



EL MITO COMO MEMORIA COLECTIVA URBANA: UNA LECTURA DE LA REPRESENTACIÓN DEL CUZCO EN *Los Ríos Profundos* DE JOSÉ MARÍA ARGUEDAS

Myth as Urban Collective Memory: A Reading of José María Arguedas's Representation of Cuzco in Los Ríos Profundos

MAXWELL WOODS
UNIVERSIDAD ADOLFO IBÁÑEZ (CHILE)
MAXWELL.WOODS@UAI.CL
ORCID: 0000-0001-9539-0555

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Resumen

Este artículo explora la función sociopolítica de las representaciones míticas del espacio urbano en la literatura latinoamericana. A partir de un análisis del primer capítulo de *Los ríos profundos* (1958) de José María Arguedas, sostengo que el mito es una tecnología narrativa de la memoria colectiva que vincula a una comunidad regional a través de la práctica de reproducir narrativas compartidas del significado urbano asociado a una ciudad unida. Más precisamente, analizo la función del mito del Cuzco como “centro del mundo” en el capítulo inicial de la novela de Arguedas.

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Palabras clave

mito, memoria colectiva, estudios urbanos literarios, Cuzco, Arguedas

Abstract

This article explores the socio-political function of mythical representations of urban space in Latin American literature. Based on an analysis of the first chapter of José María Arguedas's *Los ríos profundos* (1958), I argue that myth is a narrative technology of collective memory that binds together a regional community through the practice of reproducing shared narratives of the urban meaning of a uniting city. More precisely, I look at the function of the myth of Cuzco as the “center of the world” in the opening chapter of Arguedas's novel.

Keywords

Myth, Collective Memory, Literary Urban Studies, Cuzco, Arguedas

Research has noted the lasting importance of myth in the history of Latin American literature (Rovira and Valero, 2013; González Echevarría, 1990; Usandizaga, 2013; Usandizaga and Ferrús, 2015). This article places this study of myth in Latin American literature into dialogue with the emerging interdiscipline of literary urban studies.² As Jason Finch (2022) has argued, literary urban studies focuses on the “citiness” of its objects of study, analyzing the dialectical relationship between city and text. Within the interdiscipline, there has been a minor focus on the relationship between myth and urban space, with the 2018 conference for the Association for Literary Urban Studies, “The City: Myth and Materiality”, exploring the relationship between mythical narratives and the concrete material reality of cities. As Finch notes, however, the current elaboration of the origins, aims, and methods of the interdiscipline is often Anglocentric. As such, there is a ready site for fruitful dialogue: How can the study of myth in Latin American literature benefit from the discussions of mythical urbanism in literary urban studies, and how can the interdiscipline of literary urban studies benefit from mythical urbanisms present in Latin American literature?

Through an analysis of the first chapter of José María Arguedas's, *Los ríos profundos*, in which the author engages the mythical representation of Cuzco as the navel of the world, this article argues that myth can serve as a narrative framework of collective memory that binds together a historical community organized around a uniting urban center. Mythical representations of urban space can function as a connective structure that aids in the reproduction of a community's social, political, and cultural bonds. In this way, this article is based within the methodology of literary urban studies in dialogue with the study of myth in literature from the Andean highlands. Rather than trying to modify the methods and aims of literary urban studies through a reading of Arguedas or showing how literary urban studies can be applied to mythical urbanism in Latin American literature, I use the example of the mythical representation of Cuzco in *Los ríos profundos* to demonstrate the possibility of productive dialogue between literary urban studies and the study of myth in Latin American literature.

This article proceeds in two sections. First, I revisit the theorization of myth in the Andean highlands as a technology of collective memory. I then put that theorization into conversation with the importance of

² For overviews of this discipline, see Finch (2022) and Hones (2022).

cultural identity rooted in an urban territory for the reproduction of a community's historical continuity. Second, I explore this theorization through a reading of the first chapter of Arguedas's *Los ríos profundos*.

