens the concept of mytheme originally used by Lévi-Strauss by redefining it as a “mythical atom [that] inherently has an ‘archetypical’ [and] schematic structure, in a Jungian sense [according to Durand], and its content can indifferently be a ‘motive’, a ‘theme’, a ‘mythical decorate’ [...] and emblem, a ‘dramatic situation’ [...]” (Durand 344). Moreover, in *Mitos y sociedad*, Durand explains that the mythemes can be manifested as actions conveyed by “verbs [...] by kinship relationships, kidnap, homicide, incest [...] or even emblematic objects: staff, trident, axe, a dove [...]” (Durand 163). Finally, but most importantly, these semantic units intrinsically retain a redundancy in which a myth can be stripped down by establishing similia connections that enable labelling the shape of a myth (Gutiérrez 54). The mytheme appears in two forms: 1) a patent form, such as *pachakuti*, meaning an explicit reiteration of contents; and 2) a latent form, earth-beings in this case, meaning a repetition of premeditated representation(s) that are inferred by the context in which they are imbued (Gutiérrez 60; Durand, *Mitos y Sociedad* 2003). The mythemes fulfil the function of structuring the mythical discourse in the chosen poems.

As mentioned above, in *Las estructuras antropológicas del imaginario*, the mythemes will exhibit a range of symbols that the figurative structuralism has classified in two orders of symbolism: the Diurnal Order and the Nocturnal Order. On the one hand, the Diurnal Order is composed by heroic (schizomorphic) structures. These structures split up the world into two groups of antithetical images: the heroic structures are formed by the ascensional, the spectacular and the diæretic (cutting) symbols; and synchronous and opposing the heroic structure, are the “Faces of time” (Bestiary), symbols that comprise the theriomorphic (beasts and monsters), the nyctomorphic (darkness) and the catamorphic (fall/sin) symbols. The heroic structure is characterized for the heroic qualities of its symbols, which strive after and search for light, ascension, and destruction of the “Faces of time” (the Bestiary), because these symbols represent time and dead (Durand, *Las estructuras* 125).

On the other hand, the Nocturnal Order, also named in *Las estructuras antropológicas del imaginario*, contains the mystical structure in which both symbols of inversion, and of intimacy have their place. In this same Order is found the synthetic structure comprised by cyclical symbols and the rhythmic schemata to the myth of progress (the eternal return) (Durand 291-354). The Nocturnal Order, contrary to the Diurnal, aims to appease the previous Diurnal symbolism, using a procedure that Durand designates as “euphemisation” (Durand, *Las estructuras* 120). This means that the nyctomorphic, catamorphic and theriomorphic symbols renounce their evil attributes and convert themselves into symbols of peacefulness, protection and shielding. In this order resides two subdivisions: 1) the mystical structure

(nyctomorphic symbols), which incorporates the symbols of inversion and intimacy related to “the continent and the habitat [...] the matriarchal and nutritious sociology” (Durand, *Las estructuras* 60). This illustrates the return to Mother Earth and a value-based transformation of the symbols of death and the grave; and 2) the synthetic structure, which incorporates “the cyclical technics, the agricultural calendar and the textile industry” (Durand, *Las estructuras* 60-61).

To the detection of the patent *pachakuti* mytheme and the latent earth-being mytheme encased in the poems, has to be incorporated the classification of the symbols to which the mythemes belong, the Nocturnal Order and its synthetic structure. By doing this a close reading is possible. By categorizing the symbols found in the poems, analysis reveals the imaginary that underlies and gives a foundation to the way in which the poems express and approach, through the appointed mythemes, the surrounding reality of extractive activities in their territory and how the Amerindian cosmovision, through these mythemes, can show a new meaning and an alternative form of living by reversing the *pachakuti's* collapse and extinction to a renewal.

