PART I
Coloniality

COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL

1

Mapping the Pre-Columbian Americas: Indigenous Peoples of the Americas and Western Knowledge

Gustavo Verdesio

The power of the first chronicles to relate the stories of exploration and colonization of the Americas is still intact. They represent a land that appears to these authors as pristine and untouched by what the West has called civilization. If one were to believe this corpus of texts about lands that were at that time unknown to European subjects, those lands showed no evidence of significant traces of human labor. The predominance of this early perception of the Americas occurs in spite of both the existence of later chronicles and documents that describe, to a European audience, the wonders of human settlements as complex and sophisticated as Mexico-Tenochtitlán and Cuzco – just to mention the two most spectacular concentrations of people in the first half of the sixteenth century – and the constant presence of indigenous peoples in the daily social lives of most American nations.

In my courses about indigenous societies from the past I usually encounter the following situation: a vast majority (actually, almost the totality) of students who, when asked about the way in which they imagine the pre-contact land of what today is the territory of the United States of America, respond with a depiction of a landscape that contains idyllic images of woods, rivers, and prairies that seem to be, in their different versions, uninhabited. In other words, they often present answers that offer a portrayal of the Americas as a wild territory untouched by human hand. It is only after several questions that lead them to admit the obvious (that is, that the lands were populated by a wide variety of human societies and cultures) that they begin to realize how pervasive the initial views we inherited from the explorers of the European expansion era still are. Why is it, then, that the myth that represents the Americas as a blank page where European settlers are free to leave their imprint still survives in the collective unconscious of Western culture? Why this inertia of collective memory that privileges only one of the different images of the past?[1] There are, in my view, no simple answers to these questions. Maybe if we try to view this state of affairs as the result of a combination of factors we could understand it a little better.

I will address these factors briefly later on, but first, I will go back in time and try to deal with the issue of how the scholars and indigenous peoples believe the Americas were populated, and since when.

This is not a conflict-free matter. On the contrary, there are several contending versions from different camps. The main disagreement can be identified as the one that confronts, on the one hand, several Amerindian nations and, on the other, scholars who believe that Western disciplines can reveal the secrets of the distant past. In general, the latter can be found in the ranks of archaeologists and biological anthropologists. Many an indigenous group claims to know where they come from and when they came to the Americas. In their oral traditions, we learn about stories of origins that present us with peoples who believe that they have occupied the territory of the Americas since time immemorial – since the beginning of time (Zimmerman, 2002: 16). These versions of the origins of the different indigenous groups are contested by Western scholars who have a completely different perspective on this issue. In their opinion, and in spite of the differences among them that we will discuss later, Amerindians arrived in the Americas as immigrants from Asia.

It should be pointed out that although Western scholars have a tendency to view indigenous oral histories as nonscientific, the stories passed from generation to generation by Amerindians are a useful tool to reconstruct the past – even the very distant past. As Roger Echo-Hawk has shown, it is possible to use traditional tales together with geological, archaeological, and historical evidence to have a richer picture of the distant past, as long as "the historical content of the oral or written information should be compatible with the general context of human history derived from other types of evidence" (2000: 271). In other words, "the oral information must present a perspective on historical events that would be accepted by a reasonable observer" (ibid.). He makes a very convincing case about the time depth of some indigenous stories about their origins. He even goes as far as to say that some Arikara origin accounts can go as far back as describing the Arctic Circle and Beringia as the place where everything started for them (275–6).

The idea that indigenous peoples came from Asia, which now passes as the uncontested truth among Western scholars, despite many Amerindian groups' rejection of it, was (probably) first advanced in 1590 by a Jesuit priest, Father Joseph de Acosta, in a passage about the origins of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. In it, Acosta makes a huge intellectual effort to reconcile the teachings of the Bible about the origins of humankind (a part of which narrative is the Noah's Ark story), and the undeniable evidence of long and continued human occupation of the lands then known as the Indies (2002: 51). After a careful analysis of the possibility that Amerindians had arrived in the Indies by sea, he concludes:

> The argument that I have pursued leads me to a great conjecture, that the new world that we call the Indies is not completely divided and separated from the other world. And, to state my opinion, I came to the conclusion some time ago that one part of the earth and the other must join and continue, or at least that they come very close. To the