MYTH, URBANISM, AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Recent research has focused on how myth within the context of Latin America frequently functions as a narrative technology of collective memory (Woods, 2024b). This theorization of myth can be found in the work of Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2014), for whom mythmaking consists of the continuous recodification within a community of shared narrative structures across generations in order to respond to new contingencies in the present. For Rivera Cusicanqui, there is no stable and original myth preserved for eternity; instead, myth is a narrative structure constantly being dynamically reworked, modified, processed, and recoded within a community's collective memory. In this way, myth is defined by the dialectic between a community's "long memory" dating back generations and the "short memory" of contemporary political economy. In this theorization, myth holds a specific social function: to maintain the historical continuity of a community through the practice of transmitting shared narrative structures across generations while simultaneously recodifying those narrative structures in order to articulate contemporary political and economic demands.

This is not to say that this theorization of myth is specific to the Andes. One of Rivera's interlocutors in her discussion of collective memory is Maurice Halbwachs (1980, 1992), the French sociologist often identified as substantially developing the theory of collective memory in the early twentieth century. For Halbwachs, collective memory does not refer to some hive mind or shared set of particular remembrances within a community. Instead, collective memory refers to a set of what Halbwachs calls "social frameworks": the shared visual, narrative, sonorous, and value systems that individuals within a community employ to remember the past of their individual lives as well as of their communities. What this means is that our individual memories "depen[d] on the social environment"³ (Halbwachs, 1992: 37-38) and a communal identity is generated through the production and reproduction of the social frameworks constituting that community's collective memory — a production and reproduction that is accomplished via individuals using said social frameworks to share their personal memories with other members of the community.⁴

One way of understanding myth is that a community's mythology is the set of narrative frameworks constituting that community's collective memory. Jan Assmann (2011) arrives at a similar conclusion through his analysis of ancient myths in the Mediterranean. Assmann argues that every culture requires a "connective structure" that "binds people together by providing a 'symbolic universe'", a connective structure, furthermore, that underlies "myths and histories" (2011: 2-3). These narrative structures thereby "create a basis of belonging, of identity, so that the individual can then talk of 'we.' What binds him to this plural is the connective structure of common knowledge and characteristics — first through adherence to the same laws and values, and second through the memory of a shared past" (3). In this way, Assmann defines myth in the following way, "cultural memory transforms factual into remembered history, thus turning it into myth. Myth is foundational history that is narrated in order to illuminate the present from the standpoint of its origins [...] Through memory, history becomes myth" (2011: 37-38). This is the understanding of myth being explored in this article: myth is a narrative structure of collective memory that is employed by members of a community to remember their past, an employment that reinforces the connective structure binding said community together.

³ This idea is more fully explained by Erl (2012).

⁴ The understanding of Halbwachs presented in this paragraph is supplemented by Assmann (2008), Klein (2000), and Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy (2011).

In this theorization, myth is not defined by its content —origin stories, the supernatural, heroes, and so on— but rather by the integration of a narrative structure into a community’s collective memory. Any narrative structure can therefore become a myth.⁵ We can speak, for instance, of the myth of Manifest Destiny in the United States —the belief that US expansion was providential— that was initiated to justify Westward expansion and colonization, but which was reworked in the twentieth century in narratives related to space travel (Billings, 1997; Woods, 2024a); the integration of the narrative structure of Manifest Destiny into the collective memory of the United States is what constitutes it as a myth. There is therefore no singular, original, and/or authentic mythology, but rather a community’s constant recodification of the narrative structures of its collective memory in response to contemporary reality.

This article is more precisely interested in the mythical representation of cities in Latin American literature. A critical engagement with the work of Manuel Castells (1983) gives us one understanding of this phenomenon.⁶ For Castells, grassroots urban movements are based on “the search for cultural identity, for the maintenance or creation of autonomous local cultures, ethnically-based or historically originated” (Castells, 1983: 319). The formation and stabilization of such a cultural identity subsequently permits a community to defend their autonomous control over the territory associated with that identity. Castells thereby erects a clear trajectory of urban social change from the grassroots: a collective “historical actor” (308), united by a shared cultural identity rooted in a specific urban territory, fights for the redefinition of a city’s urban meaning, defined by Castells as “*the structural performance assigned as a goal to cities in general (and to a particular city in the inter-urban division of labour) by the conflictive process between historical actors in a given society*” (303; *cursivas del original*). Castells demonstrates how cultural identity rooted in an urban space can be the basis for the grassroots political reconfiguration of a city’s urban meaning.

