



Landscapes and Skyscapes in Contest

The creation of cultural landscapes can support different claims to land or territory. Some Apache conflate both conceptualized and constructed landscapes, sacred sites and archaeological ruins with the natural world. Curiously, astronomers share biospherical and biological imagery with their opponents, Apache as well as Anglo and Chicano ones. In the vicious contest of land/skyscapes at Mt. Graham, Arizona, many stakeholders share the belief that the mountain is sacred, although they understand it differently.

Cultures construct landscapes

Landscapes are ways of expressing conceptions of the world, although they also refer to physical entities, that is to say landscapes may refer both to the environment, generally shaped by human action, and to a meaningful representation of it (Olwig 1993, in Layton and Ucko 1999). According to Hirsch (1995:23), there is no "absolute" landscape: landscape is a process, always dependent on the cultural and historical context. Cultures construct landscapes by means of oral traditions, buildings and monuments, manipulation of natural features, and photographic, pictorial and written representations. It is a colonization of nature by landscape (Olwig 1993:332, in Layton and Ucko 1999), which reveals assertions of power.

Ashmore and Knapp (1999) distinguish between constructed and conceptualized landscapes; the former involve the actual building of artefacts, while the latter have a formal ideological structure and are characterized by powerful cultural meanings invested in natural features rather than material culture. Potter (2004) warns against overly simplified classification systems, and correctly proposes to define all cultural landscapes as conceptualized at some level. The controversy around Mt. Graham is an example of constructed vs. conceptualized landscapes, albeit much more nuanced, where both sides share some features of their opponents' worldview. This controversy pits astronomers vs. biologists, environmentalists vs. developers, Vatican's Jesuits vs. a number of Apache and their anthropologists: it represents in microcosm oppositions such as globe vs. sphere (Ingold 1995), religion vs. science, "immigrants' landscape" vs. "natives' landscape".



The case of Mt. Graham

In a nutshell, Arizona dubs itself the astronomical capital of America and the many observatories on its mountains never provoked conflicts. A conflict, however, broke out in the 1980s, when a formidable environmental alliance, from Greenpeace and the Sierra Club to Earth First!, and many other organizations tried to stop the construction of seven telescopes on public land, on the peaks of Mt. Graham, or Big-Seated Mountain in Western Apache, on the Pinaleño Mountains. The consortium was composed of the University of Arizona, other American universities, the Max Planck Institute (Germany), a group of Italian universities¹, headed by the Arcetri Observatory (Florence), and the Vatican *Specola*. As a matter of fact, only the Zuni and the Hopi replied to the letters concerning the protection of some shrines belonging to an archaeological culture². Some years later a small number of Apache began to oppose the telescopes on religious ground, supported by a number of biologists and anthropologists, who united to some Protestant churches³ to form the Apache Survival Coalition. Albeit two Tribal Councils issued a number of documents opposing the telescopes, they also issued declarations in favour of them, according to the contradictions of Indian factional politics, and never joined the Coalition's suits.

Ola's Crystal Mountain

The chair of the Apache Survival Coalition is Ola Cassadore Davis, a Christian San Carlos Apache who had worked outside the reservation until she retired. It was then that she had some dreams about Mt Graham and went to the reservation to ask advice to a former Mormon bishop, Franklin Stanley, who had become a medicine man with some followers. In a fashion typical of many crisis religious cults, both old and modern, they decided to revive the old religion, supported by anthropologists Basso and Brandt. It would be a mistake, however, to consider Cassadores Davis and Stanley as representatives of the "local" vs. the "global". They may be considered as members of a "community" of transnational activists as well as local politicians. They are the children of globalization: in fact, like other fundamentalists, they feel themselves separated from their tribespeople's lifeways, and are now promoting a return to a "purer" spirituality, closer to a revitalized "tradition". While this is perfectly valid from a religious stance, it does not mean that their Apache opponents are less true to their culture. The idea that one could not be an Indian who followed "traditional" cultural practices and a businessperson at the same time has been



deconstructed (Hosmer and O'Neill 2004). Actually, a culture is not a discrete entity, but a spectrum of different, often contradictory, always negotiating, points of view.

Indeed, many Apache are opposed to the Coalition. Karen Long publicly declared: «To say that our livelihood depends on Mount Graham and to say that any permanent modification of the mountain might jeopardize our prayers, songs, and ceremonies is an outright lie.» William Belvado, an Apache entrepreneur, who beat Stanley at the district elections, considers Ola Cassadores Davis little more than a tourist, who was rarely seen on the reservation before her dreams. Moreover, he says: «Well, we believe that the Crown Dancers come from another area, from the Superstition Mountains. We've all got different ways of treating the land. We're not the same» (Bordewich 1996:235-37).