***Pachakuti* in Indigenous Literature**

According to Rocha Vivas *pachakuti* is a key concept in Andean literature. Rocha Vivas upholds that indigenous literature underlines a key issue about “the flow or exchange between the cosmological, natural and cultural levels” (Rocha Vivas 42) in which *pachakuti* plays an essential function. On the one hand, *pachakuti* is an ancient (cosmological, natural) and a modern concept (natural, cultural) that refers to mythical events rooted in social memory of Andean history, but it also represents actual earthly and environmental disasters with their repercussions (Bria and Walter 18). The *pachakuti* mytheme, as it is classified in this study, is outlined in the Andean cosmogony in which time is divided into “ages or worlds” (Classen 62), where *pachakuti* belongs to the end of each age provoking an upheaval and a reversal of the world, “*pachacuti* is a mediating period of sacred and highly dangerous fluidity during which humans emerge from the natural world and can also return to it” (Classen 62). From this stage, *pachakuti* can also be transferred to an individual level or microcosmic form of manifestation (Classen 63), that is to say, the concept can be interpreted as linking to a variety of aspects of life where a change occurs. Bold asseverates that the mythological narratives of indigenous people also deal with beginnings and endings and can “construct moral narratives, connecting across the realms of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’” (Bold 4), which creates a co-existing relationship between human and earth-beings who interact for survival in an inseparable way. This means that a world ends when these networks of interaction are interrupted by a lack of engagement in reciprocity towards the non-human entities and the spirits (Bold 5).

On the other hand, the narratives additionally indicate a reversing of the subordinated place that indigenous communities have had through history. This

relates to multiple (social, political, economic, and cultural) narratives (and contexts) that have been stripped of their own name, and place, divested of their roots, and consequently placed in the margins of modern society, as an upside-down movement. As a result, *pachakuti* serves as way to mend this indigenous world (Noriega 491) by reorganizing and restoring life and vanquishing the already established order through this modern form of narrative. With the *pachakuti* as a common argument, the narratives reflect how it relates and defends earth-beings/nature, as an integrated part of human life and of a revitalization of the cycle of life. *Pachakuti* exposes a different kind of conception of collapse and extinction, where the idea of catastrophe does not mean an end to the order of things. On the contrary, life is conceived as a movement of forces, a world reversal that goes in cycles, and even more as a notion which brings about a consciousness of how this collapse and destruction is being shaped by the multinational corporations through the extractive activities throughout the world, but especially in indigenous territories; these narratives are a form of denouncing these transgressions. This manifests an empowerment created through their narrative, which exposes and denounces the conflicts and inequalities suffered by them in the hands of their governments and multinational corporations, but at the same time reproduces their old ways of life as a present, and future alternative way of living.

As previously explained, the patent mytheme displayed in this analysis is *pachakuti*. This mytheme flows through the narrative of the three poems and has an inherent significance that belongs to the cosmological viewpoint of Andean cosmovision. At the same time, *pachakuti* correlates to the Nocturnal Order of the figurative structuralism (Durand, *Las estructuras* 60-66, 207-354), and consequently it has a place in the synthetic structure where the cyclical symbols and the myth of the eternal return prevail. Additionally, *pachakuti* encounters other mytheme, with the earth-beings recognised as the latent mytheme and the voices denouncing the extractive activities.

***Pachakuti*: The Face of Collapse and Extinction Voiced through Earth-Beings**

The first two poems exhibit, besides the latent *pachakuti* mytheme as the common argument, the patent mytheme of the earth-beings in danger. The first poem “La Tórtola, pájaro melancólico”³ (The turtledove, a melancholic bird) was written by Lorenzo Ayllapán.⁴ Pérez indicates that Ayllapán’s poetry highlights mostly birds as

³ “El nido de cuatro palitos de la tórtola/ se ha derrumbado y por eso llora/ por la continua tala del bosque nativo [...] / al ver pasar los intrusos, los ajenos codiciosos/ y canta: se quebraron los huevos/ muy triste llora la tórtola por la desgracia/ por ser testigo del permanente castigo a la Madre Tierra (Huenún 31).