Synthesizing Castells’s theorization with the theorization of myth as a narrative technology of collective memory, one can hypothesize a political function of the mythical representations of cities. Mythical urbanisms cohere a historical community —one that is not only limited to a city in itself but to the broader inter-urban region organized around that city— based on a set of shared narrative structures used to remember experiences tied to an urban space. Once this community’s cultural identity has been firmly established, in part thanks to the narrative practice of myth, that community can engage in the political process of redefining the city’s institutionally validated⁷ urban meaning in accordance with the urban meaning found in their mythology.

Castells’s theory of grassroots urban movements thereby catalyzes a novel understanding of mythical urbanism and a new avenue for analysis in literary urban studies. A mythical representation of a city —with myth once again being understood as a narrative structure of collective memory— could potentially unite a grassroots urban community around a shared cultural identity. Subsequently, that mythical representation could serve as the foundation for redefining a city’s urban meaning, leading to a new structural performance for the city within an inter-urban division of labor (Woods, 2024b). What remains to be seen is whether myth can actually work in that way, or whether it remains purely hypothetical. In the next section, I will test this hypothesis through a reading of José María Arguedas’s mythical representation of Cuzco in the first chapter of *Los ríos profundos*.

⁵ This insight is thanks to a reading of Barthes (1991).

⁶ Castells is interested in grassroots urban movements. This excludes other possible understandings of mythical urbanism (*id est*, this article is not exhaustive). For instance, mythical urbanism can also stabilize a municipal ruling class’s dominance over an urban space (Woods, 2024b).

⁷ This is a reference to Spivak’s (2012) definition of the subaltern as those who lack institutionally validated action.

JOSÉ MARÍA ARGUEDAS AND MYTHICAL CUZCO

Born in rural Peru in 1911, two elements of Arguedas's life have routinely been mentioned when discussing his relationship to the Quechua world about which he wrote. First, although Arguedas was born to a non-Indigenous family, he was largely raised by the Quechua women who worked in his household. As a result, he primarily identified with this Indigenous culture, not the culture of his biological family. Second, Arguedas was a trained ethnologist and his professional work was dedicated to recording the Indigenous worlds that occupied the territory dominated by the Peruvian State. In contrast to the supposed common knowledge of the mid-twentieth century that most Indigenous practices had died with Spanish conquest, Arguedas showed that these Indigenous worlds were still very much alive well into the twentieth century but were under threat as a result of modernization projects. His ethnographic work was dedicated not only to showing that Indigenous communities had not died, but also to guaranteeing their continued life into the future.⁸

According to Arguedas's ethnographic work on rural⁹ Quechua communities, the intergenerational transmission of myth was central to the continuity of Indigenous Quechua communal life from pre-Columbian times to the present day. As Ángel Rama argues, Arguedas sees myth as a reiterative narrative structure that is shared across generations and applied to different situations with slight modifications, thereby cohering a given community around shared mythical narrative frameworks inherited in a collective memory (1984: 195-196, 224, 255). When Arguedas witnessed the disappearance of myths simultaneous with the disintegration of the community around which those myths were based, he concluded that there was an intimate relation between “las diversas formulaciones del mito con la estructura social de quienes lo han generado, estableciendo sistemas asociativos entre los mitos y las comunidades que los crean” (Rama, 1984: 218-219). For Arguedas, myth as a narrative technology of collective memory protects a colonized community in the face of the destructuring influence of colonialism (Rowe, 1979).¹⁰

Indeed, for Arguedas myth is linked to the political-economic heart of Indigenous Quechua life. For example, when Arguedas (1975) analyzes the disappearance of certain myths in the Indigenous communities of Puquio, where new generations “ignore” myths (38), he argues that “[l]a economía y la cultura del indio puquiano están siendo removidas en sus bases” (45). These myths, he continues, “explican el origen del orden social imperante [español], superpuesto al antiguo [indígena], y ofrecen la promesa de que ese antiguo orden podrá ser restablecido” (74-75). For Arguedas, myths are the constitutive narrative structures of the long collective memory of Quechua communities that guarantee the continuity of their communal life, meaning that their disappearance is constitutive—and not just symptomatic—of the undermining of said communal life itself. For this reason, as he insists in his brief text, “No soy un aculturado,” his literary technique depends on his remaining “[c]ontagiado para siempre de los cantos y mitos” (Arguedas, 2009: 182); holding onto myths is what guarantees his capacity to represent communal Indigenous and mestizx life.

