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Indigenous Ontology in Zo Oral Narratives: A Study of the Zo Indigenous Cosmivision

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Abstract

This paper is an exploration of Indigenous ontologies and ways of thinking and worldview that deviates from the Eurocentric critical frameworks that often insufficiently portray or interpret the nature of specific indigenous cultures and native epistemology. The focal point of this study is to explore the indigenous ontology and knowledge found in the folktales and oral narratives of the Zo tribes of Southern Manipur. The Zo's geo-political state of existence has been in a muddle since colonial times. The territorial demarcation that was done for administrative purposes had caused permanent displacement and obscurity of the Zo Indigenous identity. Colonial ethnographical records that have been perceived as infallible evidences, fall short of impartial facts and accounts. The series of under and misrepresentation of their socio-cultural and political history has narrowed the general interest and scope for the discursive study of Zo indigeneity, whose relevance to the modern world is only confined to their conflict-ridden state of political affairs. Therefore, this study will be carried out in the hope of decolonising and re-aligning the 'Zoness' through the exploration of the lesser-known indigenous ways of knowledge, philosophies, and worldview found in the reservoir of their oral literature. Zo orality is accentuated by certain indigenous concepts and philosophies that find expression in proverbs, aphorisms, allegorical tales, customary laws, rituals and the folksongs. The paper argues that these concepts are not adequately represented by ethnocentric appreciation, but are elements of indigeneity that deserve specialized set of conceptual introspections

Keywords: indigenous ontology, Zo, folklore, decolonising

The recent decades have witnessed an emerging consciousness of concerns related to the preservation of indigenous rights in the geo-political sphere, where the scientific world's perpetual onward movement has frequently been challenged to accommodate and prioritise the maintenance of harmony in man's relationship with the environment. From such perspectives, this prospective rekindling of the two worlds further opens different pathways for deeper explorations into the very essence of the relationship itself that can be justly appreciated by the indigenous theories of knowledge and pedagogy. Indigeneity is known to be rooted in the land and the ecological realm. It is also tied to the entity of identity that is inextricably linked to worldviews that provide meaning to one's existence and purpose in the entire cosmos. Indigenous ontology explores the system of indigenous knowledge that shapes the indigenous identity and consciousness and provides a more authentic understanding of the essence of a people unaltered by secular analyses, while also discovering more intricate worlds, abundantly rich in conceptual

systems and ideologies that question the validity of terms such as 'savage' and 'uncivilized' as sensational descriptors of the indigenous population.

To accurately describe the geo-political identity of the Zo people continues to be a challenge considering their lack of definite territorial and political representation if one needs to be extremely attentive to the detail with respect to diaspora. The early Zos lived in the contiguous land areas between Burma and India. Now collectively inhabiting mainly the Northeast Indian state of Manipur, they are a people who have been subjected to the dispersal of their homeland by colonial remapping and territorial demarcation. The Zos can be better described as an ethnic group comprised of tribes variously known as the 'Chins', 'Kukis' or 'Zomis'. The Kuki-Chin-Mizos, in addition to sharing common ethnic history and sociological foundations, also share mutually intelligible languages that are recognised under the Sino-Tibetan linguistic family that includes Vaiphei, Paite, Simte, Thadou, Gangte, Hmar, Zou and Lushai – spoken at large by the inhabitants of present-day Mizoram. The Zomi languages are spoken by a section of people in India and Burma. While tracing the Zo identity as a representative of a well-defined territorial boundary, it may prove to be futile and cumbersome. However, a cultural unity recollected in the form of shared ethos, folklore, language, and tradition may appear to be a more reliable source for extensive study. Khup Za Go (2008) in the prologue to *Zo Chronicles* addresses the arbitrariness of political boundaries in Zo ethnic studies:

Until quite recent times, the political frontiers of the Ava kings of Myanmar and that of Manipur kept shifting according to the changing fortunes of these native imperialist principalities. But the deeper cultural boundary of the Zo tribe had remained relatively resistant to the erratic political climate outside its own cultural world. (Go 2008, p. 15)

