

# A Tribute to the Other Voices

A gigantic treasure trove bursting with choruses and polyphonies, voices circulate throughout Mexico, as diverse as they are profound and original. Outstanding among them are the heirs to the ancient indigenous American civilizations that give the country a singular, incomparable linguistic, literary, and cultural wealth. Popular wisdom expresses it very well: “Like Mexico, there is no other.”

The issue of *Voices of Mexico* that you are holding in your hands seeks to allow you to at least monitor some of those socio-linguistic, ethno-cultural, and, at the same time, socio-economic expressions that continue to modulate through more than 60 languages and hundreds of dialects. These are voices that 500 years ago cleaved all the horizons of what is today Mexico and beyond, and some of whose expressions, such as the sacred, part of the medical, and even the playful, had to enter into the sphere of hidden languages, clandestine invocations, and buried prayers after the Spanish conquest.

These are narratives that remained around the hearths of rural homes and today are spoken in the peripheries of the great cities; not only Mexican cities, but those further North, while their speakers grow vegetables and harvest fruit in the two Californias, Texas, and Oregon, or offer their labor in the service sector of the economy, in hotels in the Mayan Riviera and even New York. Their efforts will translate into remittances that will later become disruptive in musical, gastronomical, and textile languages in the fiestas of their communities of origin, fighting to avoid the disintegration that comes with growing indigenous migration.

This phenomenon is certainly by no means alien to the double discourse of Mexico’s political class, which at the same time that it anchors national identity in a glorious pre-Hispanic past, the roots and sustenance of a multi-ethnic, pluri-cultural nation, does little to prevent its heirs from suffering from socio-cultural discrimination and economic exploitation. In recent years, as though racist and classist attitudes were not enough, these have been joined by the different forms of violence prompted by a misguided globalization and the very widespread presence of drug traffickers in their communities.

Cadences of the *milpa*, maps, textiles, and therapies, among various others, are sprinkled throughout this issue of *Voices*, which includes sounds that originated with Seri corporeal movements, interpretations of nature by the Maya, the sayings of Ch’ol ritual specialists, and the words of saints like the *yubin* San Miguelito speaking from his little niche to help his worshipers find a cure for the witchcraft, shame, and madness that come from those “foul spirits” that so often accompany what purports to be civilizing processes, which do not hesitate to attack sacred expressions and places (such as the Anishinaabe petroglyphs and pictographs of Ontario, also present in this issue, showing the fragility of ancient cultural references, even in countries considered more developed).

It also includes references to outstanding members of the university community and successful indigenous entrepreneurs, together with the testimony of social activists, engravers, poets, and singers in American indigenous languages. An entire panoply of resistances, strategies, and possibilities that the heirs of the first peoples’ civilizations design, create, and cultivate to continue brandishing the undoubted modernity of their traditional expressions, thus testifying to the continued contributions to universal culture of these peoples, who “continue to be” and put forward their voices to remind us of their irreplaceable presence.

Mario Humberto Ruz Sosa

Director of the UNAM Institute of Philological Research

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# Our Voice

Before the ecclesiastical authorities who doubted the *humanity* of the recently *discovered* indigenous of the New World, Friar Bartolomé de las Casas defended “a single structure of body and soul for all.” There is no need to go back to sixteenth-century Europe to recognize that today, as we are poised to enter the third decade of the twenty-first century, in Mexico we continue not having paid our debt to the first peoples. The profile of the indigenous was constructed little by little in the European imaginary through what they heard and intuited, through the stories of the conquistadors, almost always based on prejudices and stereotypes. That preconceived representation of the native civilizations navigated the ocean separating the two continents and took root in an America that until this day is incapable of coming to terms with its origins.

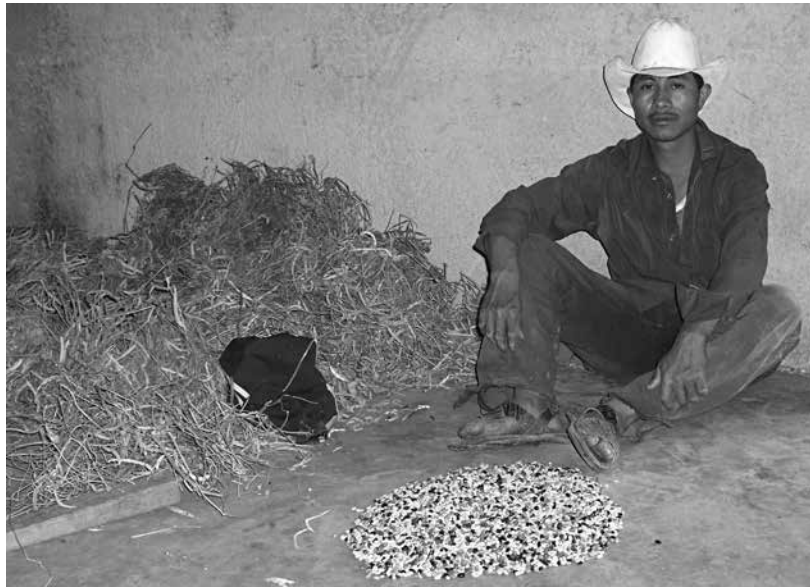
Article 1 of our Constitution prohibits discrimination, but in reality, exclusion based on racial origin continues to be an everyday practice. A single glance at the 2017 National Survey on Discrimination shows us that of the more than 25 million people who self-define as indigenous in Mexico, 14.6 percent say they have been discriminated against because of their appearance or language. Poverty indicators, a lack of opportunities, and the absence of public policies question the validity of the law and cast doubt on the will of an entire society to put an end to exclusion and racism fed by ignorance and unfamiliarity with the other.

Dedicating this issue of *Voices of Mexico* to the first peoples is a vow to banish those stereotypes and start down a road toward mutual understanding. Our identity as Mexicans stems from the preservation of the traditions and social and cultural traits of the first peoples: Maya, Nahua, Mixtec, Tzotzil, Purépecha, Kiliwa, and so many more. In this issue, different points of view converge in a single idea: Mexico's roots today are not to be found in the pages of books or inside glass cases in museums. With a critical, well-considered view, our contributors question the contradictions that define the relationships with our forebears, who inspire us, but whose descendants we also discriminate against; or the way in which anthropology and the state have approached the native cultures, as well as the presence of Mexican indigenous in the United States, migrant workers who support their communities with the remittances they send, and the students who learn and contribute knowledge in our northern neighbor's universities.

Miguel León Portilla, who we say good-bye to with admiration in this issue, used to say, “The world is made poorer when a language or a culture is lost, and it is also made poorer when everything is somehow made uniform.” Disseminating the linguistic and cultural diversity of the first peoples here is our small contribution against that potential impoverishment, but it is also our way of celebrating their traditions, their cuisine, and their art, turned into song, poetry, painting, dress, and everyday objects.

Another term for “first peoples” is “original peoples,” and “origins” are beginnings. With this issue of *Voices of Mexico*, we are proposing another beginning, another way of seeing ourselves and accepting who we are: the fortunate heirs of extraordinary cultural wealth. What a great opportunity it has been to publish the magazine jointly with specialists and recognized authorities in indigenous languages and cultures, very particularly, with Dr. Mario Humberto Ruz Sosa, the director of the UNAM Institute of Philological Research! Thank you. Thank you to all the contributors from the Institute of Philological Research and, of course, everyone else who inhabits the pages of this issue with their art and letters.

Graciela Martínez-Zalce  
Director of Center for research on North America  
November 2019



Ricardo Pacheco

Nahua farmer. Highlands of Guerrero, 2011.

Ricardo Claudio Pacheco Bribiesca\*

# Mexico's Indigenous Peoples And Their Cultures

## Inspiration and Objects of Discrimination

This article will reflect on the first peoples as a source of inspiration for artistic creation and that academic research that aims to know and reconstruct part of our past, to know who we are and how the so-called “traditional societies” are developing, as well as their role in today's world.

Official censuses state that more than ten percent of Mexico's population (approximately 15 million people) self-identify as indigenous, placing themselves in one of the 68 ethno-linguistic groups. However, this is only an estimate, a vague, imprecise reference point about a pop-

ulation that, due to racism and discrimination, and even a lack of awareness, prefers to remain invisible.

In contrast with the recognition given them from different artistic, human, social, and even scientific disciplines, in real life, being indigenous in Mexico is in most cases synonymous with exclusion, extreme poverty, forced migration, and a minimal or non-existent possibility for social mobility.

Except in a few cases, in this country, it is rare for a person to openly identify him- or herself as indigenous. This does not mean that, as a group, they are not proud of being indigenous; and in certain contexts, they will proclaim their identity, but it is not usually the case. Thinking about the whole of Mexican society, who would want to be indigenous, when that means coming from the poor-

\*Professor of the UNAM School of Political and Social Sciences Center for Anthropological Studies; riclaupacheco@yahoo.com.mx.

Who would want to be indigenous, when that means coming from the poorest municipalities, where precarious living conditions are manifested through high levels of malnutrition?

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Being indigenous in the Mexican countryside usually means surviving in a subsistence economy that forces families to seek waged work in places where what we call employment is practically non-existent. This has forced them for decades to emigrate to work as agricultural day laborers in different regions of the country and even abroad.

That domestic and international migration, mainly to the United States, has become a “tradition” for them, since in some regions, it has been going on for more than half a century and has even led to the creation of multiple indigenous settlements, such as what the Nahuas have built in the middle and high mountain regions of the state of Guerrero, in the eastern municipalities of Morelos, and in San Quintín, Baja California, where a diversity of peoples from Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Michoacán have settled several thousand miles from their hometowns. And what can we say about the Mixtec communities living in California’s Fresno Valley, or the Nahuas from Morelos in Queens, New York, just to cite a couple of examples?

Logically, migration has given rise to the creation of new identities, above all due to the birth of new generations in places different from where their parents were born. The story is so long that, both in Mexico and the United States, these new identities include not just one, but, in some cases, up to three generations.

These peoples’ social networks and capital have often led to the revitalization of their cultures, constructing community outside their land of origin, giving rise to the creation of new indigenous communities. They are always named after the place of origin, preceded by the adjective “new,” so we can find the Triqui indigenous locale of San Juan Copala in the municipality of Santiago Juchitahuaca in Oaxaca, and New San Juan Copala, in San Quintín, in the municipality of Ensenada, Baja California.

The agricultural vocation of these Mexicans and their ancestral knowledge about the countryside made the be-

ginnings of that migration rural; that is, they went from one agricultural area to another. But that has changed, and now they also move to the great cities.

Many of our families living in huge urban areas like Mexico City have among our ancestors indigenous who migrated from the countryside to the city after the Revolution or later —this is my case—, but with the passage of time, or perhaps due to some of these ancestors’ deliberate efforts to erase their identity, we do not know their origins.

If being indigenous in the Mexican countryside was already difficult, their existence in the cities has generated different difficulties, accelerating processes of cultural change and loss of identity over successive generations. Those who decided to preserve their distinctive traits, whether they are old residents of the cities or new arrivals, still face exclusion.

Despite the fact that at the time, the possibility of migrating represented an opportunity for improving their economic situation, achieving social mobility, and accessing better living conditions and a better future for their children, in the best of cases, being indigenous in the big cities means becoming part of a contingent of workers in multiple sectors where capital requires them.

Most of these Mexicans work in the informal sector: the men work as stevedores in big central markets for agricultural products, as construction workers, and in low-level, temporary jobs such as in car washes, among others. In the case of the women, jobs are even more limited and have always centered on domestic service, doing all kinds of activities, such as cleaning houses, caring for children, and many other tasks, which very often can turn into not an eight-hour-a-day, full-time job, but practically a kind of “modern” slavery.

There is no denying that in isolated cases, being indigenous, whether in the countryside or the city, takes on other characteristics. In our country, some indigenous intellectuals, artists, public officials, academics, and individuals have been taken to the public’s heart as distinguished citizens. Some are outstanding public figures who we feel proud of. However, in day-to-day social interactions, Mexican society is structured on the basis of huge asymmetries, inequalities, and a class bias also rooted in ethnic parameters, in which the poorest social strata are often made up of individuals and families of indigenous origin.

As if that were not enough, from the perspective of the rest of society (“the non-indigenous”), being indigenous can be synonymous with ugly, “black,” dirty, ignorant, and undesirable, something no one wants to be. No Mexican can deny that in our country, to insult or try to humiliate a person, one of the insults used is “Indian.” Thus, the expression “lousy Indian” is one of the best known and most widely used linguistic constructions, based on the color-ocracy, according to which the “Mesoamerican phenotype,” or just looking different, but usually having dark skin, straight black hair, dark eyes, low stature, and “unrefined” facial features, is rejected by many people, even when it is precisely Mexicans’ characteristic phenotype.

This is paired with the idea that any “slight deviation,” such as, for example, if one child has slightly lighter skin, lighter eyes, particularly green or blue, or is taller than average, is a sign of “improving the race.” This all happens in a society that prides itself on not being racist or discriminatory, precisely because, as we know, these attitudes and practices have become normalized.

In the 1990s, images of sociocultural movements, such as the one that rejected the 1992 celebrations of the fifth centennial of the “Encounter of Two Worlds” or the Zapatista National Liberation Army uprising in 1994, were seen around the world. Despite the fact that they once again put on display the miserable condition of the indigenous communities in our country, over 25 years later, the circumstances have not changed very much, and, if they have, if anything in many cases they have become worse.

These communities, despite the numerous government programs and having received all manner of aid, continue to be the most marginal in the country, and they continue to migrate. Decades ago, migrants leaving their towns looking for waged work were usually male, but for several years now, the entire family migrates, including the children; to remain is to condemn themselves to live on the very limits of survival, since they can hardly live on what they produce in the fields, by exploiting certain natural resources, or producing local crafts.

It is true that not all indigenous are poor. Those of us who have worked in the countryside for decades are even surprised at the emergence of “nouveau riche” indigenous, who parade in front of their fellows in cars, showing off lifestyles previously inconceivable. But they are a minority.