Arguedas's novels have often been read against his ethnographic background as their strength, insofar as they have been celebrated for their depiction of the intimate lives of the mestizx and Indigenous communities living within Peru's borders as well as the injustices to which they have been

⁸ For a discussion of this biographical element, see Sales (2009).

⁹ It will be pointed out that I am using Arguedas's analysis of rural life to examine his conception of a city. This is beside the point. I am simply noting how Arguedas understood the concept of myth, and then arguing that this also affected how he conceived of myths of the city of Cuzco.

¹⁰ The quantity of studies on myth and Arguedas is extensive with a full literature review outside the scope of this article. For three other analyses of myth and Arguedas following different lines of argumentation, see Castro-Klaren (2002), Trigo (1982), and Legras (2008). While it would seem that Legras counters my argument—he resists reading “myth as a form of memory” (Legras, 2008: 220)—, I recommend that we are merely working with different theoretical toolboxes.

subjected. His third novel, *Los ríos profundos* (1958), exemplifies this characterization. The novel is centered around the life of Ernesto, a youth whose father enrolls him at a boarding school in the rural town of Abancay. Here, he engages various local traditions, witnesses the power dynamics between the church, the State, and mestizx and Indigenous populations, and observes a revolt by local Indigenous and mestiza women over the distribution of salt. The structure of the novel is a series of chapters, each one of which is a semi-autonomous episode highlighting a cultural practice and/or political event and its roots in the communal life from which it sprouted. This is why Ángel Rama (1984) refers to the novel as a series of “iluminaciones” (1984: 256) without a traditional novelistic developmentalist structure. By focusing my analysis of *Los ríos profundos* on the first chapter, I want to recommend that Arguedas links together these illuminations via an appeal to the myth of Inkan Cuzco as the unifying center of Tawantinsuyu.

At the start of the novel, Ernesto and his father arrive at Cuzco.¹¹ When Ernesto first arrives at Cuzco, he simultaneously calls forth the Inkan past of the city previously shared with him by his father as well as the disjunction between said representation and the city itself. “El Cuzco de mi padre, el que me había descrito mil veces, no podía ser ese” (Arguedas, 2006: 45-46). Ernesto was initially stunned by how Spanish architecture had covered over the ancient walls (46). Yet his father then intervenes: “¡Mira al frente! me dijo mi padre. ‘Fue el palacio de un inca’. / Cuando mi padre me señaló el muro, me detuve” (46). This is the overall dynamic of Ernesto’s experience of Cuzco: his father, or recollections of recollections his father shared with him about Cuzco, illuminate the Inkan past of Cuzco for Ernesto. As he puts it, “[e]stábamos juntos; recordando yo las descripciones que en los viajes hizo mi padre, del Cuzco” (55). The superficial urban meaning Ernesto sees in (post-)colonial Cuzco is transformed when he puts the urban form into dialogue with his father’s recollections.

This representation of Cuzco transforms the meaning of Cuzco’s urban artifacts for Ernesto. Despite initially seeing nothing of the Cuzco described to him by his father, Ernesto suddenly comments on the walls of Cuzco —famously made of stones carved under Inkan rule but repurposed for the construction of Spanish colonial edifices— that they appear alive like a river: “Era estático el muro, pero hervía por todas sus líneas y la superficie era cambiante, como la de los ríos en el verano, que tienen una cima así, hacia el centro del caudal, que es la zona temible, la más poderosa” (Arguedas, 2006: 50). He then uses this experience with the walls to understand the origins of various Quechua phrases related to water and rivers (49-50). As Yazmín López Lenci (2012) argues, in this passage the “sentido oculto de los muros incaicos” are revealed to Ernesto, and the dialectic between collective memory and urban artifact transforms the wall into “un ser vivo, bellissimo” in which “la vigencia y el poder del pasado incaico” is made present (2012: 36).¹² The memory of Inkan Cuzco shared by Ernesto’s father allows Ernesto to illuminate an urban meaning linked to the “power” of the Inkan world previously hidden by the Spanish facades.