The persistence of an abstract unity marks Zo ethnic spaces as a culturally contiguous area that must be comparatively analysed with the metaphysical forces of orality. This orality in Zo culture is manifested in the form of folktales, folksongs, aphorisms, and social and religious beliefs that align their moral compass with that of their worldview; a perspective that can be better comprehended by an exploration of the Zo cosmivision that can foster a deeper understanding of the Zo indigenous ontology. Indigenous hermeneutics becomes the most viable method of understanding the Zo indigeneity in accordance with the cultural specifications that such a study demands. It is a step towards achieving a more accurate understanding of Indigenous concepts that closely follows the original intent behind the oral narratives. Indigenous hermeneutics, especially has gained fresh momentum all across, especially in the global south. Leanne B. Simpson's *Dancing on our Turtles Back* (2011) heralds a call for indigenous retrospection, concepts such as Samir Amin's 'decolonisation', Arturo Escobar's exploration of the 'Pluriverse' and Mignolo's 'delinking' and idealisation of cultural and cerebral decolonisation provide a way out from our dependence on the buoyancy of Ethnocentrism. A theoretical shift in perspective from a centralised one towards a subjective, culture-centric focus can allow a more justified interpretation and a better understanding of an indigenous people's connection with the world around and beyond them. Although Indigenous ontology is often linked to relations with land and its tangible resources, its allegiance may not necessarily be thus limited, where connections can be possibly made to the radical changes in indigenous experiences such as dislocation, colonialization, violence and dispossession. Sarah de Leeuw gives an example of the apprehension of Indigenous children through the child-welfare system in British Columbia, Canada, and

questions how a romanticized relation between Indigeneity and land relates to assessments of Indigenous families and parenting within child-welfare institutions and policies (Cameron, Leeuw and Desbiens, 2014, p. 23). This observation allows a relational ontological exploration which might appear more appropriate in the study of Zo ethnic dislocation as an area for discursive study, where traditional approaches of Indigeneity strictly affiliated to the backdrop of a defined geographical premise may not be accurate or viable. However, addressing the dislocation of Zo indigenous identity can begin with exploring its innate ontological systems that speak of a distinct collective experience in an attempt towards unification by relocating their cultural mores.

There are collections of folktales shared amongst the Zo ethnic groups that echo common sentiments; mere reiterations of the same tales with minute variations that generically incline towards an articulation of a common cultural ethos. There are tales of the popular comic hero known by many names such as *Chhura* (Mizo), *Sura* (Hmar), *Benglam* (Vaiphei), *Venglam* (Paite); the ephemeral but enduring love story of *Khupting leh Ngambawm*; the emblematic tale of kindness and familial love shared between the brother *Thanghou* and *Liandou* and the extraordinary feats of *Galngam*, the epic hero; to name a few. These are tales that hold a favourable position in the Zo collective memory. There are also a variety of folksongs — songs in celebration of love, marriage, harvest, and funerals that hint at particular patterns of the metaphysics behind Zo socio-religious structure, and certain aphorisms that are definitive of their social morale and indigenous identity. To understand the essence of these folktales and oral narratives, it is necessary to delve into the nature of Zo indigenous ontology; in order to navigate the location of such concepts that are constructed behind the oral narratives within the Zo cosmovision.

Understanding Zo indigenous ontology requires an exploration of their system of religion as a source that explains the nature of their being and existence. It is a step into the world of Zo indigenous consciousness; an exploration of the pluriversal terrain of beliefs, myths, and legends and also within the religious structure that accommodates diversity in the concept of God. Animism as a common religion among tribal societies is not a new observation and is in fact, inarguably common to most Indian tribal communities prior to mass conversion. First competently surveyed by Sir Edward Burnett Tylor in *Primitive Culture* (1871), Animism is the ancient belief in the presence of a spiritual aspect in all living and non-living things. Encyclopaedia Britannica defines it as a “belief in innumerable spiritual beings concerned with human affairs and capable of helping or harming human interests.” (Kerlin, 2020). It can be perceived as the most natural and authentic form of religion that ever existed in the history of cultural evolution. Zo indigenous religion is another form of animism where the concept of ‘soul’ is attributed to the natural environment. Dr. Ram Nath Sharma enlists two basic principles on which the belief is based; that “there are powerful souls besides powerful gods. The souls are connected with men and feel pleasure and pain through them. They influence the events in this world and also control them.” And that “the soul of man survives even after death.” (Sharma 1981, p.160). The Zo religious structure fulfills these two principles with the presence of a polytheistic system of belief in the power of not one but of various gods and spirits that influence the entire cosmic order, and also in the ephemeral nature of the human body that is survived by the soul after death.