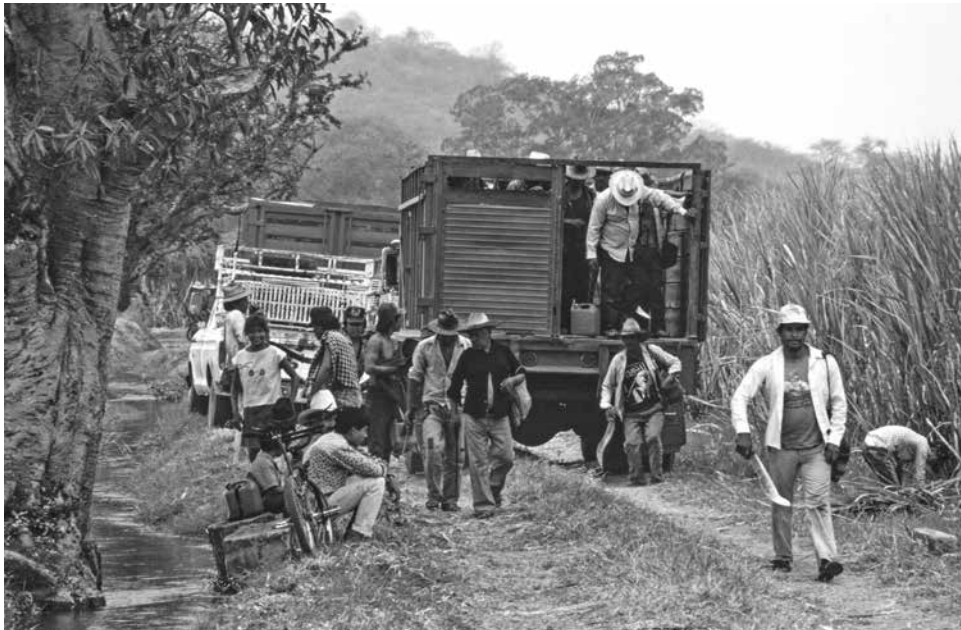
Today, the problems of the indigenous peoples have increased and become more complex. One example is the cause of migration, which may be multi-factorial and includes issues like insecurity and drug trafficking.

Ironically, the preponderantly agricultural way of life that previously allowed them to be productive when they left their communities, for several years now has been used by organized crime to force them to grow illicit crops like poppy flowers. It is more profitable for them, even when they are just one link in the chain of the transnational dynamics in this globalized world, even when they are only producers and receive a minimal part of the profits.

Despite the fact that our country’s Constitution defines ours as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural nation, originally based on its indigenous peoples, in legal terms, their collective rights are not recognized. The government continues to be indebted to them, but above all, it is Mexican society in general that owes them: we live with them every day. Many of these citizens are the construction workers who build our homes, workplaces, and leisure centers; they are the domestic workers who clean our homes; they wash our cars and sell us the folk art available everywhere in the city.

So, it is paradoxical that when we want to feel proud of our past and our present, we look to the cultural wealth of these peoples, praising their artistic production, the ritual praxis of their festivities, the culinary wealth of their food, or the creativity of their mythical narratives, just to mention a few examples. For all of this, the civic, artistic, and academic communities, who have drunk so deeply from the waters of the first peoples, the inspiration for our own creations, should thank them. If we have not already done so, we should give them the credit they deserve, and in some specific cases, share the royalties. This issue of the magazine should be a tribute to these peoples of Mexico, with whom we have often related in a utilitarian way, without valuing them, respecting or recognizing their importance to our society. ■■■

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Fototeca Nacho López / INPI / L. Arturo García Llampallas

Ana Segovia Camelo\*

## Ángela, a First-People's Struggle

When we talk about first peoples, normally we think of the indigenous in our country. Even though the 1917 Mexican Constitution protects the rights of indigenous communities and peoples and their territories, and those rights were broadened with the 1992 reform, our history is littered with illegal, unjust land-grabs and expropriations of first peoples since the era of the conquistadors. Everyone knows how deeply rooted peasants and indigenous peoples are in their land, the profound identity it gives them, those people who have venerated it and made it their own, preserving the many traditions that have developed over time.

In this article, I present the human vision of a Mexican social activist, María de los Ángeles Vences Gutiérrez, who belonged to the Florencio “El Güero” (Blondy) Medrano guerrilla group and lived among the indigenous and peasant communities deprived of their lands in the states

of Morelos, Guerrero, Veracruz, and Oaxaca during our country's dirty war under the presidency of Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976). The aim here is to bring up today a social issue that has always been present in the history of the first peoples and that continues without being fully resolved. It is also to give voice to a woman who lives among us and who just published a book about her activities in defense of these groups' rights.

I interviewed María de los Ángeles Vences Gutiérrez in her home in Morelos on February 14, 2019, thanks to the help of my friends Elsa Torres Garza and Luz Adriana Robledo. Luz Adriana gave me “Ángela's” —that's what they call her— recently published autobiographical novel to read: *El Caliche*,<sup>1</sup> which is the name the author gives to her fictionalized character's hometown. This put me on the track of a forgotten, ignored historical period, a voyage to the origin of human conflicts that have determined our social relations in many ways.

“Ángela” has won her freedom from bottom up, just like the trees grow, bearing the corresponding fruit. Born in a town in Morelos, she tells us about how, as a little girl,

\* A UNAM graduate in philosophy, copyeditor, and writer; anasecam@gmail.com.

she absorbed much of the wisdom of its traditions with great sensitivity, assimilating the beliefs and customs of its people. She worked in the fields, at home, and in her family's shop from the time she was very small in addition to going to school. An active worker, she helped in all the ways required of her; however, she soon noted the social differences between those who had much and those who had very little, and the imbalance in the exercise of power. This awakened in her a sense of justice, equality, and social harmony: why do some live well and others do not? Questions like these plagued her from a very early age and her social activism responded to that kind, intelligent heart that wanted the common good, that wanted everyone to be treated equally, justly, and kindly.

She was 14 when she became interested in politics when her town's city hall was taken over in 1973 by people opposed to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which had stolen the election, proclaiming itself the winner and illegally imposing its candidate. El Caliche was ruled by a local strongman: the PRI and politicians in general shared the land out among themselves, imposed unfair prohibitions on local inhabitants, and discriminated against them. "Ángela," however, saw that they could defend their political rights if they united. That was when she met the people from the Rubén Jaramillo Neighborhood in the Temixco municipality, who had been supporting them. She became the girlfriend of one of the young men from that group, and she would follow him two years later to carry out clandestine activities in solidarity with the local residents, peasants, and indigenous people who had had their land and territories stolen from them. Her links to the deeply-rooted agricultural traditions of her town naturally gave that struggle enormous meaning.

It turned out that her boyfriend—"Arturo" in the novel—was one of the most important activists led by Florencio "El Güero" Medrano, the head of the United Proletarian Party of America (PPUA), which fought against imperialism, the landowners, and the bourgeoisie.<sup>2</sup> She says that her town, El Caliche, was conservative and too small for the aspirations for a better life for all, since she wanted to create awareness about the possibility of a broader horizon of common good that could benefit them more fully. But her town had stagnated in individualism, forgetting the values of solidarity of their grandparents who had fought with Zapata and the loyalty due to the popular traditions, replaced now by monetary interests.

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Her role was political, not military. "Ángela" recognizes that her poor, rural origins helped her interact with poor peasants and indigenous. She was a messenger, she arranged for meetings with "El Güero" Medrano, and she carried out organizational tasks. She worked with mestizo peasants from Guerrero's Tierra Caliente (low-lying "hot land") and with Mixe, Chinantec, Popoluc, Mixtec, and Zapotec indigenous communities of Oaxaca. She notes that the peasants from Guerrero were more impulsive and determined in their protests; they made more autonomous decisions and were more open to organizing. They had to deal with local authorities—also landowners—who took their lands away from them by sending in gangs of armed thugs. The indigenous communities, by contrast, although they were calmer and more mistrustful, suffered from the local and federal authorities' harassment to the benefit of influential politicians' families interested in their lands.

The indigenous people did not leave their communities, but, if forced to, they took refuge in other indigenous territories. By contrast, the peasants from the Tierra Caliente went more often to the cities, to the sugar harvest in Morelos or at the Tuxtepec sugar mill, or worked as agricultural day laborers elsewhere. Those who could went back to their hometowns, but if there was violence there, they stayed where they were or tried to live elsewhere. The author tells us that even the Tlapanec indigenous from Guerrero, who worked the sugar harvest, had to take over land in Ayala, Morelos, because they could not return home.

The indigenous and peasants fought their legal defense in the Agrarian Reform Ministry, advised by "El Güero" Medrano, who was supported by Humberto Serrano Pérez, the president of the Mexican Agrarian Council.<sup>3</sup> And it was precisely due to the recovery of those lands in Oaxaca, stolen by the local strongmen, that "El Güero" was killed. "Ángela" mentions that today the issue is not land-grabbing by the landowners, but rather their use by drug traffickers, mining companies, and multinationals (to build housing and tourist complexes), etc.:

The enemy of the First Peoples has gotten bigger, because, while before, they were landowners who wanted to grab the First Peoples' land to create their ranches, now they include foreign companies—right?— who use the same methods as the other people, scaring them. They force them to sell and even kidnap them to take away the money they have just been paid. The only thing that has changed is the enemy, who is bigger. . . . Here, there are real estate companies that launder money. And then in Tetlama and Coatepec, there are indigenous communities, and since the Canadian mining company came on the scene to grab their lands, violence has also increased more. . . . Once you've got violence, remember that it's no longer so easy to celebrate traditions and customs because of the fear of violence; you don't have the same kind of confidence you used to have. . . . The fabric of society breaks down. . . . Indigenous migration always existed, but only half-way, because they'd come and work and then go back, but now there's more and more migration because of the violence. . . . The important thing is to occupy the space so they can't plant. . . . It's easier to subject a people that way, a less sovereign people.<sup>4</sup>

When I ask her about the Zapatista insurrection in Mexico's southeast by the National Zapatista Liberation Army (EZLN) in January 1994, "Ángela" says that she was very hopeful because it made the First Peoples visible in many ways. She even says that she worked in Morelos on the issue of indigenous laws. However, they turned out to be a dead letter because the people are not really taken into account; everything goes on as before.

She also says that she went through many painful moments full of sacrifices during her struggle, and that reading the legacy of leaders like Ernesto "Che" Guevara helped her escape from situations that depressed her, since she had suffered hunger, cold, and she missed her people. Nevertheless, she defines herself as an idealist, a dreamer who, since she was a young girl, was protected by her grandparents, who, in her dreams, offered her sticks of ocote or torch pine: that is, light to guide her. She says that her town is magical, that around it are pre-Hispanic constructions that were houses for healing, which is why there are many traditional healers. She tells me that her Aunt Diega said to her,

You've got the struggle in your blood, "Ángela." . . . First she scolded me, and my aunt is very wise. . . . She knows about

We are all sensitive to the history of the First Peoples with regard to the illegal expropriation of their lands and territories. But "Ángela" acted to change the situation, risking her own life.

those women I dreamed of; when my Uncle Lito was orphaned, those are the women who took care of him, two sisters or two cousins, because his father, who was "silvered," my great-grandfather Benito. . . . The "Silvered Ones" were the gang of bandits from the time of the Reform . . . , but they also participated in the War of the Reform, the Three-Year War, but they also could see that there was much inequality between hacienda-owners and peons. . . . And so, he died in 1908 and years later, my grandfather's mother died and he was brought up by those ladies. And so, I think that that's where the connection comes from, because my grandfather also did cleansings. My grandfather would take an egg and spit on it and clean my sister. He didn't do it . . . he didn't do it with other people; just with the family. And I think that has been the protection that they've had to be able to get ahead, my family on my mother's side.

My interviewee thinks that she inherited part of this family legacy (being protected and her spirit of solidarity). In addition, she had family chats around the *tlacuitl* or hearth with her paternal grandmother Aurelia, which helped create better communication. She thinks homes are no longer lasting and "married people divorce for any little difference." She's in favor of reconciliation before suing for divorce. She explains that in the past, parents congregated in a circle and sought to create dialogue to overcome a couple's squabbles and disagreements to rebuild what had been damaged. She observes that women defend their rights today, but forget their obligations; they have become more individualistic and less collective: they no longer educate their children because the psychologists say they should not be punished, so they do not correct them. Today, more young people are in the drug trade because this kind of education is missing. Before, women resolved many difficulties in the family; they were intermediaries in the fights among the children, but they no longer are.

"Ángela" confesses to us that she has always struggled and that she cannot identify with this society, and that



after her clandestine activity, she became disillusioned with political parties and social movements. She laments the lack of principles, of ethics, and of an authentic ideology.

And so, with this book, I wanted to reflect on that integrity of feelings that existed before. . . . That giving oneself over to an ideal. That sincere, uninterested devotion, but also to disseminate the PPUA's work. This isn't just my personal concern. . . . That's how the breach was opened up for the democracy that still exists. They left us no alternative because there were no political parties like now to participate in, somewhere to participate [expressing] your concerns; that didn't exist. There was only one party and the rest were clandestine. And wanting to participate was penalized. Being different was penalized.

The PPUA's action was more organizational and political than armed, says "Ángela," unlike the September 23 Communist League guerrilla group, which was more military. An arduous task because the idea was to create consciousness, but in a way that was so disinterested that the party militants had to work for a living in other fields since they received no financing, and if any of their members died in the forest, for example, no one would ever know.

"Ángela" stopped collaborating with the party in 1978, and although she does not cover this in her story, she was arrested, tortured, and later released. One of her fellow militants was very sick and suffered from depression due to the violence he had been subjected to, but she encouraged him, told him that they had to go on, that her book recovers the memory and gives voice to all the comrades, including the ones who had already died, who were in the PPUA's social struggle. She said that this was not her book, but the book of all of them, and that therefore, their lives had not been in vain: "That's why I consider myself a *nemontemi*.<sup>5</sup> I feel like the *nemontemi*. . . . And being *nemontemi* is a commitment. . . . I am living extra days to complete what others have lived and what I lived. That is the mission. And here is the mission [pointing to the book]. That's it. And I feel I am *nemontemi*."

In "Ángela's" opinion, memory serves to prevent us from making the same mistakes, and writing *El Caliche* has allowed her to put what she has inside herself out there and to rediscover her tradition and culture more consciously. She even realizes that the knowledge passed on to her

by her grandparents is very valuable and that she is fulfilling the mission she inherited from her family and that it will be necessary to continue resisting until people have the wool taken from their eyes and wake up. That is why she wrote her narrative in a simple style, so it could be understood by most people.