In the next paragraphs, I want to argue that this urban meaning communicated to Ernesto, and activated through his visit to the city, is embedded in a myth of Cuzco as the “center of the world”, a narrative structure that has been integrated into the collective memory of some communities in the Andean world. The urban meaning of Cuzco’s past that Ernesto’s father recounts to Ernesto is one of Inkan glory. Ernesto asks his father if a certain plaza was built by the Spaniards, to which his father replies,

[l]a plaza, no. La hizo Pachacutec, el Inca renovador de la tierra. ¿No es distinta de los cientos de plazas que has visto? [...] Puede que Dios viva mejor en esta plaza, porque es el centro del mundo, elegida por el Inca. No es cierto que la tierra sea redonda. Es larga; acuérdate, hijo, que hemos andado siempre a lo ancho o a lo largo del mundo. (Arguedas, 2006: 54)

¹¹ Hugo Chacón Malaga (2018) has carefully traced Arguedas’s biographical relationship to Cuzco and put that relationship into dialogue with *Los ríos profundos*. His work is the concrete counterpart to my theoretical analysis.

¹² The theoretical implication of this reading —“the city is the *locus* of the collective memory” (Rossi, 1982: 130)—is explored in full by Aldo Rossi (1982).

Arguedas is reproducing the basic collective-memory effect of myth: a common narrative structure is transmitted to new generations (Inkan past through to the father and then to the young Ernesto) and a communal continuity is formed around that mythical collective memory.¹³ More precisely, Ernesto's father is transmitting the common narrative structure of Cuzco's past in which the ninth Inkan leader, Pachacuti Yupanqui (1438-1471), developed the urban infrastructure and regional centrality of Cuzco in reflection of its conceptual significance as "the center of the world". It is often said that it was under his rule during the fifteenth century that Cuzco expanded into a mammoth political entity and Cuzco's famous architectural monuments made of stone and gold were erected.¹⁴ Subsequent to this urban development, Cuzco came to be known during the era of the Inkan State as the "center of the world".

More precisely, what we see in Ernesto's father's remarks is the reproduction of the myth of Cuzco as the center or navel of the world. In his analysis of contemporary Quechua poetry, Gonzalo Espino Relucé (2015) opens his section on Cuzqueñan verse with the following remark: "En el cusqueño, advertimos una larga tradición, además de un sobredimensionamiento del sentido para la cultura de los países andinos, como ombligo del mundo" (2015: 66). When Espino Relucé speaks of Cuzco as the navel of the world, he is referring to a conception of the city inherited from the Inkan State. With occupation of the site starting thousands of years ago, the Inka did not create Cuzco so much as radically develop its already existing infrastructure and use the city as the foundation for the expansion of their State across a territory that includes parts of what is today known as Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, and Chile and what was named during Inkan rule as Tawantinsuyu. This name, Tawantinsuyu, given to Inkan territory means "the four regions" in Quechua, and refers to the four regions that make up the Inkan State's domain. Cuzco was located at the center where these four regions met, a centrality that enabled Cuzco to obtain a precise conception: Cuzco is the center of the world from which radiates out the entirety of Tawantinsuyu. More concretely, Cuzco was the organizational center of the Inkan State, and its centrality—reinforced through ideological, political, and economic practices—was a symbolic, political, and economic knot aiding in the unification of the territory and political economy of pre-Columbian Tawantinsuyu.¹⁵

This narrative conception of Cuzco as the center of the world was transmitted into the future. For instance, Inca Garcilaso de la Vega repeated the idea in his *Comentarios reales* (1609) and, later, Túpac Amaru II (who read Garcilaso's text) also integrated this urban meaning of Cuzco.¹⁶ Indeed, despite noted criticisms of the work (Rénique, 1997; Ortmann, 2007; Manrique, 1988), one way of reading Alberto Flores Galindo's (1994) *Buscando una Inca* is that it traces the concrete transmission of the collective memory of Inkan past from the Spanish invasion through the late twentieth century.¹⁷ In this way, when Espino Relucé (2015) talks about the "sobredimensionamiento" of the conception of Cuzco as the "navel of the world," he is talking about the process whereby the material historical circumstances and the structural performance that led to Cuzco gaining centrality in the Tawantinsuyu political economy are integrated as a streamlined narrative structure into the collective memory of some communities of the Andean highlands. One element maintaining the historical continuity of Tawantinsuyu is the myth of Cuzco as the center or navel of the world. When Ernesto's father passes that narrative structure down to his son, it is one more iteration of this collective memory.