> present day, at least, there is no certainty that things are otherwise, for toward the Arctic or North Pole the whole longitude of the earth has not been discovered and there are many who affirm that above Florida the land runs very far in northerly direction, which they say reaches the Scythian or German Sea. Others add that a ship has sailed there and state that the sailors had seen the coast of Newfoundland running almost to the ends of Europe. Above Cape Mendocino in the Southern Sea no one knows how far the land extends on the other side of the Strait of Magellan . . . Therefore there is no reason or experience to contradict my conjecture or opinion that the whole earth must join and connect somewhere or at least that the parts are very close. If this were true, as indeed it appears to me to be, there is an easy answer for the difficult problem that we propounded, how the first dwellers in the Indies crossed over to them, for then we would have to say that they crossed not by sailing on the sea but by walking on land. (63)

The idea of a migration of peoples from Asia has taken, with time, the form of a popular hypothesis: the crossing of what after 1728 was to be known as the Bering Strait. The template of said hypothesis goes like this: in the Wisconsin period (the latest glacier advance of the Ice Age) glaciers retained so much water that the level of the sea descended dramatically, transforming the Bering Strait into dry land that connected Siberia and Alaska. This land, called Beringia by scholars, allowed the passage of human beings from Asia (there is no agreement, however, about the exact region or regions of the continent they came from) to North America, from where they later moved south, thereby occupying the rest of the continent. This hypothesis has it that the migratory groups of human beings entered the continent through the ice-free corridors that opened during the short periods of de-icing. And of course, some elaborate conjectures have been advanced about the different possible routes that those human travelers followed.

In a more recent development of the crossing of the Bering Strait hypothesis several scholars (among them Thomas Dillehay, one of the major voices today on the issues pertaining to the peopling of the Americas) have advanced the idea that the migration may have taken place, among other ways, by sea – thus contradicting some of Acosta's conjectures. The new version of the story is based on recent geological investigations that point to different climate changes, on disagreement about dates of deglaciation, on newly discovered patterns of settlement in South America, and many other factors. In South America, for example, the archaeological record is clear about the survival of the megafauna of the Pleistocene well into the early Holocene – something than cannot be said about North America, where most of the megafauna had already disappeared by that time.[2] For this reason and many others – among them the once controversial site known as Monte Verde, located in the present-day Chile – a narrative considered as the true one in North American academic circles is much more difficult to defend for the South American case. I am referring to the "Clovis first" hypothesis that in its most traditional (and I dare say reactionary) versions includes the variation known as "overkill."

The first hypothesis maintains that the culture that produced the fluted point known in academic circles as Clovis was one organized as bands of hunter-gatherers

who moved from one place to another in search of food. The food, so the story goes, was mostly taken from big animals such as mammoths and other giants known as part of the megafauna of the Pleistocene. In the "overkill" version of it, these bands were so greedy and so environmentally irresponsible – they would have refused to sign the Kyoto protocol, I guess – that they ended up depleting their hunting grounds. Therefore, the big animals that fed them for millennia vanished from the face of the earth. This culture would have been the one that populated the rest of the Americas.

There are many problems with the application of this narrative to the vast territory south of what today is the USA. One of them is, as we said, that those big beasts survived into the Holocene in South America. Another element to take into account is that the Ice Age did not end between 11,000 and 10,000 BF in South America, but sometime between 14,000 and 12,000 BP.[3] But another set of problems is raised by the study of the evidence found in Monte Verde, Chile. That site – like several others in the southern hemisphere – shows very clearly that not only were its inhabitants not hunting big mammals, but also that their way of life differed dramatically from the one described not only by the "overkill" version but also by the more comprehensive one: "Clovis first." Many a society in South America developed, at an early stage of human occupation of the Americas, complex and diverse cultural habits – those of foragers – that differ dramatically from the model that presents Amerindians of the ancient past as predators. This relatively new evidence puts into question the simplicity and most of all the appeal of the Clovis theory that, in its basic form, states that the hunters of megafauna were the first society in the Americas and that later they populated different parts of the continent for a relatively long period of time. As a consequence, the population of South America, according to this theory, must have been a much later development. Unfortunately for its proponents, archaeological evidence shows that some radiocarbon dates of South American archaeological sites are much older (12,500 BP, in the most conservative estimates) than the ones identified as Clovis, which are only 11,200 years old – and very short-lived, because the most recent dates for Clovis place the end of that culture at around 10, 800 BP.[4]

Of course, there is more than science behind this dispute about dates, ancestry, and genealogy. There is also politics: the "Clovis first" narrative is mostly supported – not surprisingly – by North America-based scholars. Some have even said that the Clovis fluted point is the first manifestation of American (understood as pertaining to the US) ingenuity, which also gave us Coca-Cola and baseball caps.[5] This situation, besides being a blatant case of academic imperialism – it took Dillehay years (many more than the usual period for any investigation) to be able to get his radiocarbon dates and stratigraphic analyses broadly accepted by the archaeological community – it is also a dispute that may help us rethink the way in which we represent the past. That is, it may help us realize how important are the narratives we produce in the present to create a past that suits our community's – whatever community one belongs to – needs in the present, and how those pasts one invents are going to determine the futures that will actually happen or take place in real life.