There is no doubt that we are all sensitive to the history of the First Peoples with regard to the illegal expropriation of their lands and territories. But "Ángela" acted and gave everything she possessed over valiantly to change the situation, risking her own life, rooted in the community values of her Morelos town and identified with the injustice suffered by Mexico's indigenous and peasants.

In contemporary history, the defense of the land and territory continues to be fundamental. "Ángela," for example, actively opposed the construction of a landfill in Temixco, Morelos. However, despite the success of that protest, she confesses that she has not wanted to join any social movement or political group because she sees them as divided. And even though the land grabbing continues, she proposes to start working with families, with the values of solidarity among brothers and sisters and with honest work and respect for others, "without racism or discrimination." She thinks that teaching the true value of human beings is also a way to resist with an eye toward transforming society in the quest for the common good. ■■■

## Notes

- 1 María de los Ángeles Vences Gutiérrez, *El Caliche* (Mexico City: Senado de la República-LXIII Legislatura, 2018).
- 2 Uriel Velázquez Vidal, "El movimiento social impulsado por Florencio Medrano Mederos 'el Güero', la lucha armada y el PPUA en el estado de Morelos. 1973-1979," *Pacarina del Sur* year 8 no. 29, (October-December 2016), <http://www.pacarinadelsur.com/home/brisas/59-dossiers/dossier-19/1376-el-movimiento-social-impulsado-por-florencio-medrano-mederos-el-gueero-la-lucha-armada-y-el-ppua-en-el-estado-de-morelos-1973-1979>.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 This and the following paragraphs quoted are from the aforementioned interview with the author, on February 14, 2019.
- 5 "The last five days of the Aztec or Mexica calendar were known as the *nemontemi*, which translates as 'completing what has been lived.' According to the sources of the time, those days were considered 'unfortunate,' 'in vain,' 'insufficient,' 'empty.' That was the thinking because those days were not associated with any divinity, in contrast with the other days of the calendar. The sources mention that people spent those days in repose, in their homes. They didn't go out." <https://tuul.tv/cultura/los-nemontemi-los-dias-del-ano-en-que-se-reconciliaban-los-mexica>.



# Problemas del DESARROLLO

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¿Quiénes son pobres? Análisis de su identificación en América Latina

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Genoveva Roldán Dávila\*  
José Gasca Zamora\*\*

## Mexican Indigenous, Migration, And International Remittances<sup>1</sup>

In the Americas, we all have a trace  
of first people's blood.  
Some in our veins, and others on our hands.  
EDUARDO GALEANO

**D**ifferent kinds of indigenous migration in the pre-Hispanic era have been widely researched: the movements that populated the Americas; those associated with natural phenomena like animal migrations and seasonal climate changes; migrations linked to the expansion of the Aztec empire; those arising from Mesoamerican trade; and the ones motivated by pilgrim-

ages to sacred sites. All of these influenced the development of new intercultural relations and the progressive construction of ethnic identities in that period. The consequences of the migration spurred by the Spaniards' land-grabbing of indigenous lands when they arrived cannot be compared to any others. The latter, resulting from colonial domination, gave rise to certain interethnic mixes, hybridization with the hegemonic Spanish culture, and became a permanent part of the profound, non-homogeneous transformations experienced by the first peoples during this stage, and which were manifested in redefinitions of their clothing, religions, institutions, languages, and political and economic organization.

Beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, indigenous migration also began to result from the expansion and deepening of capitalism. Research has shown that, in the second half of the twentieth century, their internal migration toward the big economic centers and regions

\* Researcher at the UNAM Institute for Economic Research; grolndan@unam.mx.

\*\* Researcher at the UNAM Institute for Economic Research; jgasca@unam.mx.

Our hypothesis is that indigenous remittances grew continually from 2000 to 2010. This jibes with the insertion of these indigenous migrants in the U.S. labor market and their increased numbers.

increased so they could join the agro-industrial export labor markets; become part of the construction of large works of infrastructure like hydroelectric plants and highways; and get jobs in maquiladora plants, big tourist developments, and the broad range of activities in the service sector. The import substitution model marked a significant rhythm of industrialization and economic growth that gave rise to a new intensification of migratory flows, typically employment-oriented, which has been particularly important for the spatial and territorial reconfiguration and the socio-cultural and identity-based redefinition of the Mexican and Latin American indigenous communities.

It should be mentioned that the links between internal and international indigenous migration are profound. The wave of migrants from Michoacán, Oaxaca, and Guerrero toward Tijuana and Mexico City contributed to the signing of the *bracero* agreements (1942-1964). Later, the flows of Oaxacan indigenous agricultural workers toward Sinaloa, Sonora, and the San Quintín Valley in Baja California extended to the fields of California. However, international indigenous migration had a low profile until the late 1980s. The last 20 years of the twentieth century and the first 19 of this century have witnessed a strong increase in indigenous mobility toward our neighbor to the north and, to a lesser degree, toward Canada.

Indigenous migration is not divorced from the behavior of the overall flow of Mexicans toward the United States, which in that same period increased until the total number of Mexican immigrants in that country reached 12 million and 31 million residents of Mexican descent. The rise in the number of indigenous people in these flows has been clear in the ethnic re-composition of the Mexico-United States migratory system, as noted by Jonathan Fox and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado.<sup>2</sup> The Survey on Migration on the Northern Border of Mexico (EMIF) notes that indigenous people represent 9.8 percent of all Mexican migrants to the United States.<sup>3</sup> Other Latin American indigenous communities are also immersed in this kind of migration

toward North America and Europe: the Otaval Quechua of Ecuador toward Spain; the Chorotegas from Nicaragua; Panama's Ngäbe people toward Costa Rica; and the Maya, Huehuetec, and Quetzaltec from Guatemala toward the United States, among others.

Outstanding among indigenous migrants from Mexico are the Purépecha, Mixtec, Zapotec, Maya, Totonac, Nahua, N̄hañu, Mixe, Triqui, Tzotzil, and Tzeltal. The first three have been migrating the longest: they were part of the migratory flows organized beginning with the *bracero* agreements. The rest, from Yucatán, Veracruz, Chiapas, Hidalgo, and Puebla, stand out because of the numbers of international migrants in the period. Despite these migrants' going all over the United States, different research projects have noted that they are particularly concentrated in California, New York, Oregon, Texas, and Florida, where members of most of these ethnic groups are living.

Mexican migrants are employed in different economic sectors, more than 60 percent in the service sector, but they are a large percentage of agricultural workers (more than 70 percent of whom are of Mexican origin). Young indigenous are prominent in the cultivation of fruits and vegetables (strawberries, blueberries, cucumbers, and green and yellow squash, among others). This is a very important activity, since the United States is the world's second largest exporter of food products. This means that indigenous labor plays a key role in U.S. international competitiveness and in the social reproduction of its workers through the low prices of widely consumed agricultural products.<sup>4</sup>

A great deal has been written about the causes of these international migratory flows, and the idea that they are spurred by poverty—which certainly exists—and backwardness in the countries of origin continues to prevail. Mexico's National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (Coneval) estimates that the percentage of the indigenous-language-speaking population living in poverty in 2016 was almost double that of the non-indigenous population: 77.6 percent versus 40.6 percent.<sup>5</sup> Coneval figures also state that the proportion of the indigenous population living in extreme poverty was six times larger than the non-indigenous: 34.8 percent vs. 5.5 percent. In addition, this is reflected in the fact that, in 2016, of the entire indigenous population, 31.6 percent reported an educational lag; 30 percent had insufficient access to food; 77.6 percent had no social security coverage; 15.1 percent had no access whatsoever to health

services; and 53.6 percent had housing lacking in basic services. These characteristics are undoubtedly necessary for explaining migration, but they are also partial, incomplete, and used to justify the anti-immigrant, xenophobic policies prevalent in the U.S. and worldwide. They ignore the fact that, historically, Mexican peasants (many of whom hide their indigenous roots) have been sought-after and highly appreciated by U.S. growers, something that intensified significantly during the boom in capitalist globalization, even under the crisis and unstable recovery conditions of the last decade or more. The need for workers with specialized knowledge, even if that knowledge is not recognized by formal education, was reinforced, as well as the need for workers willing to do back-breaking work for low wages, suffering violations of their most elemental labor and human rights.

International indigenous migratory processes are connected to the search for labor flexibility and precarious employment and for workers who will accept these conditions, whether they are from the home country or from abroad. Clearly, these are conditions that reveal that both countries' labor markets are linked in a relationship of subordinate complementarity. Mexico's economic, political, and social subordination to the United States is a fact; the catalyst marking the pattern of these migratory processes is U.S. economic and demographic conditions, with a market that requires that work force to live in a state of exclusion, not only as migrants, many undocumented, but also as indigenous.

Being a migrant and indigenous creates a very broad series of phenomena in the countries and communities of origin and in the destination and transit countries and communities. One of these involves remittances, linked to different eventualities: general and specific labor market conditions; the cost of transferring money; exchange rates; migratory policies; the development of individual, identity, gender, family, and community histories, which are interlinked with the dynamic and meaning of being a migrant; and the characteristics and conditions of migratory flows, which have a broad influence on those who send money, the frequency with which they do so, and the amounts involved. Indigenous remittances have remained invisible in the overall amount of remittances sent by Mexican migrants. Less attention has been paid to identifying them because of the difficulty in measuring them; this means that they remain absent in Mexican public

and private institutions' conventional reports on remittances. To a great extent, this is due to limitations in survey design. The official statistic is structured to report on what it deems a homogeneous phenomenon, according to units of register and its geographical scale; this is a barrier to disaggregating the information in a different way. The transfer of wages for family and social reproduction, particularly among the indigenous, acquires a different significance from that of the rest of remittances, since both their transfer and their use have specific reference points for territoriality, community integration, citizenship, systems of charges, as well as their particular idea of the contexts that guarantee family reproduction. That is why the results of these wage transfers spur identity references and community life in general in a confused, varied way.

To research indigenous remittances, we worked with a broad, multidisciplinary group of researchers.<sup>6</sup> This allowed us to respond to the main question we posed: Of the total volume of remittances that arrive in Mexico, what percentages and amounts were received by indigenous communities in 2000 and 2010? The article we co-authored with Teresa García explains the methodology used;<sup>7</sup> here, we only explain the results for the eight states selected, which answer the question posed to a certain level of generality. In the states of Yucatán, Chiapas, Michoacán, Oaxaca, Veracruz, Hidalgo, Puebla, and Guerrero, US\$6.647 billion were received in all. The contribution of the indigenous-language-speakers was 2 percent of that, or US\$240 million (at constant 2010 prices). By 2010, when Mexico received US\$23 billion, the contribution of the indigenous-language-speakers came to 6.2 percent, or more than US\$1.4 billion.<sup>8</sup> The self-identified indigenous population's contribution to the national total was 4.9 percent in 2000 (US\$586 million) and ten years later, 9.6 percent, or more than US\$2.2 billion. The former population's contribution to the national total tripled, going from 2 to 6.2 percent, with a 495-percent growth rate; while the latter's contribution almost doubled, from 4.9 percent to 9.6 percent, at a 277-percent growth rate.

According to Bank of Mexico information, between 2007 and 2010, total remittances received in the country dropped significantly compared to 2006.

Remittances are used to improve nutrition, education, and health. But there is no clear evidence about the possibility that they influence the communities' recovery and identity-based cohesion.

This information allows us to put forward the hypothesis that indigenous remittances grew continually from 2000 to 2010. This jibes with the insertion of indigenous migrants in the U.S. labor market and the increased number of indigenous migrants. This can also be observed in the growth in the number of indigenous municipalities that contained remittance-receiving households in the states selected: by 2010, these came to 517 municipalities, while in 2000 there had been 438. A similar trend can be seen in the number of indigenous households/dwellings that receive remittances, which rose in the same period from 30 652 to 44 915. In 2010, we localized changes that show the increased number of indigenous receiving remittances. The proportion of indigenous remittances from the eight selected states in the national total rose. In certain emblematic cases, such as that of Puebla, the remittances of indigenous-language-speakers rose from US\$5 million to US\$211 million; and those of self-identified indigenous rose from US\$21 million to US\$298 million. Remittances sent to indigenous communities in Yucatán, Oaxaca, Guerrero, Veracruz, Hidalgo, and Michoacán increased along these same lines.

By contrast, according to Bank of Mexico information, between 2007 and 2010, total remittances received in the country dropped significantly compared to 2006. The annual total remittance variation rate went from 14.5 percent in 2006 to -1 percent in 2007 and -7 percent and -15 percent for 2008 and 2009, respectively. By 2010, remittances dropped 1.7 percent. It should be pointed out that almost half of all the ethno-linguistic groups recognized in Mexico participate to some degree in the transfer of remittances. However, the reception of these resources is highly concentrated ethnically. Using both criteria (indigenous-language-speakers and self-identified indigenous), in 2010, only five groups concentrated almost 90 percent of the remittances received: Nahuas, Purépechas, Mixtecs, Totonacs, and N̄hañus. One remaining task is to move ahead

with the analysis of what these remittances mean to indigenous peoples.