⁴ Lorenzo Ayllapán Cayuleo, born in Southern Chile, is a Mapuche poet, actor, film producer, anthropologist and teacher of his mother tongue, Mapudungun. He is also known as *Üñümche* or bird man and, as such, he communicates with birds, which is the feature of his own contribution to Mapuche poetry (Pérez 4-5). His poetry expresses the profound interconnections between his culture and the birds, but also between the birds and the ecosystems of Southern Chile (Aillapán and Rozzi 420-21; Binns 5): he is a representative of the Mapuche ethno-ornithology (Binns 8). He won the prestigious

agents (2006 4). The second poem “Todo está dicho”⁵ (Rocha Vivas 294; Suescún) (Everything has been said), written by the Yanakuna poet Fredy Chikangana⁶, follows Ayllapán’s mytheme about the earth-beings, but focuses on the rivers.

On the one hand, in Ayllapán’s poem, the patent mytheme is about conveying the turtledove’s vision and emotions about the destruction of its environment. On the other hand, in Chikangana’s poem the rivers and doves also bear witness to the destruction and collapse of their environment. Both poems acknowledge, through the different voices of nature, the predominant and important role play by earth-beings in the current world system that is in crisis. Earth-beings are present in Andean cultures and have become, as de la Cadena explains in *Earth Beings*, political actors during the 21st century’s social movements among indigenous populations that protest against extractivism such as mine-related environmental issues, pollution of water resources and deforestation (de la Cadena, *Earth Beings* 341).

The latent *pachakuti* mytheme appears clearly in both “La Tórtola, pájaro melancólico” and “Todo está dicho”, where the movement of the upside-down turning of the world materialises when nature speaks out its reality, giving us, as described by Rocha Vivas, the vision of the defeated (2010 294). In the beginning of “Todo está dicho”, the conjured verses denote a strong presence of an apocalyptic catastrophe incarnated in the voice of a human, “I have nothing to say/about the time and the space that/have come upon us/Everything has been said”⁷ (Suescún). The poetic voice perceives the crisis brought by the *pachakuti* but seems resigned to the fate; however, the enunciation of these words displays what Bria and Walter explain about *pachakuti* as “equally a way to acknowledge and accept the inevitable traumas of history” (Bria and Walter 20), because *pachakuti* encompasses past, present, and future, thereby facilitating a person’s acknowledgement of history conceptualizing its “position and agency within the world during times of widespread transformation” (Bria and Walter 2019 20).

As mentioned previously, in both Ayllapán and Chikangana birds appear as earth-beings, “The turtledove’s nest of four sticks has been shattered, she cries/For the constant chopping down of the native forest/for the constant aggression against mother nature [...]” (My translation).⁸ Here, the turtledove’s statement describes its laments and its sorrows of losing its home because it has no trees left to build its nest. In Chikangana’s poem the poetic voice says, “[...] let the doves say something from

literary prize Premio Casa de las Américas de Literatura en Lengua Indígena, 1994. The poem to be analysed here was first published in 2003 in the book *Úñümche. Hombre Pájaro*. Later, it was republished in 2007 in the anthology *La memoria Iluminada: poesía mapuche contemporánea*. This is the edition that I use in this analysis.

⁵ “No tengo nada que decir/sobre el tiempo y el espacio que se nos/vino encima./Todo está dicho. Que hablen los ríos desde su agonía,/que hablen las serpientes que se arrastran/por ciudades y pueblos,/que algo digan las palomas desde sus/ensangrentados nidos;/yo,/hijo de tierras ancestrales,/no tengo nada que decir./[...]Todo está dicho” (Rocha Vivas 294-95).

⁶ He is borne in Yanakuna County in Colombia. He considers himself as a poet and *oralitor* and he is an activist for the defence of Mother Earth. His works has been part of many anthologies.

⁷ “No tengo nada que decir/ sobre el tiempo y el espacio que se nos/ vino encima” (Rocha Vivas 294).