Anthropologists Climb the Mountain

In *Globes and Spheres* Ingold (1995) contrasts the globe (the planet Earth of school globes), which can only be perceived as such from without, with the spheres (the Ptolemaic universe), which were perceived from within. Moreover, the former involves visual perception, and the latter were imagined in terms of listening rather than looking. Ingold argues that the lifeworld imagined from an experiential centre is spherical in form, while a world divorced from life, as in the phrase "the global environment", is imagined as a globe. From a global perspective, the world becomes, in the mind, a map, a Baconian *tabula rasa* for the inscription of human history. Thus, Ingold contends, the image of the world as a globe is a colonial one. The tribal stories of the Athabaskan southern migration from the Arctic are "global", but the stories about the underground emergence to this world are "spherical".

Malkki (1997) emphasizes the connection between the concept of nation and the anthropological concept of culture. The conceptual order of the "national geographic" map, similar to a school atlas, is comparable to the anthropological spatial arrangement of peoples and cultures. A related set of connections between nation and culture has to do with the fact that, like the nation, culture has for long been conceived as something existing in "soil", by means of terms like native, indigenous, and autochthonous (Malkki1997:57). The "natives" are supposed to be able to give moral lessons to the restless, rootless children of colonists and immigrants.

This notion also appears in the title of Basso's book *Wisdom Sits in Places* (1996). As a founding member of the Apache Survival Coalition, Basso wrote the book in the heat of the controversy. He also belongs to the army of American



anthropologists who looks for the pure Indian, and constructs “the” Western Apache. He contrasts Apache “wisdom” to «this unsettled age ¼ ravaged by capitalism.» The landscape in which the Western Apache dwell can be said to dwell in them (Basso 1988:122). In court Stanley and Basso «were presenting silence as the ultimate argument. Denial of the mountain significance was to be understood as evidence that Mount Graham was in fact sacred. » (Borderwiche 1996:218). Even if Basso’s claim may be the subject of an academic article, it did not hold in court. In addition, Basso was given a good lecture by anthropologist Martin Ball (2002:474), because the former provided a philosophical frame in which to situate his description of Western Apache sense of place based on Sartre (Basso 1996a, 1996b),

Apache religious claims lack material culture evidence and rest on very scant documentation. This fact is confirmed by Fort Apache archaeologist J. R. Welch (1997:89), when he says that «finding an unambiguous Apache element of the Mt. Graham shrines is unlikely.» There are only two sites dated about 1100 AD, where Mimbres pottery was found; Welch also confirms (p. 88) that San Carlos and White Mountain Apache people do not agree about which mountains⁴ form the actual spiritual boundaries of their homeland, due to the composite history of the reservations.

Furthermore, both Basso and Ball write that «what matters most to Apaches is *where* events occurred, not *when*, and what they serve to reveal about the development and character of Apache social life. In light of these priorities, temporal considerations, though certainly not irrelevant, are accorded secondary importance» (1996b:31 emphasis added). This means that even if Mt. Graham became sacred after Ola’s dreams, it is the location of the dreams, the mountain, not when it acquired its sacredness which counts from an Apache point of view. Therefore, while this may be a very convincing argument in a conference about Religion, it is no surprise that the court rejected it.

Chicanos Christen their Landscape

During the controversy, the Apache play the part of the “indigenous” rooted to the place. They are seen in contrast not with the Puebloans and the Pimans, but with other Arizonans, whose ancestors mostly arrived from Mexico at the same time as the Apache came from Alaska. Their migration, like that of the Apache bands, was also dotted of miraculous events. For example, Santiago Matamoros, Our Lady of the Rosary, the Blue Lady, St. Michael, etc., helped the Spaniards in battle; Montezuma appeared in many sites as well as El Diablo and La Llorona.

Although most geographical features in Arizona bear Spanish placenames,



and Mexican American churches, chapels and shrines mark the landscape, the Mexican Americans, as well as the Zapotec, Mixtec and Maya immigrants are not considered as “native” as the Apache. They are considered as immigrants as the “Anglos” after them, and as such, like Malkki’s refugees, they belong to «the aberrant condition of people whose claims on and ties to national soils are regarded as tenuous, spurious, or nonexistent» (1997:55). In this sense, pardon the word play, they soil the national soil, their constructed landscapes are stained morally, and their observatories pollute the biologists’ Mt. Graham bioregion as well as Apache sacred landscape (see Douglas 1966). Gupta and Ferguson (1997:6) are right when they warn against the conceptualization of the “local” understood as the centred, the natural, the authentic as opposed to the “global”, understood as new, external, artificially imposed, and inauthentic. Leonard (1997) has shown, in fact, how immigrant Japanese and (East) Indian agricultural workers have superimposed “Asian” landscapes on rural California. Similarly, non-Indian Arizonans have constructed hybridized, rhizomatic identities for their communities, which “root” them to the landscape in a way as authentic as that of their Indian neighbours.