To conclude, we would point out that different research projects have corroborated that the benefits obtained are used to improve nutrition, education, and health. But it has also been shown that there is no clear evidence about the possibility that remittances influence in the communities' recovery and identity-based cohesion. Another series of effects must be identified involving the fact that remittances are not able to stop the draining of life-blood that accompanies migration: the loss of indigenous languages and cultural identity, family break-up, and changes to eating habits detrimental to people's health, among others. We must build a future in which migration is a free decision and does not happen at the cost of the disintegration of indigenous communities. ■■■

## Notes

- 1 The author wishes to thank Martín García for his technical support.
- 2 Jonathan Fox and Gaspar Rivera-Salgado, "Indígenas mexicanos migrantes en Estados Unidos" (Mexico City: H. Cámara de Diputados de la LIX Legislatura-University of California at Santa Cruz-Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas-Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2004).
- 3 El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, "Encuesta sobre Migración en la Frontera Norte de México, EMIF Norte" (Mexico City: Colef, 2016).
- 4 Patricia Pozos and Daniela Castro, "Las remesas de la población indígena oaxaqueña. El caso de los mixtecos en los campos de fresa en Oxnard, California," in Genoveva Roldán, José Gasca, and Carolina Sánchez, comps., *La travesía de las remesas y la senda de la migración indígena en México* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas, UNAM, 2019).
- 5 Consejo Nacional de Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social (Coneval), *Informe de evaluación de la política de desarrollo social 2018* (Mexico City: Coneval, 2018).
- 6 Genoveva Roldán Dávila and Carolina Sánchez García (comps.), *Remesas, migración y comunidades indígenas de México* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas, Programa Universitario de la Diversidad Cultural y la Interculturalidad [PUIC], UNAM, 2015); and Genoveva Roldán Dávila, José Gasca Zamora, and Carolina Sánchez García (comps.), *La travesía de las remesas y la senda de la migración indígena en México* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas, UNAM, 2019).
- 7 Genoveva Roldán Dávila and Teresa García Zarate, "El aporte de las remesas indígenas en México: perspectiva nacional, análisis municipal y por grupo étnico," in Genoveva Roldán Dávila, Teresa García Zarate, and José Gasca Zamora, *La travesía de las remesas y la senda de la migración indígena en México* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Económicas, UNAM, 2019).
- 8 It should be noted that the two categories, indigenous-language-speakers and self-identified indigenous people, are different. The former, the most widely used statistically, is explained earlier in the text and is self-explanatory; the latter refers to those people who self-identify as indigenous based on their culture, traditions, and history, but whose language has been lost over the generations. The latter is, then, the broader category.

## TESTIMONIES



Melissa Twance\*

# Pictographs and Indigenous Presence in Northwestern Ontario

**N**orthwestern Ontario is often hailed as a wilderness playground and it's not hard to see why. The region is set in the heart of the Canadian Shield, resulting in a landscape dominated by lakes too numerous to count, thick boreal forests of spruce and pine, waterfalls the color of root beer, sandy beaches, and swathes of exposed granite. Tourist brochures call it "an unspoiled and rugged paradise."

Every year, outdoor enthusiasts flock to the region's national and provincial parks, paddling canoes along the turquoise waters of Lake Superior or the red-brown tinged lakes of the interior. Often, these lakes are enclosed by tall granite cliffs and exposed bedrock. Paddle up close to the rock face and you may see some faint red-brown mark-

ings, figures in a canoe, animals, thunderbirds, and other mythical beings. These are pictographs, also known as *mazinaabikiniganan* to the Anishinaabe people who call this region home.

Rock art sites can be found throughout Canada. In fact, pictographs and petroglyphs may constitute Canada's oldest, most widespread artistic tradition. Ontario is home to at least 400 of these sites in all and the majority can be found between Lake Superior and what is now the Manitoba border. The archaeological record shows that red ochre, or onaman, the pigment primarily utilized in creating these images, has been in use for at least 7 000 years within the Great Lakes region and that Ontario's *mazinaabikiniganan* tradition may be up to 2 000 years old. Today, many of these sites are located in national or provincial parks. The most pressing questions are often how old they are, who made them, and what they mean.

As an Anishinaabe woman, I have always been fascinated by the history of my people. I fell in love with our stories when I was a young girl, listening to my great-

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\* Anishinaabe and member of Pic Mobert First Nation; doctoral student in educational studies and contract lecturer at the Faculty of Education and the Department of Indigenous Learning at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada; [mktwance@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:mktwance@lakeheadu.ca).

All photos by the author.

Pictographs and petroglyphs may constitute Canada's oldest, most widespread artistic tradition. Ontario is home to at least 400 of these sites.

grandmother recount the many exploits of Nanabozho, a trickster figure and cultural hero featured in many traditional stories and legends. As I got older, I spent time with my grandparents as they reminisced about their childhood and their younger years spent out on the land, trapping, hunting, and fishing. When I entered the university, I was drawn to courses that allowed me to explore my people's stories and history further and to deepen my understanding of Anishinaabe peoples' connection with land and place. During my time in the Indigenous Learning program at Lakehead University, I had the opportunity to work with a professor on traditional land-use mapping within the Robinson-Superior Treaty Area, allowing me to learn the political and cultural histories of different communities throughout the region I call home. The more I travel, the more aware I am of how much history the landscape holds, a history that many Canadians are unaware of.

Indigenous/Aboriginal people in Canada account for nearly five percent of the nation's total population. There are 133 First Nation communities in Ontario alone, but indigenous peoples have been nearly invisible in the nation's consciousness until fairly recently as the new era of Truth and Reconciliation pushed us to the forefront. *Mazinaabikiniganan* and indigenous peoples have both literally and figuratively been erased from the Canadian landscape. Due to settler-colonial policies and actions, both historical and present, we have become dispossessed of many places and sites that are central to our cultural histories as indigenous peoples.

In the first year of my master's degree studies, I took a road trip with my family along the north shore of Lake Superior. We visited the *mazinaabikiniganan* at Agawa Rock, located in Lake Superior Provincial Park and I was immediately struck by the disconnection between people and place. On the hiking trail leading down to the water, interpretive panels give information on the history and geology of the area. Every panel described my people in the past tense, informing me that this used to be our terri-

tory and that we once fished here, set up our lodges here, lived here. In some places, someone had come along and scratched out the past tense and left their own message: "We are still here."

Environmental dispossession is a term that describes the processes that reduce indigenous peoples' access to resources and traditional territories. This dispossession can take both direct and indirect forms. Natural resource extraction is the backbone of Northwestern Ontario's economy. It is the province's most sparsely populated region and most towns are small, with populations under 5 000. These towns have been built on mining or the pulp and paper industries, which have a direct impact on indigenous peoples' ability to use and connect with sacred places within our territories. This includes increased mining activity, hydro-electrical development, as well as the introduction of pulp, paper, and steel mills. Indigenous peoples' access to land and traditional territory becomes limited, even restricted. Hydroelectric dams have flooded lakes and submerged many *mazinaabikiniganan* sites. Privatization of property and increased mining and logging limits indigenous peoples' ability to access ceremonial and sacred sites. In some cases, increased accessibility, made possible through provincial parks and tourism, has actually lead to vandalism of these images. In one notable and recent example, cottagers on Mazinaw Lake, Ontario, had spray-painted a large Canadian flag on a rock face that holds over 100 *mazinaabikiniganan*. Local indigenous peoples protested the vandalism, but these sites have very little legal protection today.

More indirect forms of environmental dispossession, including assimilation and acculturation, have also destabilized indigenous peoples' relationship with the land. Residential schools played a major role in the erosion of indigenous knowledge and severed indigenous peoples from land and communities. The introduction of Christianity also saw the renaming of sacred places, remaking them into evil places, often associated with the devil. Northwestern Ontario has some notable examples. Devil's Armchair is a small rocky outcrop that lies just off the shore of Lake Superior near Sault Ste. Marie. Originally, this place was known as Nanabozho's Chair and, according to one story, that is where Nanabozho rested after creating the world. Anishinaabe people who paddled along this section of the lake often left offerings there as a sign of respect or to ask for safe passage when crossing the





open water. Devil's Warehouse Island is another example. This island is believed to be the source of the onaman used to create the *mazinaabikiniganan* at Agawa Rock. Through this renaming, sacred places become places to be feared and avoided.

One of the most enduring myths at the core of Canada's national identity is the notion of pristine wilderness that literally erases or ignores the historical and enduring presence of indigenous peoples. By associating *mazinaabikinigan* with a bygone era or cultural periods that precede modern indigenous communities, we have been written out of the control of our own cultural sites causing governments, archaeologists, and cultural heritage managers to step in as the "owners." By removing indigenous presence from the land, *mazinaabikiniganan* become a blank slate for the uncritical consumption by non-indigenous peoples.

Separated from the communities that created them, *mazinaabikiniganan* have become veiled in settler colonialism, often resulting in misinterpretation and misunderstanding. The restricted access to sacred and significant locations creates museum-like exhibits around our country—dead things from the past. *Mazinaabikiniganan* cannot exclusively be interpreted by archeologists, historians, or by the government of Canada. We have our own stories that tell us *mazinaabikiniganan* are not part of some remote and distant past, as the majority of Canadians tend to believe. Rather, they continue to be used as places of ceremony and learning for many First Nation communities. *Mazinaabikinigan* are visual reminders that this land is not a vast, empty wilderness, but a local and familiar place populated with oral, cultural, and family histories

Today, many of these sites are located in national or provincial parks. The most pressing questions are often how old they are, who made them, and what they mean.

that have been passed down from generation to generation. Emphasis must be placed on the traditions, knowledge, and cultures of indigenous peoples to acknowledge the full history of human habitation of the land. These sites continue to hold stories that can be used to educate the strained relations that landscapes hold and still hold to this day.

*Mazinaabikiniganan* open the door to wider conversations about history, connections to land, and what it means to be Anishinaabe today. It is time to reclaim our knowledge, share our stories and inspire those around us. It is a time of awakening, where information panels at provincial parks will no longer describe my people in the past tense, where indigenous peoples are recognized and valued for their cultural foundation and not regulated by government ideals of propriety. Northwestern Ontario is a wilderness playground, but it is also a vast landscape of Anishinaabe storied pasts and persevering futures. We need to challenge the notion of an "unspoiled and rugged paradise" and consider that this land was, and continues to be, indigenous land. *Mazinaabikiniganan* offer a way to connect the myths, legends, and history of First Nation communities with contemporary landscapes. It is time to recognize that our presence as First Nations people cannot be so easily erased. ■■■



Summer seminar students, 2019.

Alberto Díaz Cayeros\*

## Young Mexican Indigenous University Students at Stanford

Several students with different profiles and experiences spent three weeks together in total immersion, analyzing urgent problems in the social sciences. Given the prevailing uncertainty and pessimism among some of us due to insecurity, a dearth of opportunities, and political confusion in Mexico, we concluded that a community response was required based on the experiences of the first peoples.

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\* Director of the Center for Latin American Studies at Stanford University; [albertod@stanford.edu](mailto:albertod@stanford.edu)  
Photo, courtesy of the author.

The summer seminar “Global Risks, Security, Crime, and Governance,” held in Stanford, California, from July 15 to August 3, 2019, brought together university students from first peoples all over Mexico and others from the Autonomous Institute of Mexico (ITAM). The ITAM’s Vidal Romero and Stanford University’s Alberto Díaz Cayeros coordinate the program that originated the seminar, under the auspices of the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Learning (ANUIES) and the U.S. Embassy in Mexico.

We went to the world center of technological innovation and social change, a unique venue and the product

of three revolutions: the environmentalist, women's, and computer science revolutions, which have radically changed the way we live. Here, our university students share their experiences in their own voices.

**Mitzy Violeta Guzmán**  
**Mixtec from San Sebastián Tecomaxtlahuaca,**  
**Oaxaca**

I'm Violeta. I'm Mixtec and I study at the School of Political and Social Sciences at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. I say that with pride, recognizing the privilege it implies. When I went to get my number for the admission exam, only my mother and my sister thought that I would really be admitted to the country's best university. Before that, I had studied at an Agricultural High School Center, which I was able to get into on the first try. Finally, I was admitted to the UNAM when I was 17, so I came to live in Mexico City. Until that moment, I hadn't thought about what that implied, since the important thing was the university and having the chance to study for a degree. With time, you learn that many young people only need that: a chance.

After three years at the UNAM, I applied for a seminar organized by Stanford University and the ITAM. There, I met important academics, both men and women, from that university and was able to talk about issues like machine learning in the social sciences, community police in Brazil, and gangs in El Salvador. I did all that side-by-side with other young indigenous people who became my family for those weeks.

Being able to meet such great people made me value my own roots and culture more, and let me know that you can create science from other viewpoints. It awakened my interest in research, and above all, made me understand that, no matter how impossible it might seem, there are people fighting for us to at least have the chance to dream.

**Víctor Guzmán Cruz**  
**Nahua from Ocotepec, Puebla**

My name is Víctor Guzmán Cruz; I'm a Nahua indigenous from the Northern Sierra of Puebla. I studied high school at a shelter founded by Professor Gabriel Salom Flores in

**"As a young indigenous woman, my ambition to study public administration and political science seemed absurd to my high school teachers, unattainable to my family, ridiculous to my friends."**

**RAQUEL JUÁREZ, Totonac**

San Andrés Tepexoxuca, in Ixtacamaxtlán, Puebla. The school is currently run by an NGO (<https://www.facebook.com/Tamachtiniac/>).

Going to high school was very significant for me, key for going on to get my bachelor's, because the shelter focuses on aiding low-income indigenous youth who live far from the state's educational institutions. Its founder's educational projects have made it possible for many indigenous youths like myself to continue their studies at different universities in Mexico and fulfill their dream of finishing a bachelor's degree.

Living together with young people from different parts of the North Sierra motivated me to study a bachelor's in law with an intercultural focus at Puebla State Intercultural University, an institution that has given me the tools I need to work for a decent life in indigenous communities. To my mind, participating in the 2019 seminar was the fruit of that formative process. The experience allowed me to realize that my high school's educational model is similar to Stanford's; that's why it's been very successful in educating and empowering indigenous students, because it promotes linking up education with day-to-day activities in the community and participating in productive workshops.

**Rosa Isela Cruz Vázquez**  
**Tutanakú from Cuantotola, Amixtlán, Puebla**

Today, basic education is not enough to survive. That's why the best option is to go to the university to become a professional. But not everybody has the same opportunities of access.

In my community, most of us young people believed that going to high school and then going out to work was the best life plan. When I enrolled in Digital High School 169, my goals changed: I began to want to study a bachelor's in architecture. But that was very hard

because my family didn't have the money. However, the Puebla State Intercultural University appeared as an option, offering quality teaching, and, what's even better, it was accessible for us. So, my older sister and I decided to study sustainable development. And that's how I found out that that life style is similar to that of first peoples, which is why we should also adopt that model.

I participated in the seminar, and there I discovered a new culture, a way of life that was very different from my country's, above all what life is like in my hometown. We were in an area where living conditions are better, but where there are also problems. When we went into some issues, it became clear that, although it shouldn't be that way, being indigenous means being vulnerable. And that's proven by many statistics.

I had the opportunity to go to classes at the prestigious university that hosted us, and there I learned about the problems that affect the entire world, as explained by very academically capable professors. This increased my interest in these issues, as well as in the research methods used. That's why I want to continue my studies and do a graduate course at a university like Stanford.