Zo Cosmovision

Delving into the universe of Zo cosmology is a step towards comprehending the position of mankind according to the early Zo's consciousness, and to recognise that fear was the driving force behind the ideas for law, order and morality. This fear was essentially directed towards the divine forces that had been established as the epicentre that pulled the gravity of the entire Zo cosmic order. Deification in Zo cosmovision consists of duality in order that it corresponds to the duality of light and darkness. The universe, according to Zo concept is comprised of three realms; the realm beyond the sky where the heavens lay, the realm of land above the ground and the realm of the underworld. Singkhawkai in his book *Zo People and their Culture* (2008) mentions the Tedim terms for these realms as *Vantung*, *Leitung* and *Leinuai* respectively (*Van-sky*, *tung-above*, *lei- land*, and *nuai- below*). *Khuavak* and *khuazing* are Tedim terms denoting light and darkness; *khua* means society or human civilization, *vak* means light and *zing*, darkness. The Tedim language, one of the Zomi languages is spoken in the Chin state of Myanmar. It is also spoken in the Indian states of Assam, Manipur and Mizoram. With over 189,000 speakers in 1990 in Burma and about 155,000 in India, the language is also known as Hai-Dim, Tiddim, Zomi or Tedim Chin ("Tedim"). Tedim language is widely used as the foundational source of knowledge in Zomi Ethnic studies owing to Pau Cin Hau's development of the lopographical Tedim script, also known as the Tual Lai script (local script), however, tedim is now written in the Latin alphabet (Tedim. n.d). *Khua* holds a more elaborate concept that is not limited to signifying human settlement; it also has connotations of weather or climatic conditions where *khuapha* would mean good weather and *khuasia*, bad weather. 'Khua' is a versatile concept which is also connected to the spiritual world, where the word is attached to the identity of their deities. *Khuazing* is a Tedim term to address the god of earth, or "the controller of earthly things" and as *zing* is a term for darkness, or the state of being free of light to induce sight, he is also known as the god of invisibility (Zo People and their Culture 106). In Mizo folklore, *Khuazing* is attributed with a female persona and is called *Khuazingnu* or *Khuanu* where the suffix *nu* denotes the feminine gender with motherly attributes. With the coming of the Christian religion, the concept of *Khuazing* may have been compressed into the Lushai word *Pathian* to denote the Christian God. Singkhawkai records that *Khuazing* is believed to be more benevolent than its counterpart, *Khuasia* which is a deified concept of 'bad weather. The anthropological records of Carey and Tuck report that the idea of a Supreme Being was non-existent in Zo societies; that their world was infested by these deities and spirits that did not necessarily provide them with good luck or salvation but constantly needed to be propitiated through offerings and sacrifices (Carey and Tuck 196). However, Cary and Tuck's observations fall short of a closer interpretation of the concept of Zo religion; of the exact object and nature of worship. Although the idea of veneration for a singular deity may have been absent, there was an allegiance towards an ethical force that assumed the role of a benefactor and protector—the spiritual energy called *Sha* that manifests itself as a moral and superhuman force that resembles the Christian 'Spirit'. This force is also connected to their concept of ancestor worship portrayed in the rites of sacrifice to the spirit of the ancestor *Pu-Sha* or *Pa-Sha* (Singkhawkai 1995, p. 121). Further, attaching their identity to that of their progenitor 'Zo' is an extension of ancestral worship. In *The Mountain of God*, Quartich Wales has also conjectured on the possibility of linking Zo as a celestial ancestor who was transferred to the sky and identified with some star in the circumpolar region (Wales 1953, p. 40).

What is also peculiar about the Zo system of knowledge is their manner of engagement with the internal world of imagination to carve out a distinct identity and source of creativity. Having been nomadic tribes, the idea of territorial expansion was never much of a priority. Logic was more governed by the internal, psychic forces that predominantly revolved around memories and dreams than by sensory articulations of external structures. Dreams have been an influential part of Zo society, whose significance has seeped into colloquial uses in everyday speech. Dreams were regarded as prophetic revelations of the future course of events (Singkhawkai 1995, p.123). The term "*mangpha*" or "*mangtha*", which translates to "may you have a good dream", is used as a gesture of goodwill; of wishing someone a good night or farewell. Further, what bound the communities together throughout history was a unity in their oral tradition and this orality is what signified their identity and vice versa. G.N Devy (2002) attributes this to the aspect of tribal creativity that is more attuned to sensory memory; which explains the tribal's need to indulge in ancestor worship (p. 6). In connection to Devy's observation, there are pieces of evidence of the Zos being innately connected to spirituality within a contiguous time frame; the living was never completely detached from the dead, thus, causing them to believe in the temporality of death. Death is treated merely as a transitional phase that the spirit of a living man passes through to arrive at the mystical world of the spirits. Even in death, a man's connection to the spirit of the deceased was not absolved if the cause of death was an unnatural one; for instance, if the victim had been murdered. In such cases, the soul of the deceased who had been murdered would continue to haunt his relatives and would not find peace until he had been avenged.