⁸ El nido de cuatro palitos de la tórtola/se ha derrumbado y por eso llora/por la continua tala del bosque nativo/por la continua agresión a la madre naturaleza [...]” (Huenún 31).

their/nests spattered with blood [...]”⁹ (Suescún), expressing a more dramatic and radicalized image that exhibits a destiny of extinction. These poetic voices assume a collective position showing the earth-beings’ suffering. Birds, explains Cirlot, are symbols of the spirituality representing the soul that flies away after death, but also as messengers (Cirlot 356-58). The presence of birds in the poems serves the purpose of carrying ominous message or/and testimony, since birds for indigenous people are messengers of both good and bad omens (Montecino 2015 487-92). In this case the turtledove and the doves are earth-beings presenting a testimony and passing a message of the consequences of the exploitation of their habitats. The poetic voices in the poems suggest a complexity of entanglements between humans and earth-beings where both groups perceived the environment (Mother Earth) as a “living being with which we have an indivisible and interdependent, complementary and spiritual relationship” (“World Peoples’ Conference”). What the poetic voice presents is the presence of “transformational entities” that propose insights into the “multiverse” where humans and earth-beings are interconnected (Viveiros de Castro 38). The birds denounce what Brightman and Lewis describe as an agency that solely concentrates its efforts in the “growth-based market economies that have intensified resource extraction and consumption around the world, mostly externalizing the cost to non-human species and environments” (Brightman and Lewis 14).

In “La Tórtola, pájaro melancólico” the turtledove laments its inability to nest because of deforestation, then the trees constitute a life-interrelation. This description of the trees embodies, according to the synthetic structure with its symbols and myths of progress, the life of the cosmos with what Cirlot names “density, growth, proliferation, creation and regeneration” (89), which at the same time is an unquenchable source of life, thereby it represents immortality that has been disrupted. The bird exposes a sign of the crumbling of the centre of the world. The imbalance is mourned by it laying the blame on the intruders that the turtledove glimpses at from one of the few trees left and by it sentences, “Seeing the intruders go by, those greedy strangers” (My translation).¹⁰ The turtledove is aware of the danger that these foreigners embody to its existence. These strangers do not belong to the territory and are perceived as a representation of bestiality (theriomorphic symbols) expressed in the appropriation of the land, because they express an evilness (nyctomorphic symbols) marked by the act of deforesting the bird’s habitat, which *per se* is an act of destruction manifested in *pachakuti*.

Thomson clarifies that before the colonization indigenous societies were organized in relationships based on reciprocity and complementarity, and “a respect for plurality, coexistence and equality” (450), which is the explanation for the turtledove’s testimony denouncing the destruction of its natural environment as a devastation. In the following verses, the narrative voice, articulated by the bird man, proclaims, “She sings: the eggs broke/ The turtledove cries so sadly for the

⁹ “[...] que algo digan las palomas desde sus/ ensangrentados nidos; [...]” (Rocha Vivas 295).

¹⁰ “[...] al ver pasar los intrusos, los ajenos codiciosos [...]” (Huenún 31).

misfortune/ Because she is a witness to permanent punishment to Mother Earth [...].”¹¹ (My translation). The turtledove, through this testimony, owns a subjectivity through which it expresses its own perspective of the territory’s exploitation. This does not represent a humanisation or a metaphorical approach for explaining the conduct of this earth-beings. Viveiros de Castro conceives this as perspectivism, a concept suggesting that the world is populated by different forms of subjectivities (Vivieros de Castro, *The relative* 229) that involve humans and more-than-humans, or earth-beings, as de la Cadena designates them (164).

While the poetic voice in “La Tórtola, pájaro melancólico” denounces the cruel reality of the forests of Mapuche territory, “Todo está dicho” reveals the endangerment of the riverine waters when declaring: “Let the rivers talk in their agony.” As observed in this verse, the earth-beings are the rivers. As Montecino and Portela Guarín describe it, for indigenous people the water takes different shapes - sea, lakes, rivers- and it is considered the dwelling of spirits, mermaids, monsters - earth-beings- or enchanted cities; there is also a bridge or a passageway to the other life (Montecino 41; Portela Guarín 18, 66). Durand postulates that the water also symbolises a creative force directly entangled with Mother Earth or the “Mother of the world” that precedes all creation and form to which all life wants to accede; water is the beginning and the end of the cosmic creation too (Durand, *Las estructuras* 2005 237, 266). Portela Guarín postulates that since water is perceived as the origin of life it belongs to the cosmography of the indigenous people, which is a fragile ecosystem because of the extractivism through mining, the cattle industry and monoculture that has contaminated and diminished these sources of life (53). This situation causes the spirits living in the waters to leave it and the water loses its power, provoking an imbalance in nature that negatively affects the cycle of life of both earth-beings and humans, disrupting “the good living”, which means “a fullness life in a community, together with other persons and Nature” (Gudynas 2011 442). This concept of “the good living” is found among many indigenous people that refer to it in their own languages. The Quechua people calls it *Sumak Kawsay*, the Aymara names it *Suma Qamaña* and the Mapuche people refers to it as *Küme Mongen* (2011, 442-43).