My going to university continues to be difficult for me and my parents, but the results will benefit not only my family, but also my community. And I'd like it if more young indigenous had the opportunity to continue with their studies. Paxtakatzinilh Stanford, nak xtakuwini kin natalan Tutunakú (Thank you Stanford, in the name of my Tutunadú brothers and sisters!).

### **Manuel Sánchez Pérez** **Tseltal from Bachajón, Chilón, Chiapas**

When I graduated from high school, I wanted to continue my university studies in the social sciences. However, I faced two main obstacles: first, there's no university in my town, and, second, the lack of financial resources. Given that challenge, I enrolled in the National Council to Foster Education (Conafe) with the aim of getting a scholarship when I finished to reach my goal. Today, I have a bachelor's in economics thanks to that scholarship, which I got after two years of community service with the council.

The Stanford summer seminar was my second experience abroad (before I had been on an academic exchange in Argentina). What made the biggest impression

**"This experience brings together brothers and sisters with aims similar to yours, like contributing to making the world better, a very difficult job."**

**JENNY MARIEL MARTÍNEZ LÓPEZ, Ch'ol**

on me at this seminar was seeing the economic and technological dynamism of the San Francisco Bay Area. When I heard that the California state gross domestic product is greater than that of all of Mexico, I was really surprised. The exchanges with wonderful professors and my indigenous and non-indigenous colleagues have also allowed me to be more inclusive and tolerant. I think that the real value of that seminar is that it brings such a diverse group together and contributes to reducing the gap between young people of both origins.

### **Raquel Juárez** **Totonac from Hueytlalpan, Puebla**

There is no doubt that, as dramatist Pierre Corneille said, "The greater the effort, the greater the glory." And I learned this when I was preparing to go to the university. I am very aware of it because, as a young indigenous woman, my ambition to study public administration and political science at the Autonomous University of Puebla (BUAP) seemed absurd to my high school teachers, unattainable to my family, ridiculous to my friends, and was a huge challenge for me. So, one of my first glorious moments was showing that I was capable of getting what I had set out to get.

However, it didn't end there. One of the best experiences that I'll remember all my life is my summer stay at Stanford. To get there, I had to make an effort. But, I'm convinced that every step was worth it. And I don't mean just the academic side of things, but also how valuable and enriching it was to learn about other cultures like the [U.S.] American or that of Kazakhstan—even though I only heard about the latter.

Working with students from the ITAM and from several states around the country showed me the importance of analyzing a problem from different perspectives and that using our abilities for a common end will always be fruitful for everyone.

Wa yuma tu jkikatsil yankaxli neklakgkapastaka! Paxcatsinixl! (I will always remember what I learned! Thank you!)

**Silvino Arellanes Hernández**  
Zapotec from San Pablo Güilá, Oaxaca

Being able to study at a university is the best. And you have to give yourself goals, to have a concrete objective and not give up, since, as we know, being an indigenous student at a university involves lots of challenges, such as managing the little money you have well, sacrificing a lot of things you want, like having certain luxuries that you see in a world that's different from our communities. Also, you have to look for different kinds of scholarships to cover the expenses that come with studying.

Participating in the seminar has been a huge opportunity for me as an indigenous student; it's allowed me to learn new things, like about the different kinds of violence, how they come about, and the way criminal organizations operate, just to mention a few. Being with the ITAM students was very enjoyable, since we had interesting exchanges of ideas. Also, getting a closer look at U.S. culture was incredible because there, they respect rules and norms and they are applied lawfully.

**Andrea Domitila Marcial Santiago**  
Zapotec from Oaxaca

It seemed impossible—even otherworldly—to have the chance to visit Stanford University, to learn new things from professors from one of the most prestigious institutions, and even to go to another country.

When they gave us the results of the competition for the scholarship, I was surprised that I had qualified, that

“When we went into some issues, it became clear that, although it shouldn't be that way, being indigenous means being vulnerable. And that's proven by many statistics.”

ROSA ISELA CRUZ VÁZQUEZ, Tutanakú

all my efforts to get to where I am today were beginning to show results. For me, the transit from high school to the university brought many challenges, both economic and emotional. However, I always found a way and a new road forward.

I'm an undergraduate law student at the Vasconcelos University in the state of Oaxaca. My dad is from the municipality of Tlacolula de Matamoros. I was born there, but I grew up in Capulálpam de Méndez, where my mom is from; so, I'm proud of being a native of both towns. I realized that the opportunity to participate in this seminar does change lives. At Stanford, we worked with five young people from the ITAM, which was very interesting since, for those weeks, we put to one side the stereotypes and prejudices that society imposes on us and generated a quite dynamic, enriching communication and closeness.

I also had the opportunity to look at the other side of the coin and see how people live in San Francisco and San Jose, both cities located in a country that is very attractive for everyone, like the United States. I observed that many Mexicans who live there work long days, mostly in restaurants and malls, and that it's not like we in Mexico imagine it to be. I would go so far as to say that their work is twice as hard and, in some places, it's even badly paid. But even so, they do their best to send a large part of their paychecks to Mexico to their families.

In addition to that, the research and other information the Stanford professors shared with us made me think even more about the impact on our society of the global risks in Latin America. It might seem like it's not the case, but all the personal information we share as Internet users, on social media, is involved, and very much so.

That experience has opened a huge door in my life. I discovered that it wasn't so difficult to make one of my biggest goals a reality, that nothing is impossible, and that every effort and all your dedication will always be worth it.

**Jenny Mariel Martínez López**  
Ch'ol from Oxolotán, Tacotalpa, Tabasco

Talking with my friends from the seminar, we thought, “And if we talk about what happens after such a wonderful experience?” We would all think that after finishing

"The important thing was the university and having the chance to study for a degree. With time, you learn that many young people only need that: a chance."

MITZI VIOLETA GUZMÁN, Mixtec

such an important program as Stanford's, things would be better for us and for our communities so many things come to mind that you could put into practice.

But things aren't always what we expect. When you come back, you're faced with your reality, with challenges like certain conflicts at work —they don't pay the double shifts you worked so hard to finish "because you weren't there"— or others with the authorities in your community because they say, "How can you go around saying that there's violence in the community?" The problem is that people don't know what's behind a Facebook photo, and you're always going to share the happiest moments, because why would you share the negative things like stress or not getting enough sleep? Why place so much importance on them?

It's important to say how we experienced the process. At least for me it wasn't easy, since it not only implied getting through red tape to apply (providing documents, filling out the application, a letter to explain your motivations, recommendation letters, etc.); you also had to deal with the lack of access to technology because we live in communities where we often don't have these services.

Imagine the worry of knowing that at any moment an urgent e-mail could arrive and you wouldn't be able to respond right away because the local Internet service was down; also the worry because of economic conditions, because, although it doesn't cost much to apply, every step involves expenses. In my case, after finding out that I had gone on to the second stage, my mind was already asking where I would have to go. I'm not complaining; each of us was aware that we had to make an effort and that was part of the process.

A lot of other things are involved, but they're no longer important because I can say with full certainty that I would never regret having participated in this seminar. It contributes to the development of critical thinking, of deepening your understanding, analyzing, studying, and proposing solutions in line with what's needed. It prepares you to deal with the challenges that will come after the program is over. But not only that: it also introduces you to important people, not because of their economic status, but because of their commitment to society, their great hearts, and their dedication to everything they do.

All of this not only brings you knowledge but also many brothers and sisters with aims similar to yours, like contributing to making the world better, a very difficult job, but that, by creating networks and joining forces, we will be able to achieve.

I finish this paragraph by sharing how happy and proud I feel of my roots, thankful to God for having allowed me to be born in a family full of culture, with parents who have supported me throughout. Käk'ēñ wokolix yälä kux-tyäle! (Thanks be to life!) **MM**



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Rafael Pérez-Taylor\*

## Different Anthropologies: The State and the People

It is fundamental to have knowledge of the past and the present in the context of the time scales of the different first communities, who have lived throughout history outside Western traditions and have suffered the domination and destruction of their centuries-old ways of life, outside of the idea of progress, labor, and capital. Invasions, conquests, and colonization led the first peoples' cultures to gradual destruction at the hands of the expansion of the mercantilist world and the imposition of new ways of life that brought slavery, servitude, and subservience.

In our country, history has not changed much since the sixteenth century. The different policies of the Spanish empire, during colonial times, Mexico after independence, and until today had their dose of progress for the original cultures, with the support of the Catholic Church. To a large extent, this justification of "progress" found one of its origins in the Council of Trent (1550), where those present carried on theological and philosophical discussions

to determine whether the Indians recently discovered in the Americas were men or not.<sup>1</sup> Later, the different discourses definitely were taken on board as just causes for war and the need to civilize or exterminate; all this in different religious and military orders.

The extension of the empire to the colonies also required military, religious, and colonial administrative services that could be seen and described, beyond the spiritual conquest, including the material domination of production through the brutality imposed by the colonial governments to favor their empires. From that moment on, the past acquires a dual link that the civilizing processes would inscribe in their writings: on the one hand, Western history, and on the other, those who have no history and must be civilized; in our particular case, the cultures from the overseas possessions were part of that process.

From that starting point, it is my opinion that the West went wild in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Americas, because to be able to register these cultures, it had to implement discourses that could situate these first peoples in history—in Africa and Asia, the processes were more or less similar with regard to the plunder

\* Director of the UNAM Institute for Anthropological Research; rperezttaylor@gmail.com.

Anthropology carried out in libraries and cubicles has as its main function the mythical, ancestral recognition of human groups to be able to compare them, without establishing historic, temporal, or geographical scales.

of goods and territories from the European-dominated groups. Those Indians must have come from one of the lost tribes of Israel to be able to legitimately be considered under the category of men, even if they were still savages because they had lost their religious sense. The eighteenth century revealed the superiority and Caucasian decline in Europe. The sense of historicity is based on the construction of a theoretical, un-empirical apparatus that framed the supremacy of the white world; published works such as those by Jean-Sylvain Bailly, Georges Louis Leclerc Buffon, and Joseph Arthur de Gobineau show this. In that sense, the knowledge acquired slowly formed a reading based above all on philosophical discussion, which led to the emerging idea of the possibility that the races in the world had experienced, through migrations and sexual and symbolic exchanges, processes that would bring forth those cultures' moments of splendor and subsequent decline. That deterioration would lead to historic moments of hopelessness for the individuals who lived through them.

Aftertastes of those moments in ancient history are founded in the old Euro-Asian myths in the Northern Hemisphere. The empirical demonstrations are very unclear and charged with imaginaries, and they turn into readings and writings that form the basis above all for the idea of the privileged status of being Western. This surrounding movement intertwines in a dichotomy between race and mixed race that would undoubtedly spawn the decadence of cultures. By following this postulate, Western discourse leads down a path that brings colonialism to the fore as the place where domination and supremacy give meaning to exploitation; or, in other words, colonialism leaves its mark to show that civilization, in all its splendor, can only be found in the Western world. This opens up the vein of superiority with regard to first peoples and mixed races, given that the weak and not the Westerners are situated on an inferior level, therefore posing the Christian necessity of removing them from that

place to make it possible for them to one day be civilized. But, meanwhile, the hard work of that endeavor—above all a Christian endeavor—lies in attempting to save their souls, both in the spiritual and the material worlds, through the progress-seeking work that will dignify their lives.

In addition, romanticism about the origins of humanity goes hand in hand with religious beliefs and the birth of scientific rationalism, which clashed with creationist thought, limiting and narrowing and simultaneously creating the possibility of constructing pragmatic elements that unify the symbolic processes with practical ones. This mobility found its form in the descriptions of the other, which formalized the meaning of an understanding whose only real end is the knowledge of the differences that can be utilized in the construction of new forms of subjection. This network of actions created the ethnographic order as a principle, as the first-hand source that provided access to another culture; all this at the service of the imperial state and the systems of exploitation, work, and overseas trade.

The situation did not change very much over time, above all with the expansion of the different Western empires that took on the task of the conquest and extermination of the local groups in different parts of the world, whether the Americas, Africa, Asia, or Oceania. Wherever they were, they enslaved and stole natural resources to the benefit of progress, of their civilization, and the maintenance of the oppressive forces that impeded any kind of change. These first thinkers were born under the principle of colonial administrators who described the others as objects that could be considered sub-human, as beasts of burden who, to be civilized and occupy a place in the spectrum of linear evolution—although on a lower level to that of Western Man—had to go through the harsh process of labor, subjection, and servility.

## The Role of Anthropology

Anthropology has an important place in the context of colonialism that can be understood as ways of sketching political-expansionist policies and describing new lands and resources, as well as academic processes that scientifically legitimize comparative points demonstrating the existence of that difference. So, we can argue three forms of explanation:



1. Colonial anthropology administered the land of the other after the invasion, conquest, and colonization. It appropriated its place in the production of raw materials that would pass over to the empire, recognizing the role of the other as the knower of his/her territory. Anthropologists worked on an ethnography of the recognition of these groups based on their usages and customs, their mythology, their productive systems, and their kinship relations, accompanied by political relationships and possible conflicts. This ethnographic knowledge materialized in the control of different ethnic groups by the empire. This anthropology served colonial interests as a platform indicating the geopolitical movements that had to be made to be able to control the dominated territories.
2. The anthropology carried out in libraries and cubicles has as its main function the mythical, ancestral recognition of different human groups to be able to compare them, without establishing historic, temporal, or geographical scales. This kind of very erudite bibliographical work corresponds to legitimizing anthropological knowledge as a significant entity or fantasy that delimits the possible differences between one culture and others, to give a privileged place to the Western world and the empires. Based on this perspective, anthropologists describe a large number of ethnic groups throughout the world to be able to compare them outside their historical contexts. With this, writing in a book becomes part of realities that are outside any social continuity.

In addition, a wide range of theoretical works about the anthropological sciences is rooted in two levels: the first, the authors' field experiences, and, second, theories about the works of other authors.

3. Anthropology was carried out in different field expeditions, mainly in the colonial world, in societies without Western writing systems, with a low civilization profile, that were immersed in savagery, but whose lands held the raw materials that the empire needs. These field expeditions were carried out in places where information was needed to find territories to be exploited, but also in strategic locations that served to build artificial borders between the different entities. These international borders divided ethnic groups and in many cases turned them

into enemies. This arbitrary separation benefitted the imperial powers, which used their treaties to divide the world up until well into the twentieth century and even today. Colonialism continues to exist in more sophisticated forms through, for example, slave labor in post-capitalist societies.