¹³ The concrete transmission of this collective memory of Inkan past from the invasion all the way to Arguedas is analyzed by Flores Galindo (1994).

¹⁴ Brian Bauer's (2000) analysis implies that this narrative structure is mythical in the Barthesian sense that it ignores the concrete material causes for why previous political-economic development enabled Pachacuti to expand the Inkan State's territory.

¹⁵ All of the information in this paragraph is well known. That is precisely the point: it appears in common narratives about Cuzco. Some sources on this history include Julien (2000), Yaya (2012), and Bauer (2000).

¹⁶ This is common knowledge being mentioned in an off-hand comment, for instance, by Franklin Pease (2009: 168).

¹⁷ I am careful with my language: Flores Galindo (1994) is tracing the collective memory of Inkan past, but he does not explicitly talk about the mythical conception of Cuzco discussed in this article.

Returning to Castells’s language, what is significant about this myth of Cuzco as the center of the world is the urban meaning Cuzco gains within an interurban system. Within this narrative structure, Cuzco’s greatness, as exemplified in Ernesto’s father’s story about the city’s architecture, only holds true within the greater regional structure of Tawantinsuyu. The urban meaning contained in the myth of Cuzco as the center of the world only makes sense within the broader context of the restitution of Tawantinsuyu. Cuzco is the center of the world only when it serves as the organizational center of a broader regional political economy; said urban meaning is tied to the regional system in which that structural performance holds importance. Mythical Cuzco thereby provides a conceptual mechanism by which a community can bind together their cultural identity rooted in a specific territory. Cuzco becomes a metonym for Tawantinsuyu, and the macro-scale liberation of the latter (along with the utopian revival of its politico-economic reality) is imagined on a micro-scale by the restitution of the former’s urban meaning (*id est*, Cuzco as the center of the world) and leading figures (*id est*, Pachacuti). Cuzco’s mythical urban meaning binds together a community through the transmission of a shared narrative structure about its past, a narrative structure that only attains its meaning within the symbolic and material world of Tawantinsuyu, and enables the utopian hope for the resurgence of that urban meaning, one that must be accompanied by the corollary resurgence of Tawantinsuyu united by the urban knot of Cuzco at its center.

Ernesto himself comes to understand Cuzco in this light. Near the end of his tour with his father, Ernesto hears the sound of a church bell. Ernesto’s father comments that the “metal [de la campana] era del tiempo de los incas. Fueron, quizá, trozos del Sol de Inti Cancha o de las paredes del templo, o de los ídolos. Trozos, solamente” (Arguedas, 2006: 58). Inti Cancha, or as it is usually called today, Coricancha, was not only a temple containing gold-plated walls and golden idols, it was located at the center of Cuzco itself; if Cuzco was the center of the world, then Coricancha was the center of that center —the core from which radiated out the entire world of Tawantinsuyu (Bauer, 2000). Spanish colonizers famously ransacked the temple and used its materials in other buildings and goods. In this first chapter from *Los ríos profundos*, we see Ernesto and his father imagining the Christian bell as constructed using the sacred materials from Coricancha. In this way, Cuzco’s twentieth-century urban meaning is signified not as the Spanish replacement of Indigenous Cuzco, but, just like the living Inkan walls, as the persistence of the substantial Inkan past within the mere facades of Spanish surfaces.¹⁸

What is significant is that this bell from the center of the center of the world allows Ernesto to geographically anchor his wanderings in the subsequent chapters. Not only would this bell “desde el centro del mundo” go on “hundiéndose en los lagos” of the surrounding regions (Arguedas, 2006: 56), but the “voz extensa de la gran campana” (60) would continue to accompany Ernesto even after it finished tolling. The bell of Cuzco, in other words, is a metaphor for Cuzco’s capacity to unite the extensive territory of Tawantinsuyu (the bell’s sound sinks into the territory) as well as its population (the sound accompanies Ernesto). The illustrations of the subsequent chapters are united around the geographic heart of Tawantinsuyu: Cuzco.

