The New Zealand Centre for Latin American Studies (NZCLAS) and Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga present

Professor Arturo Arias
University of Texas at Austin

Oxlajuj B’aq’tun: Not the End but a New Beginning for Maya, Indigenous Peoples and the Earth

On 21 December, 2012, Maya communities across the Americas celebrated the end of the Fourth Era and welcomed the Oxlajuj B’aq’tun, the Fifth Mayan Era. The Maya Calendar is the oldest extant calendar on the planet, with a 5,200 year cycle of remarkable accuracy and complexity. However, across the planet, from the US to Russia, citizens panicked at the idea that the world would end “as predicted by Maya astronomers”. This was a Western invention; this change does not predict the end of time but promotes continuity at a time of crisis. In his talk, Professor Arias will explain the workings of the Maya Calendar, the celebrations last December, and the way indigenous peoples throughout the Americas understand this momentous event as a starting point to reconfigure an ethical beginning for their own people, to promote an indigenous worldview on Earth, to advance decolonial processes, strengthen indigenous cultures, and protect Mother Nature in significant ways.

Arturo Arias is a mestizo creative writer and specialist in critical theory whose contributions to Maya culture are recognised by their claiming him as one of their own. Professor of Latin American Literature, he co-wrote the screenplay for the film El Norte (1984), and edited The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy (2000). Having published six novels in Spanish, with two Casa de las Americas Awards, he was also winner of the Ana Seghers Award for fiction in Germany, and the Miguel Angel Asturias National Award (2008) for Lifetime Achievement in Literature in Guatemala. His most recent book is Taking their Word: Literature and the Signs of Central America (2007).

Tuesday 12 March, 6pm
Business School Lecture Theatre B4

Professor Arias’ is a Hood Fellow. His visit is supported by the Lion Foundation.