The past and the present crisscross in the spectrum of capitalism. The nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries have to a certain extent shown us that human existence in its different ethnic and national contexts, as well as the genotype and phenotype, are proof that whoever possesses the means to disqualify the other and negate his/her diversity is also the owner of the means of production. This strong but simple argument situates the sectors that hold the means of production and that also have the authorization of the national states that support them in a rhetorical discourse close to barbarism. Some of the forms of discrimination that have occurred until recently on the long road of historical events can be clarified in this history; the histories of inequality, poverty, and destruction of the other are part of the work carried out by the empires of the past and the present, as we will see here.

Some of the ways in which colonial power materializes in subject peoples can be seen in concrete cases: the living museums in Europe, the United States, and Argentina, where different ethnic groups, above all African, were exhibited for European societies, and the ethnological museums where dried humans were displayed in "their natural habitat." All these collections were exhibited in the great Western capitals. A few concrete examples should be referred to: indigenous "prisoners of science" in Buenos Aires in the nineteenth century; Inayakal, the local strongman, displayed alive in the museum of natural sciences in La Plata, Argentina, in 1888; the human zoos in Europe and the United States from 1870 to 1930; the Paris Zoological Acclimation Garden between 1872 and 1912; and New York's Bronx Zoo in 1906, where racist amateur anthropologist Madison Grant put a pigmy on display together with an orangutan under a sign reading "The Missing Link."

The grotesque example of several cases in the past established the reference point of Western supremacy and that anything non-white was condemned to become an inferior species of human comparable to the primates;

Anthropology had a fundamental reason to exist after the 1910 Revolution to the extent that it aided in constructing a vision of Mexico that became a reason of state, forming a comprehensive perspective.

thus, museums guided the way in framing the inferior subjects. In this sense, the object of study was presented in two ways: the first as a living museum, where a human zoo was presented as the registry of superiority showing non-Western persons in the artifice to manufacture the *habitus* in which they were found in the places of origin, emphasizing their primitivism. The second conceptual level they were presented on was as already dead: through their taxidermy, they were exhibited as a show in a museum, representing the habitat had they occupied when alive. The exotic was underlined here to ensure the act of white, Western supremacy in the empire and also in the colonies that presumed to be Caucasian outside the borders of the empire.

On the other hand, there was also an academic anthropology that discussed first in theory and then through fieldwork, the ethnographic description based on two points of view: 1) for academic ends, and 2) with political biases. Among the most important of the former are the works of Edward Burnett Tylor, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Claude Levi-Strauss. Those with the political bent focused more emphatically on the English-language anthropology of Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, Margaret Mead, and Ruth Benedict, among the most important, not to mention the new generations.

In Mexico, anthropology took its distance from the colonialist spectrum, except for a few foreign expeditions doing fieldwork, primarily in the areas of archaeology, ethnology, and linguistics, in the late nineteenth century and during the twentieth century until the expulsion of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). Anthropology had a fundamental reason for being after the 1910 Revolution to the extent that it aided in constructing a vision of Mexico that became a reason of state, forming a comprehensive perspective. That is to say, archaeology; physical, social, and linguistic anthropology; ethnology; and ethnohistory made up the anthropological sciences.

Until relatively recently, archaeology occupied a privileged place in the study of the areas of high impact (pre-Hispanic, monumental cities like Teotihuacán, Chichen Itzá, and Palenque, among others). This is because the glorious, monumental past of the great cultures was enshrined in the construction of the national identity. Meanwhile, the other important point would be the projects about *indigenismo*, and with that, the construction of institutions that backed research in the anthropological sciences in Mexico. Among the anthropologists with this state vision were Alfonso Caso, Ricardo Pozas, and Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, among others.

The construction of the country through the national identity represented the process of validation of the nation, to ensure continuity between the past and the present that would legitimize the state to obtain a place of privilege for the political party in control. This line made it possible to regulate the construction of the country by a social imaginary that indicated that everything in the past was better and profoundly glorious. Its descendants, the indigenous, had lost their way, but the state situated them in the terrain of what was Mexican—we are all Mexicans—to attempt to erase each group's ethnic identity. With that, nationalism took its place of privilege in the monumental past, but also in the present, by maintaining the idea that all of those born in Mexico are Mexican without any distinction among them at all.<sup>2</sup> This meant that the political discourse of identity and national culture recognized a single country, one language (Spanish), a single glorious past due to the ancestral cultures, and a modern country due to the post-Revolutionary present, with the same opportunities for all its citizens. This last part slipped up profoundly in the terrain of inequalities and the suppression of rights and guarantees for many of them. Thus, Mexico constructed its vision of a nation to a great extent amidst monumental archaeology, *indigenista* anthropology, and the sense of oneness under a state party.

We could say that this process came to an end in the administration of Salinas de Gortari, who in one term dismantled the firm aim of a national state to turn it into a corporation and give rise to never-ending policies of dismantling government obligations, leaving only its rights. This procedure led to the end of national heritage as it had been conceived in the past; the new forms led to its commercialization; plunder came on the scene and anthropology stopped being a reason of state; the great projects

lost their funding and came mainly under the custodianship of a declining National Institute for Anthropology and History (INAH) and the public universities.

The neoliberal model in the context of the imaginings of capitalist progress replaced the previous ideology, redefining the concept of nationalism as reactionary because it was no longer correct to defend international or regional borders: the territories inside the borders of the nation could be sold to the highest bidder, no matter where in the world they were; the law of supply and demand also went to the highest bidder, and, with that, the state rid itself of its fundamental obligations by auctioning them off. In this context, cultural diversity emerged without a defined project, as did the new need to reconstruct the nation; and anthropology had to take on a new connotation: that is, an anthropology from the roots of society, from below.

We must “give the floor to the peoples themselves . . . , listen to them through their intellectuals (decolonizing our interpretative perspective with regard to them,” says Heriberto Ruiz Ponce.<sup>3</sup> This situates us in an anthropology

of shared meanings, from which the differences take on meaning through the interlocution between the anthropologist and the person he/she is dialoguing with. Democracy is established between the different forms of accessing the power of knowledge. For the first time in the history of anthropology, we can say that the decolonization of discourses happens in practice, and this will lead us to determine knowledge shared through a common life. ■■

### Notes

- 1 Mercedes Serna, ed., “Introducción: políticas de la conquista,” *La conquista del Nuevo Mundo. Textos y documentos de la aventura americana*, Clásicos Castalia. Documentos siglo XVI (Madrid: Castalia, 2012), p. 37.
- 2 José Antonio Fernández de Rota, *Nacionalismo, cultura y tradición* (Barcelona: Anthropos, 2005), p. 58.
- 3 Heriberto Ruiz Ponce, *Resistencia epistémica. Intelligentsia e identidad política en el proyecto descolonial ñuu savi* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca / IIA, PUC, UNAM / Juan Pablos Editor, 2017), p. 133.



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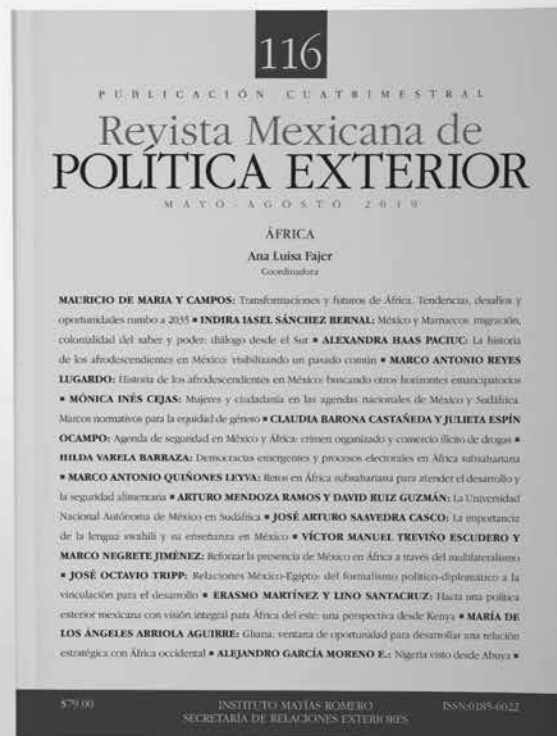
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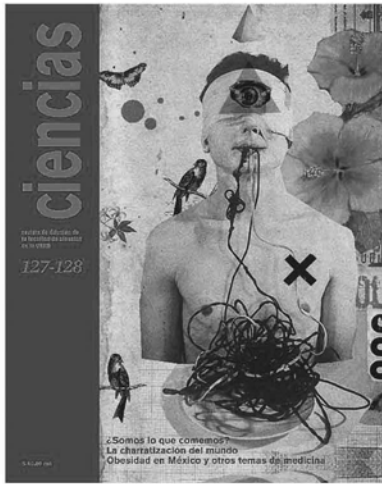
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Kiliwa territory, Baja California, Mexico, 2018.

Natalia Gabayet\*

## Amidst Borders, the Cultural Territory of the Yuman<sup>1</sup>

In this article, I will show the transcendence in time and space of a living geography located on what is today the border between Mexico and the United States. This imposed border divides the territory of the Kumiai, Paipai, Cucapá, and Kiliwa nations, which anthropologists call the “Yuman peoples.” I will be using ethnography and these groups’ memory, funeral rituals, traditional songs, and mythology.

Tracks on the land are lasting marks in the biography of any Yuman. In effect, the road each person takes leaves its traces on these landscapes of wide-open horizons and creates an individual and collective memory, since in their interrelated clans, actions are intertwined with the territory, its resources, and the ways of sharing it.

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\* Inter-institutional liaison and editorial content manager of the Indigenous Heritage Foundation’s Indigenous Cultural Platform; ngabayet@gmail.com.  
All photos by the author.

They say, “The steps are always taken twice; in life and in death.” Thus, any mark on the desert’s layer of dust or among the rocks in the hills is inexorably visited a second time. If the first time the path is blazed in life, the second time, when you die, your very presence on the surface of the land must be erased. After death, the time of the last pilgrimage along the road taken begins, and then you pick up all the fingernails and hair left behind, plus the energy that each object has been impregnated with; the tracks are erased and your own steps are recovered.

When one trip around the sun has been made and the task has been completed, all the clans come together and the friends of the Californias travel along the highways to say good-bye, speaking the road traveled together, the experience shared, and, to ask that everything be taken, even the memory itself, the name of the dead will not be spoken again.

Yuman's origin myths are anchored in a specific landscape. They recognize themselves as having come from far-off lands, upriver along the Colorado, from the Mohave Desert in California.

## The Vocation to Walk

For the Yuman, people's ephemeral sojourn in the world contrasts with the depth of their memory of the territory, very present in their mythology and traditional songs. In an interview by National Institute of Anthropology and History researchers Daniela Leyva and Alejandro González, traditional Kumiai singer Juan Carranza said that the song accompanied by a *bule* (a kind of rattle) sung during *kuri kuri* dances—the Yuman call their fiesta the *kuri kuri*—is the narration that mentions certain roads, manifesting the appropriation of a living geography.<sup>2</sup>

Their origin myths are also anchored in a specific landscape. They narrate where the Yuman come from and how far they have walked as a people. To start, they recognize themselves as having come from far-off lands, upriver along the Colorado, from the Mohave Desert in California. There, the serpent Maihaiowit exploded and knowledge of the word, how to hunt, to sing, to weave, and to fish spread. From there, they walked and scattered along the way, those of the Pai family—the Paipai, who share the common original language with the Havapai, Havasupai, and Walapai, in the area of the Grand Canyon—; then the Cucapá, who also scattered, with some remaining on the other side of the border, in California, together with the Yuma, and others on the Mexican side, in Sonora and Baja California, up to the banks of the Hardy River on the edges of the Cucapá Mountains.

The Paipai traveled far from their linguistic brothers and sisters, from the nearest clans, who stayed in Ojos Negros, in the municipality of Ensenada, to create the beautiful town of Santa Catarina. The Kiliwas settled further to the south, on the skirts of the San Pedro Mártir Mountains, on “the rib of the Earth,” as they say. The Kumiai, relatives of the “Diegueños” from San Diego County, also were separated by that border that was so new to the history of these peoples. In Mexico, the Kumiai live today in communities from Tecate to the environs of Hanson

Lagoon in the National Constitution of 1857 Park. If there's anything the Yuman people defend, it is their nomadism, their ability to move, which for thousands of years led them to travel over what is now the south of California and Arizona as well as the peninsula of Baja California and the state of Sonora.

## Geography and Its Mythological Counterpart

The mythology of these peoples links the effigies of the gods with the land, since, depending on their destiny and their actions, the gods turn into the mountains, rocks, and valleys surrounding them. For example, the head of the great monster, a whale or lizard, that killed the Cucapá cultural hero is Cerro Prieto, located just outside Mexicali; the body of Meltipá, *the land person*, creator of the Kiliwa world, scattered, creating that group's cultural landscape, since the head remained in the Trinidad Valley, the body is made up of the entire slope that leads to the so-called San Felipe Valley, and the right arm is the Arroyo Viejo, close to Colorado Hill.

Among the Paipai, the tale of the hero's deed narrates the battle of a young warrior against the monster Jalkutat, who attempted to steal the spring that gave life to Santa Catarina; in the end, the young man is victorious and then the clans are born. In other words, the gods form the world, which is nothing more than their bodies; this means that the landscape is not only ancestral, but it is alive and is also touched with the divine.

In the myths narrating the clans' journeys and explaining the origins of the songs, a cultural region also appears covering both countries, separated by today's national boundaries. A common source-language, funeral customs, music, kinship, and shared material lives express not only historic exchange but the construction of an identity down through the centuries. These crisscrossing elements were detected from the beginning of the twentieth century, for example, in Yuman art, particularly music. This means we can speak of stylistic integration in the production of the Mohave, the Yuma, and the Diegueños as constituent parts of this cultural region. Among the common traits are the simplicity of tonal development, the composition of long series of songs, and their close connection to the myths. They also share the use of the *jonal* or *bule* as the only accompaniment, the strict separa-



Among the Paipai, the tale of the hero's deed narrates the battle of a young warrior against the monster Jalkutat. The man is victorious and the clans are born.

tion between festival songs, interpreted at yearly collection celebrations, and funeral pieces.