Man as a Spiritual Being

Singkhawkai in his book, *Zo People and their Culture* provides a detailed elucidation on the ontological concepts of the Tedim terms *hin'na* denoting the noun 'life', *Tha* or *Kha* or the 'spirit' and the *Si-kha* for spirit of the dead (where the prefix *Si* denotes 'dead') (Singkhawkai 125-126). There is, however, a difference between the spirit of the dead (*Si-kha*) and the spirit of man which in Sihzang and Khuano dialects is called *Ci-Tha*, where the prefix *Ci* denotes the physical body of the worldly man. This perspective points to a duality in the spirituality of man where both entities dwell in different realms. While the *Ci-tha* or the spirit of man is constantly in need of an attachment to a living source:

It is the force that keeps once alive and well. K'la ('tha') comes from a previous existence to inhabit the body at the time of birth and departs into a new existence at death; so also it leaves the body for brief periods and at frequent intervals, as during sleep... Whenever *Tha* goes out of his body, the man suffers bodily illness and when it re-enters, he is well again... the life and death of man are virtually determined by the life and death of his spirit" (Singkhawkai 1995, p.126-127).

Si-kha on the other hand, represents the immortal 'soul' of man that detaches itself from the time of death and proceeds to dwell in the afterlife of *Mithikhua* or the 'land of the dead'. The mythscape of *Mithikhua* is the abode where the spirits of the dead manifest their lives that have been lived in the physical world; a continuation of their lives on earth:

... he would drink and eat; he would grow and marry there, and so on. So the life of man after death is conjectured as the continuation of the worldly life in the other realm.

Whether a man is honest or dishonest is of no consequence in the next world... In his life after death, one is still what he has been in his human life. (Singkhawkai 1995, p. 131).

This concept of man's spirituality and the afterlife is encapsulated in the tale of *Khupting leh Ngambawm*.

Thuaiting leh Ngambawm

Theirs was a story of forbidden love due to class conflicts between their families, even though they were betrothed before their birth, for their mothers had declared it as a promise to each other as good friends. As they grew older, Thuaiting's family refused to carry on with the pledge as Ngambawm's economic condition began to degrade after the death of his father, and Thuaiting's family resented him for not being able to afford the minimum customary requirement of bringing *Zu* or rice beer for his marriage proposal. The lovers eloped and married, but were separated by Thuaiting's parents when they returned. Desperate for his beloved, Ngambawm resorted to the practice of the occult to achieve his ends; taking a strand of hair from Thuaiting's head which he bound around a clay figurine, and placing it on the banks of the *Ngajam* river. This made Thuaiting gravely ill, compelling her family to announce a reward for her hand in marriage to anyone who succeeded in curing her. Ngambawm took this opportunity to win the favour of Thuaiting's family and replaced the strand of hair back on her head, curing her of her illness. But his endeavour proved unfruitful, for her parents still refused him. He placed the figurine with the strand of Thuaiting's hair wrapped around it once again on the banks of the *Ngajam*; however, this time, the figurine was washed away by the pouring rain, which ended her life. Distraught and grief-stricken, Ngambawm followed a jackal who led him to Thuaiting's spirit in the land of *Mithikhua* or the land of the dead. His spirit was broken when he learned that the soul of the living and the dead could never merge there and he had to die to truly be united with his wife. On Thuaiting's request, Ngambawm returned home and made preparations for his death. He arranged a feast of the finest meat as a token of farewell, hung a spear above his bed, and waited in silence. A restless fowl flew into his room and stepped on the spear that hung above him, which pierced his heart and ended his life. And thus, Ngambawm could finally reunite with his beloved wife in *Mithikhua*. (Vaiphei 2015, p. 66-72)

In the tale, the two lovers are able to proceed with their love affair in the land of death as spiritual beings. Moreover, Thuaiting's cause of illness and eventual death was because Ngambawm had taken a strand of her hair; a part of her natural body that was attached to her living spirit. Her health and life were thus, carried away by the river (Singkhawkai 1995, p. 129).