The testimony of the birds and the rivers is a narrative that fits in the Nocturnal Order and in the synthetic structure of the cyclical symbols and the myths of progress, because it manifests a cyclical movement that spins around situating the earth-beings on the upside-down of *pachakuti*, *pachakuti*’s side of collapse and extinction. The stories also denounce this annihilation to the multinational corporations that destroy the ecosystem in which the earth-beings live. These viewpoints expressed by the earth-beings in the poems entail, accordingly to Viveiros de Castro perspective, shifts that involve the differences of bodies and not the culture the subjects belong to. This is what he calls *multinaturalism* in opposition to multiculturalism. The author indicates that “where our modern, anthropological multiculturalist ontology is

¹¹ [...] canta: se quebraron los huevos/muy triste llora la tórtola por la desgracia/por ser testigo del permanente castigo a la Madre Tierra (Huenún 31).

founded on the mutual implication of the unity of nature and the plurality of cultures, the Amerindian conception would suppose a spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity— or, in other words, one ‘culture’, multiple ‘natures’” (Viveiros de Castro 36, 59). The turtledove, the doves, and the rivers, as earth-beings, bear witness to the collapse and extinction of their world carried out by humans, who destroy both the landscapes and the earth-beings that inhabit these territories in pursuit of the resource extraction (Bold 3).

In the final verses of “Todo está dicho” the poetic voice has the sentences, “I/son of the ancestral lands/have nothing to say [...]/Everything has been said [...]” (Suescún). Jenkins *et al.* explains that indigenous “cosmovision refers to narratives in which beings in the world tell their own stories, and in the telling make manifest the deeper meanings of the world and humans woven into it” (Jenkins *et al.* 107), showing that there is no difference between humans and earth-beings telling the story. This verse exposes the importance that indigenous people place on letting earth-beings assume their own positioning to denounce the *pachakuti* of this era from their point of view.

***Pachakuti*: The Renewal of the Cycle**

Finally, the poem “Vivir-morir”¹² (“To live-to die”) by Vito Apüshana¹³ shows the *pachakuti* mytheme in its latent form related to the cyclical process which involves both catastrophe and reminds of the myth of the eternal return renewal (Muyolema Calle 122; Eliade, *The Myth* 86). This myth involves a symbolical reverie of the return to the Mother after death which indicates a victory or an inversion of time and death by unifying the symbols of the cradle and the tomb, where the earth, as a womb, signifies the ultimate repose (Gutiérrez 112-13). The poem relates the cycle of life from beginning to end, and to beginning again.

In the poem, it is observed that humans are represented as equal to trees and earth beings, “We grow, like trees, inside/the footprints of our ancestors” (Suescún). Cirlot explains that the trees represent the life of the cosmos, from which all beings emerge; trees are bound to earth by their roots, and humans are attached to earth by the footprints of their own ancestors who lie in the earth interconnecting the living with the dead in an ever-ending cycle (367). The footprints are remnants of the feet, which at the same time symbolise the soul that connects humans to earth in a funerary sense (367). This means that the feet, by the act of walking belong to earth and unite humans to the land of the dead where the ancestors lie and towards where all humans return. In accordance with the cosmogonical beliefs of the Andes, the cosmos is divided in two: the world above (sky) and the world below (earth). The

¹² “Crecemos, como árboles, en el interior/ de la huella de nuestros antepasados./ Vivimos, como arañas, en el tejido del rincón materno./[...] Soñamos allá, entre Kashii y Ka’i, (la luna y el sol) en los predios de los espíritus./Morimos como si siguiéramos vivos” (Apüshana 68).