Funeral rites also have elements in common both in the area now located in the United States and in the south of the Baja California peninsula. It is true that the first peoples, except the Cochimi, were exterminated during the Spanish colonial period, but precisely eighteenth-century sources and those from the beginning of the last century mention those common traits, such as, for example, those observed in the Kiliwa funeral rite (*ñiwey*).

Among these people, the *ñiwey* began a minimum of one year after the death, but it could be postponed until the fifth year, when the clans would have gathered enough acorns, pine nuts, and hunted animals to distribute among the participants. They hid the artifacts that would take on life for the ceremony in caves, letting them “age.” On the day of the ceremony, the clans came together and established a dialogue between the living and the dead. Some artifacts (layers of hair and feather headdresses) were put on the warriors’ heads, while they held others in their hands (boards used as masks and feather wands). Dressed like this, they would dance out of the caves toward the ceremonial center built of branches for the occasion. There, the healer, smoking coyote tobacco and playing the *bule*, would “take over” the voice of the dead, negotiate about old quarrels, find lost items, and arrange mat-

ters pending among the clans present. Later, he would sing and the participants would dance until the dead were sent to their permanent resting place, ending the ceremony.

Toward the North, among the Diegueños from San Diego and Riverside Counties, and among the Yuma, we find the same ritual, but instead of placing the artifacts on the warriors’ bodies, they built wooden “dolls.” On the dolls they placed the clothing and the life-giving hair, painted the faces to make the clan identity clear, and put the feathers on their heads and in their hands, tools for the mystical journey, thus making, just like among the Kiliwa, bodies that represent their dead.

Different sources describe this paraphernalia and some of the objectives of the rituals recorded among the Pericura and the Waycura. Thus, we can be relatively certain that the Yuman death traditions have extended not only over the territory, but over time.

### Belonging Defined by Water

Two more traits show us the importance of territory and its symbolism. Because these peoples do not build large ceremonial centers nor are they precisely sedentary, their relationship with the land seems to be very different from that developed by agricultural peoples and the great Mesoamerican empires. However, in ancient times, each Yuman clan was associated with a body of water, as a fixed territorial center that gave the clan its name. This belonging in turn generated hunting and gathering rights over a certain area around that body of water throughout the year.

Relations among the Yuman groups were based on the connection between one clan’s hunting and gathering places and those of another, and the visits to the different camps were linked to intermarriage and political alliances among clans. Points for gathering acorns and pine nuts, for example, acted as meeting places. This was the moment for festivities, music, and singing, a time for *kuri kuri*.

In the myths narrating the clans' journeys and explaining the origins of the songs, a cultural region also appears covering both countries, separated by today's national boundaries.

Another shared aspect was the towns of ancestors. While the Yuman worked ritually to turn the presence of the dead into a journey into another world, the inevitable accumulation of dead relatives ends up marking forever the place where a camp or a seasonal hunting hamlet was located, following the memories and the trace left by the living on the objects, houses, and, generally speaking, on the land. Over time, this accumulation of presences made certain sites sacred. And, even though the funeral rites attempted to make the presence disappear, the landscape is inevitably shared with settlements of dead relatives. This means that they continue to be present, which means that the rituals like the ñiwey can be understood as perpetually failed attempts at erasure and are constantly redone. Both living and dead Yuman make up,

together, the social and material fabric that, despite imposed borders, identifies part of our geography. **MM**

### Further Reading

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### Notes

1 The information gathered for this article is part of a research project coordinated by Dr. Alejandro González Villarruel, "Antropología inminente, lengua y cultura yumana," CNAN-Centro INAH Baja California, 2012-2015.

2 Interview by Alejandro González and Daniela Leyva, October 9, 2015.

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Gabriela Rodríguez Ceja\*

## From Witchcraft to Psychosis Treating Illnesses of the Head and Mind In Contemporary Chol Communities

Today, Mexico's indigenous peoples have access to a diversity of alternatives for health care since they live in multicultural contexts; this has influenced their ways of understanding and dealing with health problems. This article will look at experiences of Chol-speakers living in the southeast of the municipality of Calakmul, Campeche, near the border with Guatemala and the state of Quintana Roo. The Chol language is part of the Mayan linguistic family.

To care for relatives with illnesses of the head (*jol*) and the mind (*pensal*),<sup>1</sup> they deal with a multiplicity of special-

ists with different approaches to health and illness, the individual, the body, and the universe. This translates into varied diagnostic techniques for detecting and determining conditions, forms of treatment, and criteria for healing. This is known as medical pluralism.

The research on which this article is based was done in five localities of Calakmul municipality and led to the analysis of the treatment path of 15 people.<sup>2</sup> They have seen doctors and healers in the area covered by their social networks, that is, Chol healers both in Chiapas and in Campeche,<sup>3</sup> Maya healers from the Yucatán Peninsula, or *hmenob* located in the states of Campeche and Yucatán, spiritualists from different places throughout the peninsula, Pentecostal pastors living in Calakmul collective *ejido* farms, and, less frequently, psychiatrists

\*Anthropologist and researcher at the UNAM Institute of Philological Research; gabriela.rceja@gmail.com.  
All photos by the author.

or neurologists from nearby cities. These alternatives may resolve health problems in different contexts, but at times they are not enough.

A look at the medical records allows us to get a glimpse of the complexity of the problem these populations face: clearly, they have great difficulties in treating health problems like those mentioned since they must seek out the wide gamut of possibilities they have within their reach and invest important sums of money—the treatments and travel are very expensive for their fragile finances. And even so, in most cases, they report no improvement.

It is important to mention that few people have had specialized medical care, a clear indication of Mexican indigenous peoples' social exclusion in health matters. These groups do not have the access to the goods, services, and opportunities that can improve or preserve a good state of health that other groups in society enjoy.

For decades it has been shown that the state invests the least amount in human and material resources in these citizens: their possibility of seeing medical specialists who can give them the care that public hospitals or private clinics offer is also minimal. It has been pointed out that cultural, economic, and social barriers prevent them from fully enjoying that benefit. This is why, in the case of the conditions mentioned, those who might receive clinical, scientific care have few probabilities of being treated in top-level clinics, much less being channeled where they need to go. All this encourages their condition to progressively deteriorate.

In addition, those involved must “translate” their proposals for care, since some are more familiar to them than others. The diversity of explanations or the illness include “witchcraft” (*tilentiel*) or an illness deliberately caused by someone (*choco chāmel*), according to the Chol healers and many spiritualists; the introduction of “foul spirits” in the bodies of the patients, in the interpretation of Pentecostal pastors; or, in the opinion of scientific medical practitioners, that the illness is the result of somatic injuries or dysfunctions. Thus, we encounter conditions like *soj-kem ijol* (confusion or muddling of the head), also called “madness,” *yaj chitiam* or “pig shame,” when what people actually are suffering from is epileptic crises, a psychotic break, or cysticercosis.

By analyzing one man’s treatment path, we can begin to understand the local cultural logic that has guided his family’s decisions and interpretations; plus, the obstacles

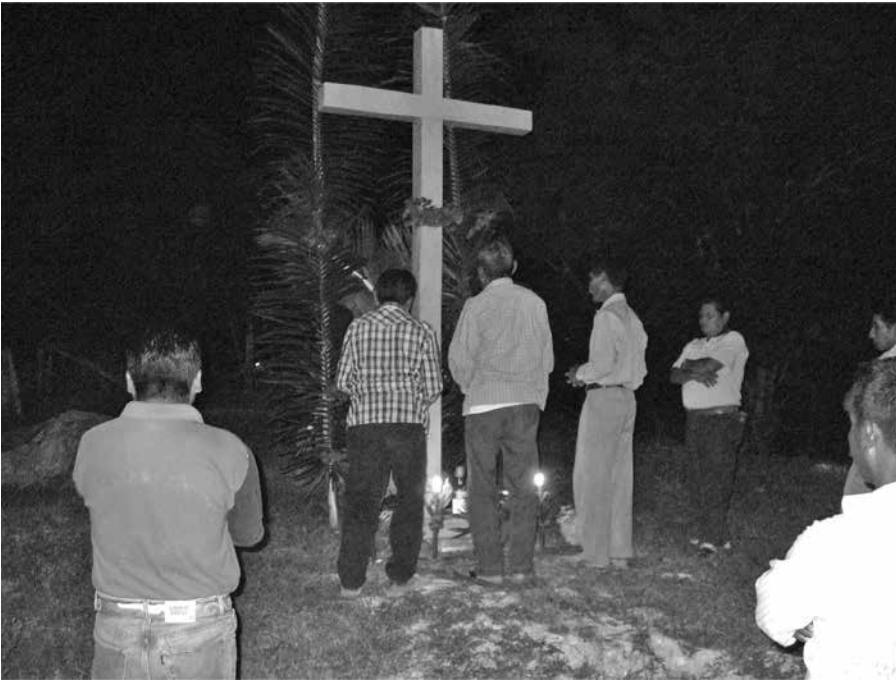
to his accessing specialized medical care will also become clearer.

María states that during Holy Week her dad (D) fell ill with diarrhea and intense vomiting. D explained that some neighbors had invited him to have a “drink.” When they saw that he was drunk, they brought him a plate and said, “Cousin, eat this snack, because in the middle of this plate is you; you’re the snack.” D and María thought that they put something in the snack to hurt him. María and her mother took D to a *xwujtijel*, or Chol healer, who helped him get better. He told him that he should make three visits to him, but D did not want to return because he felt better. María thinks that if her dad had gone, he would not have died, “because he was still able to hold his own.”

Shortly after his condition manifested, D began to threaten María and her mother with killing them; he also



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Witchcraft can operate through nocturnal rituals in which the witch (*xibaj*) establishes communication with Satan or the Owners of the Earth (*yumob*).

hit his wife while she was asleep. D said that he had seen several men come into the house and have sexual relations with his wife. They also say that “he listened as though someone was speaking to him. At noon, he would bathe [since he heard someone say], ‘Pig! Take a bath because we’re going to eat you now.’ And he’d obey. He’d say that he felt how they operated on him, putting the bottle of Big Cola in his gut, throwing potatoes in with it, and they’d sew him up again. He said that he saw that, that he felt it, but we were there and [could see] that none of this was happening.”

He also said that two people from his village forced him to go with them to work in the hills taking care of the animals. He would go away for days at a time, coming back covered in thorns and ticks. Those people had also recently forced him to sell a piece of land at a very low price because they wanted to set up a store there. Neither María nor her mother know how the transaction was carried out, but they think that D accepted selling it because they had done him some “evil,” cast a spell, which made him “lose his head.”

Just like her mother and other people from their area, María thinks that D had had “evil” or “witchcraft” done to him. Shortly before his death, they took him to see a spiritualist, who said, “Right now you’re walking around. It’s just your body. They’ve already eaten your soul; you’re no longer alive.” He explained to him that some enemy had paid a lot of money to someone to do him damage and cause his death. The spiritualist saw him five times, but in the end said there was nothing more he could do for him. For this work, he charged Mex\$5 000.

María said she took her father to the municipal hospital because “he could smell himself, that his body stank like a dead dog.” He said, “I have AIDS...” But, his daughter says that he was the only one who smelled anything. “For us, who were fine and healthy, he didn’t stink.” The doctors did tests —although María doesn’t know what kind— and they only found that he had tuberculosis.

She describes her reasons for thinking that someone cast a spell on D. She says that, at the burial, the people present said, “Here’s a snake coming out, ‘there it goes, there it goes.’” María’s sister saw the snake. “Lots of people say that, yes, when he heard voices, maybe somebody hung the snake on him somewhere; [so, then, it was] the snake that was talking.” The explanation is that the animal was inside D in a spirit form, and that is why they could see it when he died. The snake was the indisputable proof that this man had been a victim of “witchcraft.”

In this case, we can observe that the first choice for care was the Chol healer, and then the spiritualist. For both, the explanation was that someone had caused the man’s condition because he or she wanted to get ahold of his property, and so, had affected his spirit (*ch’ujlel*). This idea is based on a conception of people as porous entities at constant risk that can be affected in multiple ways both awake and asleep, by being exposed to attacks from envious neighbors who use rituals to penetrate their bodies, affecting their *ch’uilel* and even disturb their ability to act independently.<sup>4</sup>



Maria also said that they went to the municipal hospital where they did tests on her father that she could not understand and whose only results showed that he had tuberculosis. The symptoms she described could be interpreted by medical science as linked to some kind of psychosis since they might be classified as hallucinations and delirium. However, the doctors who examined him did not identify them as such.

One important obstacle to the indigenous population having access to timely, quality care is the cultural difference and not speaking the same language: the doctors' approach to care does not incorporate the patients' cultural perspectives, and they also do not have access to people who can translate culturally what is happening. The educational level of the indigenous population is lower than that of the rest of the population (4.9 years compared to 7.7 years), which has an impact in many ways on their being excluded from health care.

In other cases, people have had trouble getting to their doctor's appointments because of the distance to the hospitals; they have also developed complications due to cultural differences and difficulties in understanding each other because doctors and patients do not speak each other's languages. But even so, I did find that a few people have received psychiatric care, but have not had access

to all the medications prescribed by the health clinic, something that is a generalized problem in clinics and hospitals throughout Mexico.

As can be seen, the indigenous population faces both structural and cultural barriers that have an impact on their health and health care and that are often made invisible in the national health system. ■■■

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## Notes

- 1 I have used these terms for the illnesses taking into consideration that both the patients and their families and the specialists who have treated them have situated them that way.
- 2 In this article, I will refer to the research I have been doing since January 2017 in this municipality, which consists of ethnographic fieldwork in different locations.
- 3 When I say "healer," I am referring to *xwujtijelob* (healers who use ritual procedures and herbal medication), the *tatuchob* (praying elders), and the "seers" who hear the voice of Saint Michael the Archangel (*yubin* San Miguelito) that emanates from a wooden box with his image and indicates to them the cause of the condition and what procedures must be followed to heal the person.
- 4 Witchcraft can operate through nocturnal rituals in which the witch (*xibaj*) establishes communication with Satan or the owners (*yumob*) through which he ensures that different entities acquire harmful properties that can penetrate the body of the person targeted. The entity can be "bad air" (*tsuku ik'*), objects, or animal spirits that penetrate through direct contact, or through eating or drinking. It can also happen during a dream, when the *ch'ujlel* leaves the body and wanders the earth, making it more vulnerable to attacks that produce discomfort when the person awakes. The spell can also work at a distance, using a proxy by ritually manipulating a full-length photograph or a piece of clothing, or writing down the target's full name. These objects must be buried in the cemetery, allowing the Owner of the Earth (*yum lum*) to trap the person's *ch'ujlel*, preventing him from returning and condemning him to death. The final objective is that the evil entity, Satan or the owner, eats the person's *ch'ujlel*, causing his death.