The way in which one represents the very different indigenous pasts is no small part of the reconstruction of the past Western society has been producing for several centuries now. In this sense, the Clovis case is a very pedagogical introduction to the contradictions present-day scholars incur when trying to write a past that favors the cause of their own culture. For example, it is clear that the image of the first Amerindians as predators who exterminated the megafauna, and as nomads who had no abode, are not the ones preferred in the West to represent civilization. On the contrary, the less complex the society, the more "savage" or "primitive" it appears to Western eyes. On the other hand, Clovis defenders seem to be interested in presenting a scenario where the inventors of the fluted point appear as the pioneers who led the migration from Asia. Therefore, one could even speculate further and say that they could be seen as leaders of a prehistoric expansion that foretells the conquest of the West undertaken thousands of years later by (North) American pioneers. It was they who populated all there is to populate in the Western hemisphere. In this way, US-based scholars make a nationalist claim in the name of science – or if you prefer, disguised as science – in order to appropriate, once again, the territories located south of the Rio Bravo (or Rio Grande, depending on your perspective and geopolitical situation of enunciation). So to sum this contradiction up, I would like to play a little with an extravagant and impossible experiment: to be able to enter the mind of an imaginary "Clovis first" supporter. If that were possible, I bet we could hear something along these lines: "Those Amerindians may have been kind of primitive, but they are ours and they led the peopling of the Americas."

The diversity of indigenous peoples in what today is Latin America only grew with time. In addition to the already complex and diverse panorama of ancient times we are starting to get glimpses of the wide array of peoples and cultures that flourished south of the territory of what today is the USA. The most sobering thing for those who yearn for evolutionist narratives is that there is no visible line that shows any "progress" or "development" in the life and history of indigenous societies throughout the Americas. If an ideal observer could travel through time and space at will she would see hunter-gatherers coexisting with settlements of early agriculturalists, or fishers and hunters living side by side with state-like organized societies. There is, then, no single line of "progress" that societies followed. That is to say, there is nothing in the archaeological and ethnographic evidence available to us today that points in the direction of the existence of a rule or set of rules that determine the "evolution" of societies. Let us now take a look at just a handful of societies that existed in the past, and some that exist in the present, to get an idea of the enormous diversity and the wealth of human variety existent in the Americas.

Let us start with the most vilified ones: ancient hunter-gatherers. These indigenous peoples are the ones who get the worst press: they are represented as simple, primitive, and as not very careful with the environment. The representation has it that those nomads of the past were constantly struggling against the elements, defending themselves from a hostile environment that did not offer them enough resources in the way of food and shelter to have a decent, less difficult life. It follows from this

model that these peoples spent most of their time trying to get food and shelter, which is tantamount to saying that they were too busy to dedicate time and energy to undertake activities unrelated to the production and reproduction of life – that is, activities without relation to subsistence patterns. From this academic perspective, it is with the practice of agriculture that certain activities not related to subsistence get better chances to take place.

However, several years ago, the work by scholars like Jon Gibson and Joe Saunders, who focused on the archaic mounds of the US Southeast, started to change this way of viewing things. These scholars came to the conclusion that the earthworks known as Indian mounds (human-made earthen elevations) located in the US Southeast (Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Florida, and other locations) were the work of peoples without agriculture. These mounds were built, in some cases, 5,400 years ago (Watson Brake, extensively studied by Saunders, is a case in point), and they were the product of societies without agriculture. This was something unexpected, to say the least, because archaeologists had trouble picturing nonagricultural societies staying at a place for long periods of time and with free time to construct massive works that required, without a doubt, a significant organization of the community as a whole – the building of the mounds requires great quantities of earth and, therefore, a high number of human labor hours.

Thus, a new model started to emerge: it was possible to view these societies (the mound builders of the archaic period) as capable of producing monumental collective works without having developed agriculture first. It is societies like the one known as Poverty Point that prompted some scholars to review the old evolutionary model. This complex is a very big site located in northeastern Louisiana, which contains a number of mounds and embankments. The historical period and culture that bear its name cover the years 3,730 to 3,350 BP and it extends over a large area of the lower Mississippi valley from a point near the conjunction of the Mississippi and Arkansas rivers to the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. The artifacts that characterize this culture are made of rocks not available locally, which means their makers must have had to import them. Trade, then, must have been very important for the people who built the earthworks.