Mythical Cuzco thereby holds a specific function in *Los ríos profundos*. The narrative structure of Cuzco as the “center of the world” enables the reproduction of a collective identity rooted in a specific urban meaning of Cuzco as the organizational heart of Tawantinsuyu. The mythical representation of a city, where myth is understood as a narrative structure constitutive of collective memory, can reinforce the connective structure of not only a grassroots urban community but an entire regional community organized around that urban space.

¹⁸ This idea is not only present in early twentieth-century research by the so-called Cuzqueñan School preceding Arguedas (Uriel García, 1922; de la Cadena, 2000), but also contemporary research (Cummins, 1996). This is a direct reflection of Arguedas’s larger literary project, “encontrar un estilo que le permitiese expresar en castellano el mundo indígena” (Sales, 2009: 18; Tarica, 2008). For more on the idea of the “persistence” of a community’s collective memory in architecture, see Rossi (1982).

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that mythical representations of a city can serve as a narrative structure of collective memory that binds together a community—not only within the city itself but the region in which that city holds its (mythical) urban meaning—around the shared practice of employing, modifying, reproducing, and retelling said narrative structure to describe the urban meaning of a given city. In this way, mythical urbanisms can reinforce the connective structure of a community and guarantee its historical continuity into the future. This use of myth has been particularly noted in the Andean highlands, and the first chapter of José María Arguedas's *Los ríos profundos* is one example of this articulation of mythical urbanism.

This article has by no means been an exhaustive reading of José María Arguedas, nor is it an exhaustive analysis of mythical urbanism (in the Andean highlands in particular and Latin American literature in general). For instance, I have not commented on the literature critiquing the *indigenismo* of Arguedas represented by voices like Marisol de la Cadena (2000), even if others have worked to distinguish Arguedas from *indigenismo* (Rivera, 2010). Furthermore, I have not commented on the literature that sees myth as a means to naturalize certain power relations within a given community.¹⁹ For instance, grassroots mythologies in a colonial context have been understood as a means for an Indigenous elite to naturalize their domination of the Indigenous subaltern (Figueira, 2002). At times, it appears that this theorization may be applied to the myth of Cuzco. Frank Salomon (2004) has argued that the “neo-Inkaism” of the eighteenth century (not to be confused with the neo-Inkan State of the sixteenth century) was similar to “other rebellions” throughout the world characterized by “urbanized native elites in search of rural clientele” (2004: 133); the myth of Cuzco as the center of the world functions in this interpretation as a means to mystify the dominance of an urban elite over the rural subaltern. Rather than trying to resolve all of these dilemmas, the aim of this article is much more humble: to present the productive dialogue possible between literary urban studies and mythology in Latin American literature. The mythical urbanism of *Los ríos profundos* opens up new avenues for research in both literary urban studies and studies of myth in Latin American literature.

It is left to future studies to examine how Arguedas developed his vision of mythical urbanism in his later exploration of Peruvian urban life, *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo*. For some, the work is representative of a new urban subjectivity in the city of Chimbote, a subjectivity in which migration and interculturality are based on the dynamic employment of Indigenous mythology (Cornejo Polar, 1996; Feldman, 2012). Others, however, note that urban life in Chimbote is experienced as the loss of a “patria” (Arguedas, 1971: 138-139) and as an “avalancha” (105-106) of refuse that collects at the port. Indeed, throughout the book the narrator contemplates suicide and reflects that he doesn't understand “a fondo lo que está pasando en Chimbote y en el mundo” (96). In this interpretation, the loss of myth as a result of urban immigration leads to despair—a repetition of Arguedas's fear of the social effects of the disintegration of myth identified earlier in this article—and the use of mythology to represent Chimbote is a desperate plea in vain for its return. The task of unpacking this mythical urbanism is left for future research.

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¹⁹ This theorization of myth finds its origins in the thinking of Roland Barthes (1991). It has also been elaborated by Jean-Luc Nancy (1991).

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