“Green” Forests, Islands and Oceans

Commonsense assumptions linking people to place are not simply territorializing but deeply metaphysical, and are conceived in specifically botanical metaphors (Malkki 1997:56). The Apache activists prefer a rhizome-like web of sacred spots and paths; they are opposed to the telescopes because, they say, they would interfere with their medicine people’s gathering of herbs and plants, and with the path of their prayers to the Mountain spirits.

Although the Mount Graham International Observatory (MGIO) complex occupies only 0.004 percent of the mountain, activist biologists and environmentalists portray Mt. Graham as a spoiled pristine world, when actually it is far from it⁵. They usually omit to cite a seventy years’ logging, a 40 mile-long, two-lane highway, two artificial lakes, multiple campgrounds with developed sanitary facilities, two villages of about 100 summer cabins, a Bible camp, two Forest Service workstations, and more than 70 transmitters. Tens of thousands of visitors escape the desert heat in its conifers each year.

These activists rely on a relatively new theory, island biogeography, which endeavours to explain why unique flora and fauna tends to evolve on islands. They contend that Mt. Graham, together with the other two dozens or so “sky islands” dotting the Sonoran desert, evolved on their own since the Ice Age, and their isolation made them much like islands :the Madrean Archipelago, of which the Pinaleño Mountains are part, is a group of sky islands surrounded by



a sea of desert grassland, and a treasure chest of biological diversity. (Warshall 1995).

Diagrams of these sky islands show a vertical slice of biosphere, a wart on the global surface of the earth. If one flattens this vertical slice on a horizontal surface, one gets a miniature map, like a patriotic microcosm, of North America, with the Hudsonian boreal spruce-fir forest in the north, and the Mexican desert flora and fauna in the south. It is also the Edenic landscape of Green primitivism (Ellen 1986).

The Pope's Telescope

The Catholic Church had seen the world as a sphere for about a millennium before Copernic, Galileo, and Newton shattered this image. For the early astronomers, the cosmos was seen to be comprised of a series of hollow and transparent spheres at the common centre of which stood man itself (Ingold 1995:32). The spheres were supposed to make a music and from the centre of the earthly sphere man could ascend to a higher perception (Ingold 1995). When the earth ceded its central place to the sun and the First Mover became Newton's engineer, the Holy See reacted badly.

The Vatican Advanced Technology Telescope (VATT), a joint enterprise of the Vatican Observatory and the University of Arizona, can be seen, physically and metaphorically, as a dome. Coyne, the VATT's Jesuit director, declared that the sacred is beyond this world and the Vatican's telescope is part of an otherworldly religious mission to help humans to know where civilization came from and to find God, or at least to deepen human understanding of God's creation and character⁶ (Taylor and Geffen 2004:58). This is a cosmological, spherical point of view. On the other hand, when Coyne claims that the VATT may enable earthly Christians to communicate and evangelize extraterrestrials (Taylor and Geffen 2004:59), he holds a global perspective. The earth is a platform for a series of hops to the outer space New Worlds, waiting for a new Admiral of the Ocean Sea to be discovered.

An Island of Science

Secular astronomers portray themselves as people with very little impact on the environment. Religious scholar Bron Taylor (1995) has suggested that astronomers view outer space as the ultimate sacred space, partly because it is the place where divine mysteries are still being revealed, through the miracle of astronomical technology. By contrast, Earth First! sneers at «... the telescopic erections protrud[ing] from the side of the mountain that faces their (Apache)



reservation.»). Earth First!'s activists, however, celebrated a ribald rave party on the "sacred" Mt. Graham, and quarrelled with their Apache allies. Moreover, these militants' phallic fantasies misunderstand the telescopes' shapes, which indeed are more similar to vulvas and breasts.

Italian astronomers are from Padua and Arcetri, where Galileo lived and worked. In Padua Galileo built his telescope and discovered the satellites of Jupiter; in Arcetri he wrote his famous *Dialogue*. These scientists are very worried by the wave of religious fundamentalism. They see the observatories on Mt. Graham as an island of science surrounded by a land of harsh and primitive majesty, especially when, «for every telescope project that proceeds amid the fury of protest, there is a place like Kansas, where legislators relegate the teaching of evolution to the back of the class» (Bradigan 1999). Padua and Arcetri astronomers' worldview is very secular; yet, when they look at the depths of the universe, their world is a spherical one. A spherical world «has properties of both transparency and depth: transparency, because one can see into it; depth, because the more one looks, the further one sees»⁷ (Ingold 1995:37).