The series of questions that places like Poverty Point posed were very difficult to understand for people working on the old paradigm. Those questions include, according to Jon Gibson:

> How did the conditions for large-scale construction appear at Poverty Point while everyone else in America north of Mexico was still following a simpler way of life? Was Poverty Point one of the first communities to rise above its contemporaries to start the long journey toward becoming a truly complex society? If Poverty Point did represent the awakening of complex society in the United States, how and why did it develop? Was it created by immigrants bearing maize and a new religion from somewhere in Mexico? Was it developed by local peoples who had been stimulated by ideas from Mexico? Did it arise by itself without any foreign influences? Did it come about without agriculture? Could hunting and gathering have sustained the society and its impressive works? (1999: 1–2)

The responses to those questions, implicit or explicit, show us an academic community that believed, 40–50 years ago, that such a large site like Poverty Point must have been the abode of a large, permanently settled, and therefore complex society. As I mentioned earlier, the prevailing idea at that time was that complex societies developed thanks to agriculture. However, no plant remains have ever been found at the site. The prejudice in favor of agriculture as a trigger of social complexity is such that even Gibson is very cautious when he talks about the food production and consumption at the site:

> it was impossible to tell if Poverty Point people had farmed, or if they had made a living some other way, such as by intensively gathering native wild plants or by hunting and gathering along the especially bountiful narrow environmental seams where uplands joined the Mississippi floodplain. We still do not have much information about foods eaten by Poverty Point peoples, but we have enough to be sure about one thing. Poverty Point peoples were not corn farmers. They were hunter-gatherers. We are only beginning to find out what they ate. We have more information about meat than plants, because bones are more resistant to decay through time and are more easily recovered by standard excavation methods. (1999: 12–13)

This attitude is understandable for at least two reasons: first, because Gibson himself had the same prejudices archaeologists had, in general, vis-à-vis so-called "primitive" societies and cultural complexity, and second, because it is always extremely difficult to go against commonly accepted knowledge – that is, it was hard to go against the dominant paradigm in the discipline. If we look at the questions posed by Gibson himself, we will see, between the lines, some of the anxieties that haunt archaeologists even today. One of them is the relationship of agriculture to social complexity, as we have already seen. Yet an even more important one is present throughout the whole series of questions: the one that has complexity itself, as a concept, at its center. That is, I believe, one of the more serious problems faced today by those of us concerned with the past of indigenous peoples.

If one looks at the questions carefully, there is a constant tension between the pair of concepts "simple/complex," which is always resolved, at least value-wise, in favor of the latter. In this context (that of the disciplines produced by Western knowledge apparatuses and institutions), complex is better or more desirable than simple. Complex, according to the above-mentioned questions, are those communities that "rise above" (to quote Gibson literally) their contemporaries. Now we see another dichotomy enter the scene: above/below. "Complex" and "above" go together, while their opposites are "simple" and "below." The axiology these oppositions propose is based on a series of Western concepts and prejudices that philosopher Jacques Derrida called logocentrism: the division of the world into conceptual pairs, one of which is considered to be better than, or above, the other. In this context, some scholars who try to vindicate indigenous cultures from the past or the present are caught in the trap of trying to prove that Amerindians are not as simple as portrayed by Western scholarship and popular beliefs while at the same time are reaffirming the very same structures that postulate the inferiority of indigenous peoples in comparison with Western culture.

For example, if one wants to study aboriginal societies in a place that is at the other end of the world from Poverty Point, say, in Uruguay, it is important to attack the popularly held prejudices that present Amerindians as backward, simple people. For this reason, one of the first things that a young team of archaeologists did in 1986 was to show the academic community, first, and the Uruguayan general public, later, that there was a culture or a series of cultures never mentioned by history textbooks that were much more socially complex than they ever imagined. The excavations conducted mostly by José López Mazz and Roberto Bracco and the papers written and ideas expressed by Leonel Cabrera Pérez began the careful construction of a new way of understanding indigenous peoples from the distant past in Uruguay. That new way included ideas similar to those advanced by Gibson, owing to a series of factors, of which I will only mention two: first, the fact that the cultures studied occupied the Uruguayan territory during, among other epochs, the archaic period (some are said to go as far back as 5,000 BP); second, because the archaeological evidence they encountered presented characteristics similar to those of hunter-gatherer societies that built mounds. Their work, then, presented the Uruguayan public opinion with a picture that was completely different from the predominant one. And yet this was done within the framework provided by the logocentric pairs that tell us that complex is better than simple.