The spiritual realm occupied an integral part in Zo culture considering that the well-being of the spirit determined the condition of the human body. Man's life could last only as long as his spirit willed it so. The strength of the man mirrored the strength of the spirit and its significance superseded the former. Singkhawkai explicates this relationship where the Tedim term for death is '*Kha-Kia*' or 'fallen spirit' (Singkhawkai 1995, p. 130). The cycle of life and death, then, revolved around the supremacy of the spirit where death itself did not merely mean the cessation of life but denoted a spiritual retraction. The spirit was not subjected to extinction but predominantly revolved around and influenced the forces of all things living and natural. This concept elaborates why all the natural occurrences were seen as a result of supernatural intervention. The spiritual

realm made a source for their entire system of logical inference. It was both destroyer and deliverer. When it is held responsible for bringing misfortune, it needs, at the same time, appeasement in the form of charms, sacrifices and offerings in order to provide a kind of salvation from suffering. Relating to this intense attachment to the spiritual world, it comes with no surprise that occultism occupied a large space in the myth and urban legends that have persisted in the modern ages. There are myths of *Pheisam*, a one-legged spirit; *Chom-nu*, a female supernatural being, one of whose characteristic traits include extremely long, dishevelled hair and feet that face backward and *Zomi-sang*, a giant who could stride across peaks of hills; the spiritual entities who are mostly responsible for a specific domain.

There is within this feared practice of the occult called '*dawl*', a looming dread against a spirit that could be called upon to possess or inhabit the physical body of a person. This was successful after a part of the victim's belongings, for instance, a lock of hair or a piece of his clothing was offered to the spirit prior to the intended period of infestation, a practice which is to an extent, similar to the Haitian Voudon religion. This spiritual invasion is generically known as *kau-pe*, which can simply be translated as the 'bite of the spirit'. Following this 'bitten' phase, the victims were believed to have undergone bouts of intense illness or insanity, gradually degrading to an extremely weakened physical and mental state. This practice is still feared in the modern age and various accounts of such incidents have been known to occur; only that it is now preferable to attribute this to the effect of demonic possession as has been the case with the explanation of most supernatural events post proselytisation.

Concept of Power and the Love of Less

Zo myth strongly upholds the power of the spoken word, particularly in the verbal curse and the magnitude that it carries. A gesture of ill-wishing is not taken lightly, more so if it is delivered by parents as it is believed to have the ability to materialise into real events. Singkhawkai traces the ontological roots of the word 'curse' to the Tedim terms '*Sam-sia*', '*Ham-sia*' and '*Tom-lawh*' (Singkhawkai 1995, p.138). In Zo mythology, the efficacy of verbal curses was highly regarded and incorporated in arguments between rivals; verbal dissensions are usually followed by a curse that was intended to befit the folly of the victim. There are numerous folktales that try to explain existential dilemmas as a consequence of the effects of such curses inflicted upon a subject. For instance, in the *Chemtatrawta* myth, the lobster's lips became rough and brittle as a result of being poked and prodded by the Hnathial plant, hence the lobster curses the plant: "From now on whenever you are pregnant with child, you shall die of childbirth", the curse that explains the reason why when the *Hnathial* plant (monocot plant) becomes pregnant with the fresh shoot, it always dies (Thanmawia and Ralte 2017, p. 135-137). The *Galngam* myth also portrays an exchange of curses between Galngam and Dawi Kungpu engaged in a battle of wits:

Galngam may your eyes become blind, may your legs be broken, and may your hands be trapped on the bull rope. Hearing this curse, Galngam cursed back "Alright even if I become blind, my legs get broken, and my hands get trapped in the bull rope, at least the bull will drag me to some village where I will find someone to help me out. As for you, may the flesh of your buttocks be permanently stuck on the rock on which you sit, may the rising floods of the monsoon season submerge you, and may you bear the heat of the summer sun all your life. Unable to bear Galngam's curse, Dawikungpu took back his curse

on Galngam who did likewise. However, a small piece of flesh from Dawikungpu's buttocks remained stuck on the rock where he sat and the mark can be seen on the rocks even to this day. (Vaiphei 2015, p. 15).