Landscapes and skylines in contest.

Some Apache conflate both conceptualized and constructed landscapes, sacred sites and archaeological ruins within the natural world⁸. Most Arizonans, however, see the MGIO as «an island of science». In this often vicious contest of landscapes, many stakeholders share the belief that the mountain is sacred, although they understand it differently. Moreover, green militants, anthropologists and Apache activists interpret the term "sacred" as "forbidden"⁹, but their worldview succeeded only in delaying the construction of the MGIO; in court the non-exclusionary interests of the other stakeholders' «taskscape» (Ingold 1993) got the upper hand.

Yet, astronomers share biospherical and biological imagery with their opponents. In some way the biologists' landscape of sky islands mirrors the astronomers' skyscape of galaxies as islands in a black sea-like space with magnetic currents and solar winds. Marine images pervade astronomical parlance. The organic analogies of Classic and Medieval astrology between the astronomic macrocosm and the human microcosm, with its moral ramifications similar to Apache wisdom in placenames, are mirrored in the zoological *Wunderkammer* of the astronomical sky, with its Swan's Veil, the Tarantula and the Crab Nebulas, the *Canis* and the *Ursas*, Alpha Centauri, the Hydra, the Draco, and so on.

«At any rate, the primacy of space over time is an infallible sign of reactionary



language,» wrote Ernst Bloch in 1932 Germany¹⁰. Moreover, he notes later, fencing off cultures breaks up the very process of history, turning them into Gardens of Culture or “Culture Souls”. In sum, when “indigenous” people are seen closer to the “cultural” roots of a place, and “immigrant” people more as leaves blown off by the wind of history, this arborescent image is easily overlapped by evolutionist trees.

Endnotes

¹ A member of the consortium is the University of Padua, with its Faculty of Astronomy and observatory, where Galileo taught.

² The first of the many laws and regulations which protect Indian sites is the Antiquity Act of 1906. Since this Act to the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA 1966), the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (AIRFA 1978) and amendments, to President Clinton’s Executive Order No. 13007 (1996), legislators evolved from a constructed landscape stance to a conceptual one. Key elements of the new policy include tribal standards to identify sites, maintaining cultural control of information, and allowing tribes to provide only general, not specific, locations in order to protect confidentiality (Gulliford 200:120).

³ A branch of the National Council of the Churches of Christ and the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations.

⁴ Mt. Graham or the adjacent Santa Teresas, the Mazatzal Mountains or the nearby Sierra Ancha.

⁵ The Observatory occupies 8.6 acres of the at least 900 acres spruce-fir forest summit, out of about 200.000 acres occupied by the mountain. Activists claim that the MGIO damages more than 28 endangered species, among them the Apache trout, imported from another area, and the red squirrel.

⁶ These words echo those of Pope John Paul II, which echo Galileo’s words when he was obliged to refute his bold theories.

⁷ On the other hand, the third and largest telescope (the Pope’s eye, as it is called, it is the smallest of the three built so far) of which the Italian consortium owns a 25 percent, the Long Binocular Telescope (LBT), at first was dubbed Project Columbus, probably because many components were built in Italy, among them the mirrors, and Columbus Day is the day of the Italian Americans. The name was changed after the controversial Fifth Centenary in 1992. The Admiral

’s name, however, haunts the project also from Columbus, Ohio, where other components were built for the University of Ohio, a member of the consortium. Italians, however, usually prefer Leonardo’s name.

⁸ A statement from the San Carlos Apache Tribe (2005) declares contradictorily that «we want the mountain (

Dzil ncha si an

) be left natural, the way God created it. The natural world includes archaeology (sic) sites, traditional cultural places, and sacred sites.» Mount Graham Coalition,

file:///D:/environment/Mount%20Graham%20Coalition.htm

They want to stick to the official definition of cultural landscape in a number of U.S. federal



laws, regulations, and guidelines. A landscape is defined by the way the land is organized and divided, settled, and used, and the types of structures that are built on it. The most detailed federal policy statement on cultural landscapes appears in the National Park Service Cultural Resource Management Guidelines

(NPS 1994): a cultural landscape is a geographic area, including both natural and cultural resources, associated with an historic event, activity, or person (NPS 1994:94 in Stoffle et al. 1998). The NPS is the manager of the area occupied by Mt. Graham.

⁹ "Devoted exclusively to one service or use (as of a person or purpose)", "Dedicated or set apart for the service or worship of deity" and also "accursed" (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary 1983).

¹⁰ Bloch [1932] 1962:322, in Fabian [1983] 2002:37.

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