However, where this defense of complexity gets even worse is in the work produced about regions populated by the most prestigious Amerindian societies: those located in the Andes and Mesoamerica. And beyond academic production, the masses, whether they know it or not, are also under the spell of a cluster of notions associated to complexity. It is not a secret to anyone that sites such as Machu Picchu, Tikal, and others constitute not only a source of revenue for the states of Mexico, Peru, and Guatemala, but also pilgrimage destinations for believers and new-agers of all kinds. The people who comprise this public are almost exclusively interested in the societies that constructed the structures that are now, for the most part, in ruins. These structures are, more often than not, monumental in nature, so monumental that they do not cease to astound the visitors who look at them in amazement for long periods of time – sometimes for many hours or even days. Anybody who has visited any of those sites knows that the image of astounded tourists is part of the landscape. Western amazement before monumentality from the past is twofold. On the one hand, there is a genuine wonder caused by the sheer spectacularity of some of the buildings constructed by indigenous peoples of the past. On the other, there is an assumption that the cultures that built those structures must have been very complex and, therefore, very civilized.

A word about the concept "civilization" when applied to an indigenous culture: it is another form of saying that said culture resembles Western civilization in some way or another. That is, it refers to cultures that are, in the occidental eyes of the observer, comparable to ours. To our eyes, then, those societies who were civilized were capable, like ours, of building monumental structures and vice versa: they were able to build those structures *because* they were civilized. Monumentality, then, is a

standard against which Western subjects measure the degree of civilization of the culture that produced it. And monuments built 500 years ago or earlier are, in general and very likely, in ruins. This leads me to another related issue: the fascination of our culture with ruins. Some prefer them clean and tidy, others (like Christopher Woodward) like them invaded by nature – that is, covered by vegetation – but both segments of the public love ruins, period. What does this penchant for decaying structures tell us about our culture and our relationship to indigenous societies of the past?

To begin with, it tells us that we prefer to see Amerindians as people from the past whose buildings are there as a testament to their past greatness. This means that they are not here, with us, anymore, which would explain why there is nobody to take care of, or to use the ruins in the ways they were intended to be used at the time of their construction. It also means that we can take care of those ruins without much of a feeling of guilt: if the original dwellers are not here anymore, why not honor their memory by taking care of them? Again, as in the case of the Clovis theory, this is a way people from the present appropriate the work and objects produced by indigenous peoples from the past.

This appropriation has several negative consequences for the way we envision Amerindian pasts. One of them is that in the regions where the Inca, the Mexican, or the Maya cultures flourished, other cultures from the past do not get the same kind of attention. Although for academics who specialize in the America's past the existence of other cultures that preceded, and coexisted with, those major cultures is a well-known fact, this is not so clear to public opinion. For most people in the world, the Amerindians who thrived in the Andes are the Incas; the ones who dominated Mesoamerica are the Maya and the Mexica (or Aztecs, the most popular name applied to them). And even if one looks at the body of scholarly work, one will see that the enormous majority of research produced about those areas has been devoted, until very recently, to the aforementioned cultures. It is only in the last few decades that work like that produced by Steve Stern on Huamanga, or Karen Spalding on the Huarochirí (for the Andes), and that produced by James Lockhart (for Mesoamerica), just to offer some of the most prominent examples of this kind of scholarship, started to become a well-established trend. Thanks to people like them and others, the cultures under Inca or Mexica rule started to get more attention. Those peoples were, sometimes, very different from, and sometimes very similar to, their rulers. A book like Michael Malpass's (1993), that shows the different way in which the Incas dealt with those under their aegis, suggests that the differences between those subjected peoples were big enough to warrant a differential treatment from Cuzco, the Inca center from which power radiated.

And yet, even now, after the production of a wonderful growing corpus of scholarship about peoples subjected to, or in conflict with the Incas or the Mexicas, we still need to see more work on cultures that preceded those encountered by the European explorers at the time of contact. Although it is true that ancient cultures that preceded the Inca, such as the Moche, Chavin, and Chimu (in the Andean region) have been getting much more attention in the last decades, it is also true that the amount of

research produced about those cultures pales in comparison to that devoted to the Inca. And this is even truer of the cultures of the pre-ceramic horizon: only when it comes to the early horizon, to which Chavín the Huántar belongs, does one begin to see a significant corpus of scholarship coming from different disciplines.[6] But early hunters from the Puna (8,000 BP) and early coastal populations do not get the attention of many scholars. This means that the great diversity of cultures that thrived, in ancient times, in what is called (incorrectly, in my opinion) the Andean region, who adapted in very different ways to a series of very diverse and complex environments, get very little attention and, therefore, little justice is given to the almost miraculous ways in which different groups of humans dealt with some of the toughest environmental conditions imaginable.[7] The Inca civilization and all those that preceded it developed a mastery over extreme environmental conditions. In Michael Moseley's words: "If thriving civilizations had matured atop the Himalayas while simultaneously accommodating a Sahara desert, a coastal fishery richer than the Bering Sea, and a jungle larger than the Congo, then Tahuantinsuyu [the name given by the Inca to their world] might seem less alien" (2001: 25). This amazing adaptability took, with time, the form of a simultaneous adaptation to all those ecological niches by a single population – a phenomenon that had no precedents in the history of humankind until it happened in the Andean region.