¹³ Vito Apüshana or Miguel Ángel López is an indigenous poet of the Wayuu Nation (Northern Colombia). He was awarded in 2000 the Latin American literary prize Casa de las Américas for the book *Encuentros en los senderos de Abaya Yala*. He has written four books of poems.

footprints are placed in the world below, appearing as a poetic expression that channels, as Bouysson-Casagne explains, the (eternal) return of the dead. The ancestors follow the living because there is a link between present and past-future that pertains to a hidden side of the world (qtd. in Rocha Vivas 169). These verses give a sense of being protected, as the footprints represent the link to the mother's womb.

In the next verses the symbol of the mother's womb is reinforced by the image of the spider, "We live, like spiders, in the web/of the maternal corner [...]". Cirlot emphasises that these three different significances "overlap, confuse or discern in accordance with the case in question" (88). This animal embodies, as Cirlot refers to it, the capacity to create through its weaving and the web itself relates to the centre of the world (88); it has also the negative attribute of aggression (88). Despite this fact, the spider, much like the cosmic tree, is associated with the cosmic centre of the world (88), and the spider's web symbolises the centre of the cosmos in which all sentient beings live wrapped up. The spider, with its ceaseless creative and destructive capacities, signifies the constant inversion through which the cosmos' equilibrium is preserved; the spider winds both life and death (88-89). Durand classifies it into the cyclical-lunar symbols since these symbols can be identified with an eternal repetition and renovation (Durand, *Las estructuras* 323-24). The lunar symbols, with the moon as the highest manifestation, signify the first dead and the first resuscitated (Durand, *Las estructuras* 295-96).

Many indigenous people count the spider as a deity or as a mythological figure, some examples are the Totonaco people and the Navajo. Among the Navajo the spider is responsible for teaching this people the art of cultivating and weaving cotton, introducing the spindle and the loom, "A cosmic loom" (Pitarch 1195), and when the Spider Woman spins around her loom it produces a change in the order of the world triggering a new epoch or time (1195) which relates to *pachakuti*. For Andean cosmology spiders are magical creatures that bring luck and good fortune (Montecino 74-76) and are associated with both the weaving and the maternal deities (Casas Mendoza 30). The maternal aspect in which the poem refers to the spider denotes an intimate symbology as returning to the mother's womb instead of to dying. In the poem, the spider transforms itself and its web into a grave-cradle, a womb, a container in which beings cuddle and rejoice, and feel safe and nourished (Durand, *Las estructuras* 245).

In this cyclical narrative is found a circo-spiral movement expressed by the web of the spider. This movement is also conveyed in the verses, "[...] We dream there, between *kashii* and *ka'i*¹⁴[...]/on the land of the spirits¹⁵". (Suescún) In these verses, the spiral movement expresses the cyclical principle that sustains *pacha* (space-time). This movement communicates where the future lies, indicating that a person walks through life backwards, seeing only what it has done; being the past the point of

¹⁴ The moon and the sun.

¹⁵ "Soñamos allá, entre Kashi y Ka'i, [...]/ en los predios de los espíritus" (Apüshana 68).

