

About the covers for Volumes 5 & 6

Este valle que ves, taller de fuego,
fábrica de volcanes, todo altura,
es hoy la gigantesca arquitectura
de lo que furia fue y es ya sosiego.¹
– Carlos Pellicer (Soneto, fragmento, 1950)

This is now the sixth cover I have done for *Tapuya*, and it's the first one with our new Editor-in-Chief, Vivette, steering the ship. Every even-numbered year I've decided to do a photography cover, and when Vivette suggested the theme of "setting out landscapes" as a core drive of her new editorship, I recalled a couple of photographs of the Andes I took on a flight from Sao Paulo to Santiago in 2017 for the 31st Latin American Sociology Association (ALAS) Congress.

Although I had been involved in the journal from its beginning in some way or another, it was only by the middle of that year that Leandro Rodriguez Medina and Sandra Harding asked me to formally join the core editorial team. ALAS was my first chance to speak about *Tapuya* as a core editorial member. My presentation for ALAS was centred on the burgeoning *Tapuya* project, alongside the empirical research I was doing at the time (and continue to do) on open access and academic publications in the Global South, the knowledge periphery, Latin America, etc.

At the end of my talk, a senior Latin American sociologist began the Q&A session by saying something along the lines of, "Oh, I know of *this* journal: one of my colleagues is involved in it, and I do not approve of the *linguistic genocide* that you people are motivating by promoting Latin American STS in *English* [in a low growling voice]." Alas, my ALAS presentation appeared not to have convincingly conveyed a core mission that *Tapuya* was and is still trying to achieve, despite having made an extra effort to make the landscape as clear as possible; a number, if limited, of other senior colleagues had expressed as much concern about *Tapuya* being a project trying to "take over" the Latin American STS world. This, regardless of our continued emphasis on *Tapuya* as another means – which did not exist with such specificity in the English-speaking "international" STS journal ecosystem – for Latin American STS research(ers) in the region to be read outside of Latin America. *Tapuya* was never positioned as "competing" with the quality, regional, Spanish and Portuguese language STS, and social sciences journals that many of us in the editorial team know, cherish, read, write for, and now cooperate with from *Tapuya*.

Mind you, at that time *Tapuya* was only a very young project, within a rather niche field that is quite underrepresented in Latin American sociology. "Linguistically genocidal" is probably up there with some of the best insults I've been thrown at a Q&A (certainly makes the top

¹*This valley before you, fiery atelier// volcanic factory, all heights// is today the gigantic architecture// of former fury and today's quietude.*

three), but never being one to back off an intellectual sparring session, I asked as courteously but directly as possible if, perhaps, it was not a bit of a historical overstretch to argue that Spanish and Portuguese, of all languages, weren't themselves immersed in their own genocidal histories. Fortunately, I had gone far enough beyond my allotted time that the session had to close *very* soon after my response.

Which leads me back to the cover. After five years, it is probably safe to say that – after countless hours of editorial discussions and Zoom meetings, hundreds of emails, more copy-editing and revision hours than I'd care to document, careful and honest work from our peer reviewers, brilliant ambassadorial work from Leandro and Sandra, many intellectually challenging editorial board sessions, and of course, the work of authors who have entrusted their manuscripts to us – *Tapuya* has become a consolidated journal that is entering a new phase that will be defined by Vivette's leadership and flair. It was great to hear from younger STSers, both Latin American and from elsewhere, during the ESOCITE/4S session in Cholula last year, that *Tapuya* is now a recognizable name for many in the field and a venue where young Latin American researchers appear to be keen to submit their work. We are, at least for now, in what I see as a stable landscape.

This, finally, leads me to the last part of this editorial: fixing the lack of a similar editorial for Volume 5! Unfortunately, (over)commitments did not permit me the pleasure of writing the traditional "About the cover image" piece for the Volume 5 illustration, which sneaked in a reference to Puebla and the ESOCITE/4S meeting that I wager to say nobody noted.

The Volume 5 cover, belonging to an odd-number year, was based on my drawings. The first one is a watercolour sketch I drew under the moonlight of the Volcán de Fuego in Guatemala, as seen from the top of the Volcán Acatenango, which I made there during a hike in 2019, under a brilliant full moon. There's not much of an explanation to it beyond me choosing an image associated to a Latin American country which had not yet featured in the cover, and that it also played on the theme of fire that was present in the second illustration.

This second image is also a watercolour, based on a pre-Hispanic clay figurine I saw at the Museo Amparo, in Puebla (hence the Annual Meeting connection). Although the figurine's description, so far as I remember, was not associated with any specific animal, I re-imagined it as a *tlacuache*² – a possum; represented by more than seventy related species across the Americas and known locally through a wide range of names:

Éstos son los tlacuaches, churchas, opossums, filandros, zarigüeyas, cuicas, catitas, zorras mochileras, llacas, coyopollines o cayopollines, comadrejas overas, mucuras, carachupas, micures, mucamucas, picazas, runchos, paricatas, guaquis, cuchas ... que viven tan próximos al hombre. (López Austin 2006, 18)

This animal had a special significance across all of Mexico's pre-Columbian cultures, their art, and their mythologies, as anthropologist Alfredo López Austin recounts in making the possum the central figure in a ground-breaking work exploring the possibilities of illustrating pre-Hispanic thought and culture through oral histories and myths – the possum had already been an important figure in Levi-Strauss (1964). His *Los mitos del tlacuache: Caminos de la mitología mesoamericana* is a tour de force for anyone interested both in *tlacuaches* and their place in Mexican mythologies, as well as in the possibilities (and limits) of tracing forms of life of contemporary indigenous cultures with ancient origins where the main sources for research come from oral storytelling.

²According to Castro (1961), both the Nahuatl *tlacuache* and the Maya *och* can be etymologically traced to the concept of "food" or "feeding." In Nahuatl, *tlacuatl*, a generic name to designate a small, insignificant critter, can be interpreted as 'one who feeds', mirroring the possum's ability to survive off a very diverse diet, including human food and refuse. The modern *tlacuache* would then come from the honorific *tlacuatzin*.

The image illustrates the moment of a myth that is widely spread, in slightly different versions, across Mesoamerica, with specific myths being variations of a general story: *tlacuache* lighting its tail on fire and swiftly running away from the bonfire tended to by a selfish old woman, who keeps it for herself and away from the suffering human tribes. The latter must live in the darkness and cold of a world that does not yet have the gift of fire-making; a marker not only of "science", "technology" or even "knowledge" (to use a vocabulary that is clearly ill-fitting), but indeed, of "culture" itself. The possum – a modest but clever little animal nobody takes seriously when he first offers to steal the fire for the tribes – receives only scorn, despite the sacrifice, once he returns with the precious gift on his charred tail: now because of his deformed body. Though it is tempting to think of this as the Mesoamerican version of the myth of Prometheus (and indeed, López Austin 2006, p. 20, refers to it as "un prometeo americano") other than the fire-stealing, the Greek and Mexican myths are vastly different. *Tlacuache* is not a demi-god, a Titanic figure. There are also no Gods to punish the theft, but only the prejudices, ingratitude, and cruelty of the tribesmen (yes, there is a gender component in there).

References

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