A similar scholarly situation presents itself to the observer in the case of Mesoamerica as well: there are thousands of articles on the Maya Classic and Post-Classic periods, but very little, in comparison, about the early hunters who populated the area of Los Tapiales 10,700 years ago. Even serious books for college survey courses written by major scholars like Michael D. Coe dedicate an insignificant number of pages (15 out of a total of 256) to those he calls the "earliest Maya" in his book *The Maya* (2001). The situation is a little better in the case of Mexico, where significant research is available about the Early Pre-Classic and Archaic periods. However, it is also the case that the majority of the research produced about Mexico covers a period that begins, roughly, with the Middle Pre-Classic, of which the most representative culture is the one known as Olmec, and that ends with the arrival of the Spaniards to the region.[8]

As I suggested above, the lack of monumentality among those early peoples from different parts of the Americas might as well be one of the reasons we do not pay much attention to them. But there are also other important factors that come into play. One of them is their social organization. This is why hunter-gatherers or early agriculturalists are not very interesting to the masses and even to scholars: their social organization differs too much from that which constitutes our ideal. It is the states or the societies that showed more complexity (at least understood as we understand it in our culture) that get most of the attention from both the general public and the experts. It seems that those peoples who did not have a state or a similar institution for social and political organization do not deserve much of our interest.

This is part of a general tendency in Western societies, which consists of perceiving indigenous cultures from our culture-specific perspective. As a consequence,

occidental subjects compare the aboriginal peoples and their cultural and social institutions and habits against the background of the known, therefore failing to assess or understand Amerindians in their own terms, as Alvin M. Josephy, among others, pointed out many years ago (1969: 4). For this reason, a high number of sites and cultures are not as present in our social imaginary as are, say, Machu Picchu or Chichen Itzá. Places like Cahokia (located in Collinsville, Illinois), for example, which seem to exhibit all the traits that characterize a highly "civilized" indigenous group according to occidental standards, are relatively little known today – after having attracted, not surprisingly, the attention of the colonizers for many years, until the nineteenth century, when the general public and the academic community began to lose interest in mounds in general – even in the United States.[9]

Cahokia is a huge site, with several mound complexes, and with a central mound (known as Monk Mound) that was the second tallest construction in the Americas before the arrival of the European explorers – it is even taller than the monuments of Tikal – and which is aligned with other mounds and the cardinal points – which reflects a significant astronomical knowledge as well as a sophisticated landscape layout. And yet, people are not interested in it or do not even know that it exists. The reasons for the current situation are many, for sure, but I would like to focus on at least one: the materials used for the construction of the large, monumental structures at the site. Clay is not as prestigious as stone, apparently, in spite of the durability proved by the longevity of the many mounds that comprise the Cahokia complex. Maybe this is why for a while the predominant view on this site has been that it was not a state but a chiefdom. That is, scholars maintained (and still maintain) that the social complexity and the power exerted by the society that built and inhabited Cahokia were not enough for it to reach the status of a state.[10] They also refuse to call the platform mounds pyramids and the concentration of mound complexes known as Cahokia a city, but as Timothy Pauketat states in his most recent book: "if Cahokia, Cahokians, and Cahokia's mounds had been in ancient Mesopotamia, China, or Africa, archaeologists might not hesitate to identify pyramids in a city at the center of an early state" (2004: 3). This is probably why Pauketat, a long-time proponent of the chiefdom hypothesis, has admitted that the limits between certain concepts and categories such as state and chiefdom are not very clear in some cases: "we have to admit that no two archaeologists in any part of the world completely agree on how to identify a city, a chiefdom, or an early state" (4). For this reason, he is now more open than before to the possibility that Cahokia could have been a state or something that resembled it very closely.