orientation (Achig Balarezo 6). The reality is a cosmic one, *pacha*, which includes the masculine and feminine aspects of all living things, represented by the sun (*ka'i*) and the moon (*kashii*), as complementary opposed unities. *Pacha* then is a concept that encompasses all the spheres of the cosmos, that includes, as Estermann explains, the natural world to which mankind belongs to, thereby it is “an expression beyond the bifurcation between the visible and the invisible, of the material and the immaterial, of the worldly and celestial, of the profane and the sacred, of the exterior and the interior. It contains temporality and spatiality” (Estermann 157-58). Then *pacha*, as an organized cosmos, at some decisive point, reaches a peak of returning, a peak of being reborn, *kuti* (Estermann 179-180). That is why and when *pachakuti* turns the world upside-down through natural cataclysmic catastrophe, political conflicts, social and/or religious upheavals collapsing the reality as it is known (Torres Chacón 24-25). Nonetheless, *pacha* is not “totally different ‘worlds’ or ‘strata’ but aspects or ‘spaces’ of a same interconnected reality (Estermann 157-58) which is observed in the last verse of the poem: “We die as if we were still alive.”¹⁶ Here *pachakuti* is incorporated on a macrocosmic level (Classen 63) that integrates the physical individual body (63), relating equally to an embodiment of the human condition linked to the natural/cosmic world, where humans and earth-beings are bound by Mother Earth to interact with each other in order to create “the good living.” When this interaction is disrupted, *pachakuti* emerges as a devastating force. In this aspect, Classen speaks of *pachakuti* in a metaphor of “the body turning around and facing the opposite direction (or, on the north/south axis, by being stood on its head). When this occurred the structures of the past would become submerged in the fluidity of the future and the world would be restructured according to new principles” (221). In this final verse, to live and to die does not make any difference because in Andean cosmivision the body expresses the spirituality of a person, like virtue, sin, and illness. Then the body, although always permeated by the presence and the power of its owner, even after death, has a close bond to the land because the body is created from earth, it lives on it and returns to it at death. Death then strengthens this connection to earth in an eternal return that reaffirms life itself by triggering the cycle of life over again (Classen 271-272).

The imaginary that the indigenous literature shared with other imaginings is also a “network of mental representations nurtured by a mythical, religious and/or historical legacy” (Fabry *et al.* 12), but in this case it differs in its ontological, axiological and epistemological value from the Western point of view. While Western culture through the religious Judeo-Christian beliefs perceives the world and its time in a linear and irreversible way, with a beginning and an end (a finite time) “between two atemporal eternities” (Eliade, *The Myth* 112), in which when the catastrophe arrives, the world will be onset anew, as it was at the beginning of times (Eliade, *The myth* 67), the indigenous cosmogony understands and tells about a cyclical time that undergoes periodical regenerations “*ad infinitum*” with new creation and a cosmic

¹⁶ “Morimos como si siguiéramos vivos” (Apüshana 68).

regeneration of the world (Eliade, *The Myth* 112). This is what Eliade calls the myth of the eternal return, the circular time that manifests itself (Eliade, *Mito y Realidad* 62-63), in this case in the Andean concept of *pachakuti*, a renewal of time which we also find in these modern literary manifestations of Amerindian cultures. This reasoning reveals that the *pachakuti* mytheme involves a form of environmental cataclysmic event which can start because of humans' predatory actions, like the one witnessed in the poems that denounce extractive projects, deforestation or contamination of the water resources that leads to earth-beings abandoning their landscapes of origin or denouncing the destruction of these landscapes.

Conclusion

The aim of this work was to show a new viewpoint of collapse and extinction through the latent *pachakuti* mytheme. In the poems the active presence of earth-beings as "spokesbeings" is found to be a patent mytheme. It is through their narratives or viewpoints that the environmental destruction comes to light, showing how humans overexploit and disrupt the relationship to the environment, turning it into a natural resource for human consumption. The *pachakuti* mytheme, but also the earth-being mytheme, that runs through all three poems exhibits its phases of environmental cataclysm ("La Tórtola" and "Todo está dicho"), but also the phase of the renewal of the cycle of life that corroborates the bounding interrelation of reciprocal energy existing between humans, earth-beings, and nature ("Vivir-morir").

The above analysis demonstrates that collapse and extinction occupy an important space in indigenous cosmovision, linking this to a cyclical return of transformations, regenerations that could mean either good or bad impacts for the people, all of them concerning a cyclical re-creation of the world. On the one side, the poems also demonstrate a re-emergence of indigenous voices and agencies, earth-beings, who belong to their cosmological world and aim to confront both the global ecological crisis and the repercussions that this environmental injustice causes by denouncing the extractivism that multinational enterprises execute by exploiting the natural resources, causing the imbalance that is destroying humans, earth-beings, and nature. On the other side, the poems raise an awareness about the importance of these indigenous perspectives and the contribution that they could offer, where *pachakuti* is a collapse and extinction but also a renewal of the world, with both phases needed to maintain the balance in the world.

Submission received 20 January 2023

Revised version accepted 4 June 2023

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