In Mizo folklore, there are a number of stories in creation myths that underscores the importance of selflessness in times of great difficulty. This usually is portrayed in the form of extending a helping hand with any resource one is capable of giving. This act of selfless service in times of need is perceived as the concept of *Tawm-ngaina* or *Tlawmngaihna* which translates to 'love of less'. It is the love of less in times of servitude to the old and needy; a collective moral code imbibed within Zo societies and is usually expected from the younger generations. The myth, "How Land Acquired Soil" narrates a cooperative interaction between the human and animal world in arriving at a solution to bring soil to their rock-laden, parched land on the other side of the river (Thanmawia and Ralte 2017, p. 3). The brothers *Thanghou* and *Liandou*, who were left destitute by their mother are admired for their selfless love for each other; their sharing of a single millet seed is an act of *tawm-ngaina* that has resonated across households and instilled upon young minds as an exemplary act of kindness and generosity. Explicating this distinct ancestral code of conduct, Vumson records Samuelson's clarification of what the concept entails:

Tlawmngaihna implies the capacity for hard work, bravery, endurance, generosity, kindness, and selflessness. The forefathers emphasized this value of the action to their progeny. In days of both happiness and misfortune, the concept of *Tlawmngaihna* was a stabilizing force. If a person grew sick or died in a village other than his own, the youth of that village would carry the dead body or sick person back to his own village. When the Mizo people traveled in a group, the youngest man's duty would be to obtain firewood to cook food for the rest of the company. If an older man's basket became too heavy a younger man would help relieve the load. Later on, the elders would honour the man who had the greatest *Tlawmngaihna* by letting him drink rice beer first in the get-together... this ... code of morals made it obligatory for every Mizo to be courteous, considerate, unselfish, courageous, industrious and willing to help others, even at considerable inconvenience to oneself. When everybody was hungry, a man would eat very little, leaving the bigger portion of food for friends... walking one whole day over rough terrain in order to give important news ... a man risks his life to save his friends... These are all *Tlawmngaihna* or 'to need less'. It might be called "self-denial and acceptance of pain." (Vumson 1986, p. 10).

Oral narratives are the culmination of a people's collective ethos, trademark, and a doorway to understanding and manifesting their subjective realities told in the most authentic manner possible. Similarly, indigenous ontological interpretations are acts of resistance that liberates us from all forms of colonial distortions that offer only to analytically expose the supposed structures of our systems without reverence for the meaning that they carry. Nonetheless, while it would be only spiteful to claim that the objective interpretations of colonial scrutiny have wronged us completely, considering the extent to which we have been added and exposed to the fields of cultural, socio-political, or anthropological interest in the global sphere, there are gaps between such progressive analyses. However, there are need to reinvent a new set of conceptual lexicons to evolve the tradition of indigenous hermeneutics that is undeniably lacking in Western vocabulary. Such indigenous concepts that have been discussed have acted as guidelines and

moral codes for the Zos before the existence of any prescribed examples, hence, what may be more important is the meaning attached to such codes, rites and traditions than their mere perception as objective data. In *Maps of Meaning*, (1999) Jordan Peterson clarifies how this process defines the consciousness of the indigenous man:

The natural, pre-experimental or mythical mind is in fact primarily concerned with meaning- which is essentially implication for action – and not with “objective” nature... For the pre-experimentalist, the thing is most truly the significance of its sensory properties, as they are experienced in subjective experience – in affect or emotion” (Peterson 1999, p. 16).

Ontological interpretation is also a means to free ourselves from what Leanne B. Simpson calls, “cognitive imperialism” that invalidates the capacity of the Indigenous people to think of and for themselves (Simpson 2011). This is evidently politically relevant to the Zo people today considering their disarrayed state of existence that only leans on a reminiscent idea of a homeland that once tangibly stood before the colonial interruption, thus, disrupting their sense of a unified identity that is rooted now only in their oral tradition. A substantial amount of autonomy must be cultivated, at the least in matters of indigenous culture to shift away from the vices of cultural hegemony. A resurgence of indigenous knowledge is an opportunity to redirect one’s route of comprehension and reflect on what the idea of indigenous means to the indigenous, rather than what s/he used to mean to the West.

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