As a summary of this chapter we could say that indigenous peoples of the Americas offer a rich spectrum of human diversity but that the very same expression with which we refer to them fosters the production of a view that homogenizes them. The misnomer "Indians" given by Columbus to the inhabitants of the lands he encountered, because he thought he was in Asia or the Indies, is a term that presents aboriginal peoples as a single entity. And we know that this is not true: indigenous peoples of the Americas are very different from each other: they organize their soci-

eties in many different forms, they have very diverse beliefs, and so on. Moreover, the groups we put together in the same category ("Indians") did not think of themselves as part of the same polity – there is plenty of evidence to support this view. Only after they realized that by considering themselves part of an oppressed kind of people – regardless of ethnic differences – and that collective claims and actions under the rubric "Indians" were useful on some occasions, did indigenous peoples began to call themselves Indians. Therefore, to call them Indians is an intellectual operation similar to those that characterize what Edward Said called Orientalism: it is a discourse we create to talk about our others because we can do so thanks to a differential of power. In some cases (very few), we have a relatively good idea about how a certain indigenous society from the past was, but in most cases we have a very spotty, fragmentary knowledge of indigenous cultures before the time of contact and the little that we know is tainted by the prejudices that pervade our gaze and our episteme. It will take the work of generations of scholars and educators to change this state of affairs and to create the ground from where a more respectful image of the diversity and cultural wealth of indigenous peoples of the Americas could emerge.

Notes

1 Said inertia is blatantly patent in another diehard myth from the times of "discovery" and "conquest," to judge from a recent study conducted at the Institute for Social Research at University of Michigan. In it, experts state that 85 percent of Americans describe Columbus in a positive light and claim that he "discovered" America. Only 2 percent of the individuals surveyed said that Columbus could not have discovered a land that was already inhabited and, therefore, already discovered. Only 4 percent of the individuals surveyed present Columbus as the man who brought diseases, death, and a grim future to indigenous peoples.

2 For a detailed discussion of these issues see Dillehay (2000: xiii, passim).

3 BP means "before the present." It is a way of measuring time without having to resort to Western religious markers such as the birth of Jesus Christ.

4 For a comprehensive discussion of the radiocarbon dates and the Clovis theory in general, see the first chapter of Dillehay (2000).

5 Interestingly, one of the most vocal supporters of Clovis first, Tim Flannery, lives outside the USA. However, he includes himself in the "Monte Verde skeptics" camp: "Although lacking a convincing explanation for the site, I am one of the Monte Verde (and thus pre-Clovis) skeptics, and from here on will write as if reports of a pre-Clovis occupation of the Americas result from dating or other interpretive error" (2001: 178). This is typical of the incredibly, unabashedly biased view – which includes very few arguments but very strong prejudices and preconceived ideas, as can be appreciated in the fragment quoted above – of the majority of (if not all) the Clovis-first supporters.

He is one of the scholars who propose the Clovis fluted point as the first American innovation (182) and who suggests a parallel between said invention and other American cultural artifacts: "From Guatemala to the Dakotas, and from the Pacific to the Atlantic coast, the method of manufacture of Clovis points and other artifacts was uniform. Unless we count our own time, with its ubiquitous Coca-Cola cans and baseball caps, such cultural homogeneity has never been seen since in North America" (183).

6 For an overview of the wide array of Andean cultures, see Lumbreras (1989) and Moseley (2001). For research on Chavin de Huantar, see Burger (1995).

7 For a description of the difficult environmental conditions that peoples from the Puna, the Altiplano, the Coast, and the Amazon basin had to deal with, see Moseley (2001).

8 For an overview of the different stages (that is, arbitrary divisions proposed by archaeologists) in the history of human occupation of Mexico, see Coe (1994).

9 And even in St. Louis, a city located 7 or 8 miles from the main site of the cultures known as Mississippian, as I was able to confirm in the summer of 2005, when only one person – among forty or so – I asked about the Amerindian place knew what I was talking about.

10 See Emerson (1997) and Pauketat and Emerson (1997), where the hypothesis that presents Cahokia as a paramount chiefdom is the point of departure of most of the analyses contained in those two volumes.

References and Further Reading

Acosta, José de (2002). *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*. Trans. Frances López-Morillas, ed. Jane E. Mangan, intro. and commentary by Walter D. Mignolo. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Bracco, Roberto (1990). "Dataciones 14C en sitios con elevación," *Revista Antropología*, 1(1): 11–17.

— (1992). "Desarrollo cultural y evolución ambiental en la región Este del Uruguay." In Renzo Pi Hugarte et al. (eds), *Ediciones del Quinto Centenario: Vol. I*, pp. 43–73. Montevideo: Universidad de la República.

Burger, Richard L. (1995). *Chavin and the Origins of Andean Civilization*. London: Thames & Hudson.

Byrd, Kathleen (1991). *The Poverty Point Culture, Local Manifestations, Subsistence Practices, and Trade Networks*. Geoscience and Man, Vol. 29. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Cabrera Pérez, Leonel (1989). "El pasado que negamos . . .," *Anales del VIo encuentro nacional y IVo regional de historia*, 1(1): 115–17.

Coe, Michael D. (1994). *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs*. 4th edn. London: Thames & Hudson.

— (2001). *The Maya*. 6th edn. London: Thames & Hudson.

"Columbus is still widely admired, U-M study shows" (2005). *News Service*. October 4, University of Michigan, *http://www.umich.edu/news/index.html?Releases/2005/Oct05/r100305*

Dillehay, Thomas D. (2000). *The Settlement of the Americas: A New Prehistory*. New York: Basic Books.

Echo-Hawk, Roger C. (2000). "Ancient history in the New World: integrating oral traditions and the archaeological record in deep time," *American Antiquity*, 65(2): 267–90.

Emerson, Thomas E. (1997). *Cahokia and the Archaeology of Power*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Flannery, Tim (2001). *The Eternal Frontier: An Ecological History of North America and Its Peoples*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press.

Gibson, Jon (1999). *Poverty Point: A Terminal Archaic Culture of the Lower Mississippi Valley*. 2nd edn. Baton Rouge: Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism: Louisiana Archaeological Survey and Antiquities Commission.

Gibson, Jon L., and Carr, Philip J. (2004). *Signs of Power: The Rise of Cultural Complexity in the Southeast*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Josephy, Alvin M., Jr. (1969). *The Indian Heritage of America*. New York: Bantam Books.

Lockhart, James (1992). *The Nahuas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

López Mazz, José María (1992). "Aproximación a la génesis y desarrollo de los cerritos de la zona de San Miguel (Departamento de Rocha)." In Renzo Pi Hugarte et al. (eds), *Ediciones del Quinto Centenario: Vol. I*, pp. 76–96. Montevideo: Universidad de la República.

— (1995a). "Aproximación al territorio de los 'constructores de cerritos.'" In Mario Consens, José María López Mazz, and María del Carmen Curbelo (eds), *Arqueología en el Uruguay: VII*

Congreso Nacional de Arqueología Uruguaya, pp. 65–78. Montevideo: Universidad de la República.

— (1995b). "El fósil que no guía y la formación de los sitios costeros." In Mario Consens, José María López Mazz, and María del Carmen Curbelo (eds), *Arqueología en el Uruguay: VIII Congreso Nacional de Arqueología Uruguaya*, pp. 92–105. Montevideo: Universidad de la República.

Lumbreras, Luis G. (1989). *The Peoples and Cultures of Ancient Peru*. Trans. Betty Meggers. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Malpass, Michael (1993). *Provincial Inca: Archaeological and Ethnohistorical Assessment of the Impact of the Inca State*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

Moseley, Michael (2001). *The Incas and Their Ancestors: The Archaeology of Peru*. Revised edn. London: Thames & Hudson.

Pauketat, Timothy R. (2004). *Ancient Cahokia and the Mississippians*. London: Cambridge University Press.

Pauketat, Timothy R., and Emerson, Thomas E., eds (1997). *Cahokia: Domination and Ideology in the Mississippian World*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Saunders, Joe (2004). "Are we fixing to make the same mistake again?" In J. L. Gibson and P. J. Carr (eds), *Signs of Power: The Rise of Cultural Complexity in the Southeast*, pp. 146–61. Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press.

Saunders, Joe, and Thurman Allen, E. (1998). "The Archaic Period," *Louisiana Archaeology*, 22: 1–30.

— (2003) "Jaketown revisited," *Southeastern Archaeology*, 22: 155–64.

Saunders, Joe W., Mandel, Rolfe D., Saucier, Roger T., Thurman Allen, E., Hallmark, C. T., Johnson, Jay K., Jackson, Edwin H., Allen, Charles M., Stringer, Gary L., Frink, Douglas S., Feathers, James K., Williams, Stephen, Gremillion, Kristen J., Vidrine, Malcolm F., and Jones, Reca (1997). "A mound complex in Louisiana at 5400–5000 years B.P.," *Science*, 277(5333): 1796–9.

Spalding, Karen (1984). *Huarochirí: An Andean Society under Inca and Spanish Rule*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Stern, Steve (1982). *Peru's Indian Peoples and the Challenge of Spanish Conquest: Huamanga to 1640*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Woodward, Christopher (2001). *In Ruins: A Journey through History, Art, and Literature*. New York: Vintage.

Zimmerman, Larry J. (2002) *Indios norteamericanos: Creencias y ritos visionarios, santos y embusteros, espíritus terrestres y celestes*. Cologne: Taschen.