Fototeca Nacho López / INPI / Ricardo Moura

Mario Humberto Ruz Sosa\*

## The Cultural Languages of Nature Other Voices in the Maya World

The 30 or so Maya peoples who have survived until our day occupy a world as vast as it is full of wonders.<sup>1</sup> Its signs and symbols are very diverse, although often quite close in their meanings, since the descriptions and analyses of morphology, habitats, customs, and attributes of real or marvelous animals, minor deities, and other supernatural beings are part of a taxonomy full of literal, allegorical, and moral meanings. Whether convergent or divergent, these signs and symbols are subjected to cultural reads that determine the way of looking at the world, domesticating it, and living with it.

Other reads, other voices, speak to entities that the Maya consider we share natural and supernatural spaces with; entities in many cases deeply rooted in Mesoamerica, which sometimes combine with the products of baroque curiosity and the “Christianization” of symbols that took

place during the Renaissance, to integrate a complex text that simultaneously writes in past, present, and future, and whose interpretation passes through a culturally determined read.

World-book, universe-text, which from millennia ago has not stopped being written and whose reading is different every time, since they are singular readings that involve reconfiguring the constellation of the memory, which demands reading it with new eyes, different from what eyes like our own can attempt, since they often overflow the containers where the West today deposits the memory, making a privilege of writing and dismissing other forms of registration that may be equally valuable and that, in fact, have been equally valuable in other eras.<sup>2</sup>

It is by no means strange that, even in different forms, the Maya go through their lives today paying attention to nature’s signs and advisories, bestowing meanings on the elements they are in continual contact with. The slightest variation, the most insignificant exception in the behav-

\* Director of the UNAM Institute of Philological Research; mhruz@gmail.com

ior of the nature around them, is an indication of an event, a change. Throughout their days, the Maya read the nature surrounding them, interpreting it with ancestral memory. But, they are not mere passive readers; they can elicit and establish a profound dialogue with it. They listen and speak, ask and offer, when they know that they are dealing with its gifts and reciprocal gifts. At times, however, they know that the intricate nature of the text requires a more experienced reader, and that is why they must resort to a specialist; while at other times, they limit themselves to waiting because they have learned from common knowledge that, in the face of some advisories, “nothing more can be done.” The only possible option is to accept that the time loaned to them is over, and it is time to return to the primal mother.

Until that moment arrives, the code of the social memory helps them interpret both the common and the extraordinary in day-to-day living. And the thing is, as you frequently hear in the countryside, “It’s not just that; it’s not just that.” Things do not happen without a reason. It is not by chance that a bird sings its portent of illness or death precisely in front of a given house, or that leads a coyote or a deer to cross the streets of the town in the middle of the day, carrying an often ill-fated message.

In fact, not even the scenery that we see when we move through the vast lands where these Maya peoples live is the same as what they see. Although they pass by us, we are not capable of reading the messages that certain plants bring with them, or perceive the vagabond skeletons like the Ch’ol *chechebak*, the Tojolobal *jimjim’echmal*, the “bony woman” of the Yucatán Peninsula, the *okinamá* heads that roll down the roads, or the legs that bleed on Yucatecan plazas like Ekmul’s.<sup>3</sup> Our eyes are blind to the serpents with wings or manes,<sup>4</sup> water dragons, the sirens of the lakes, or the “mothers of cacao,” who protect the precious almond of the mountain and Tabasco’s Chontalpa region.

And there are also celestial singularities. So, a Kaqchikel does not see a Milky Way in the heavens, a road of milk

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a profound dialogue with it.

spilling from the breast of the goddess Hera to nurse Hercules with, as the Greeks and Romans did, but rather a *Ru bey palama*, a road of the sea tortoise, associated with the track it leaves when it moves through the sand.<sup>5</sup> And a Tojolabal does not see in the firmament the “little eyes of Santa Lucía,” but rather a pair of “deer eyes”; and he also does not conceive of shooting stars, but rather the excrement of those shining beings who live on the stars and that, when it falls to earth, becomes obsidian, also called defecation of a star, or *k’oy kanal*.

Without us noticing, tiny imps, blacks with outsized penises, and formidable *tsuk* it, who have only one arm and one leg and lack anuses, move about, while in Tseltal lands wander the fearsome *lab*, the embodiment of Jesuits, religious, bishops’ deputies, and bishops hunting spirits to devour; and in the mountains the *wilikok* midgets meander with inverted feet. In the same way that the giant *ua’ay kot* walk along Yucatán’s walls—one foot on each, because they choose the parallel ones—, those same walls where lovers of tradition lay out food and offerings to tiny imps like the *aluxo’ob* and terrifying nocturnal personifications like the jaguars; those same walls where a *kakasbal* might lean, with his monstrous hair-covered body, his hundreds of feet and arms ending in crow talons, and monkey balls hanging in clusters.<sup>6</sup>

No matter how we try, we cannot perceive them. Even though our retinas have similar cones and rod cells, we are not culturally trained to see them; nor are our ears—no matter how hard we listen—capable of hearing and interpreting with the subtlety required the murmur produced by the leaden wings, bristling with small, razor-sharp slivers of flint of flesh-eating birds like the *Uay pop* or other voices of nature. Our touch cannot feel the texture of certain winds. How could we, without having been culturally educated, hear that “noise of the waters that run without making noise” or “run the [placid] waters in silence,” as the Tseltal language so exquisitely expresses the word *tzananet*?<sup>7</sup>

It is the exclusive privilege of the Maya to fully interpret the nature surrounding us; to make it comprehensible, domesticate it, read it, and propose different visions. Because landscape is clearly text susceptible of many readings; readings that, whether we know it or not, are done through a cultural present, pregnant with collective historical memory, which usually transmits the oral tradition, expressing personal experiences or communal myths

that can date back to creation itself, capable of manifesting themselves in dress, as shown by certain Maya *huipil* tops that feature planes of the cosmos, cycles of maize growth, or real or fantastic animals, or perpetuate themselves through ritual. Whether we say it or not, those rituals centered on maize, the sustenance of Man, forger of his flesh and architect of his bones, are at the same time the guardian of the spirit—it is not by chance that the Tseltal of Bachajón, Chiapas continue to leave an ear of corn next to a baby to prevent an evil being from stealing its soul. An authentic hierophany of the deity with which a mystical relationship existed and exists; that accompanies the individual from birth to grave, since some groups continue to cut their children's umbilical cord over an ear of corn and sow the child's first cornfield with the bloodstained kernels; and others place kernels or beverages made with the precious grain in the mouth of their dead. Or place on the breast of a dead mother an ear of corn for every child she leaves behind, so she will not miss them. . .

A grain of origin, linked to the divine as shown not only by mythology, but even by historical linguistics, since Maya texts from the colonial period like the *Chilam Balam* mention “divine grace,” even using the term in Spanish. This is, in effect, the “grace,” the evangelizers conceived as the gift of the deity, that makes it possible for the Christian to be fully Christian, that allows him, after death, to accede to blessedness. But, when the Maya texts speak of “grace,” they are referring euphemistically to maize. The theologians’ “grace” is an intangible, non-corporeal gift, a timeless well-being, personal, and out of this world; that of the Maya has another, tangible corporeal meaning: collective, daily, Earth-bound pleasure.

And even in the Great Beyond, the landscapes are different. Do the Tsotsil not speak of gardens where nursing babies suckle on the breasts hanging from a *ceiba* (a silk-cotton tree, the equivalent to the Nahuatl *Chichihualcuaauhco* and identical to the *ceiba* Landa described for the sixteenth-century Yucatecans), while the dead children of the Achi from Rabinal, metamorphosed into butterflies or hummingbirds, drink from the flowers? Do the Tseltal not affirm that in the sacred *ch'iibal* mountains, a parallel world where souls are watched over, nurseries of girlchild-souls are kept? Are not those caves in which those who sold their soul to the Owner of the Hills labor healing deer wounded by hunters with bad aim common in Maya

Today, a Tsotsil may narrate how Jesus Christ comes down out of a plane to visit men, while a Tseltal will describe the *ch'iibal* mountains as having not only cornfields, but also helicopters.

world views? And what of the mirror-towns that lie beneath the lakes of the Guatemalan West, watching over the dead of the lakeside communities?<sup>8</sup>

There are even places where our familiar order is reversed, and it is not men who govern, but who are judged. So, in the language of the Kaqchikel of Santa Catarina Palopó, “In the other world, the animals rule. Thus, like here on the Earth where men rule, there the animals do. In the other world, just like on the Earth, there are mayors, aldermen, city councilmen. The *xoch* [owl] is the police commissioner, and the other animals hold other posts.” This opinion was shared by Don Sebastián Ordóñez, an outstanding Mam Ixtahucan wise man (†), who spoke to me about an Animal Council that meets in the hills “every four or five days,” and is responsible for judging and punishing human beings who mistreat animals.

Given that the landscapes of the imaginary have memories—in fact, they *are* memory—the meaning of not a few messages is obvious: the adulterer, the gossip, the drunkard, the night-owl, he who hunts excessively or attacks young animals, or he who is irreverent or disrespectful all clearly know what to expect when this or that being reveals itself to them with their centuries-old *exempla*. Dealing with the possible consequences, however, may require specialized help. Not just any human is capable of holding the necessary dialogue; direct exchange with the supernatural demands not only strength, diplomacy, and aplomb, but also a special state of grace that the very deities bestow. This specialist, called a *chimán*, *balbastix*, *h-men*, *chichqajau*, *aj'quin*, and a long etcetera, will then resort to his own forms of memory.

Forms that are not even immutable. Some indigenous writings from the colonial era tell us about how the Maya peoples, descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, left Babilonia; how their languages were born at the same time that the Tower of Babel was collapsing; how their leader, Balám Quitzé, opened the waters of the great sea with his staff; and, in *Chilam Balam*, conflate the Antichrist

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with the Spaniard, “[who] sucked dry the poor Indian.” Today, a Tsotsil may narrate how Jesus Christ comes down out of a plane to visit men, while a Tselal will describe the *ch'iibal* mountains (the parallel world mentioned above) as having not only cornfields, but also helicopters, computers, and televisions, and a Maya from Campeche will identify the Antichrist with the plumed serpent.<sup>9</sup>

Disturbingly up to date, the Maya live amidst a continual updating that cannot allow anyone to ignore the cybernetic changes or escape the buffeting of globalization. Does not a Quiché association use video-cameras and laptops to log the memories of their elders? Have the Maya from Quintana Roo not changed the objects linked to the cornfields and housework that were given to infants during the *hetz mek* ceremony, replacing them with English dictionaries and small plastic computers, without doubt more useful for their children's future work lives that seem inevitably tied to the service sector in Cancún and the Maya Riviera? Have not certain Protestant Maya from southern Yucatán opted to ask their pastors for a ceremony equivalent to the ancient *ch'a cháak*, a supplication for rain, next to an irrigation pump. Tradition and modernity, telescoped.


Determined to remain, the Maya peoples are putting their trust in re-creating their memory, abandoning, rearranging, mystifying, and even inventing meanings and signifiers, with the dual intent of invoking what has been forgotten and continually updating their own and others' versions of the past, in order to make them not a mere recounting of memory, but an authentic program for the future. ■■■


## Notes


- 1 Located mainly in what are now Belize, Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala, but also, due to emigration, in growing numbers in the United States and Canada.
- 2 Jean-Claude Schmitt speaks of this in *La raison des gestes dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), as does Simon Schama in *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), among various others.
- 3 Terry Rugeley, *De milagros y sabios. Religión y culturas populares en el suroeste de México, 1800-1876* (Mérida, Yucatán: UADY, 2012), p. 79.
- 4 Roldán Peniche Barrera, *El libro de los fantasmas mayas* (Mérida, Yucatán: Maldonado Editores, 1992), pp. 100-101.
- 5 René Acuña, ed., Fray Tomás de Coto, *Thesaurus verborum. Vocabulario de la lengua cakchiquel vel guatemalteca* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1983), p. 223. Certain colonial sources identify the tortoises called *Yax Coc Ah Mut* or *Yax Cocay Mut* as Gemini.
- 6 Peniche, op. cit., p. 61.
- 7 Domingo de Ara, *Vocabulario de lengua tzendal según el orden de Copanabastla*, Mario Humberto Ruz, ed. (Mexico City: UNAM, IIFL, 1986), p. 395.
- 8 Perla Petrich, “Tipología nocturna en los pueblos de Atitlán,” in Alain Breton, A. Monod, and Mario Humberto Ruz, eds., *Los espacios mayas: representaciones, usos, creencias* (Mexico City: UNAM, IIFL, and CNRS, 2002).
- 9 Pedro Pitarch, *Ch'ulel: una etnografía de las almas tzeltales* (Mexico City: FCE, 1996); Manuel Gutiérrez Estévez, “De la conversación yucateca al diálogo cristiano y viceversa,” in *De palabra y obra en el Nuevo Mundo* (Madrid: Siglo XXI de España, 1995) pp. 171-234.


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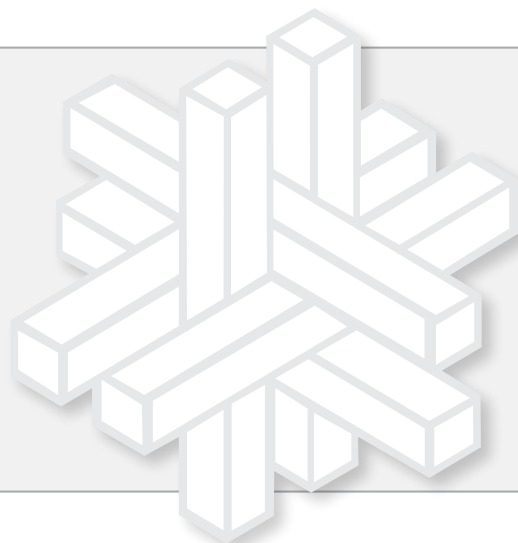
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Diego Ignacio Bugada Bernal\*

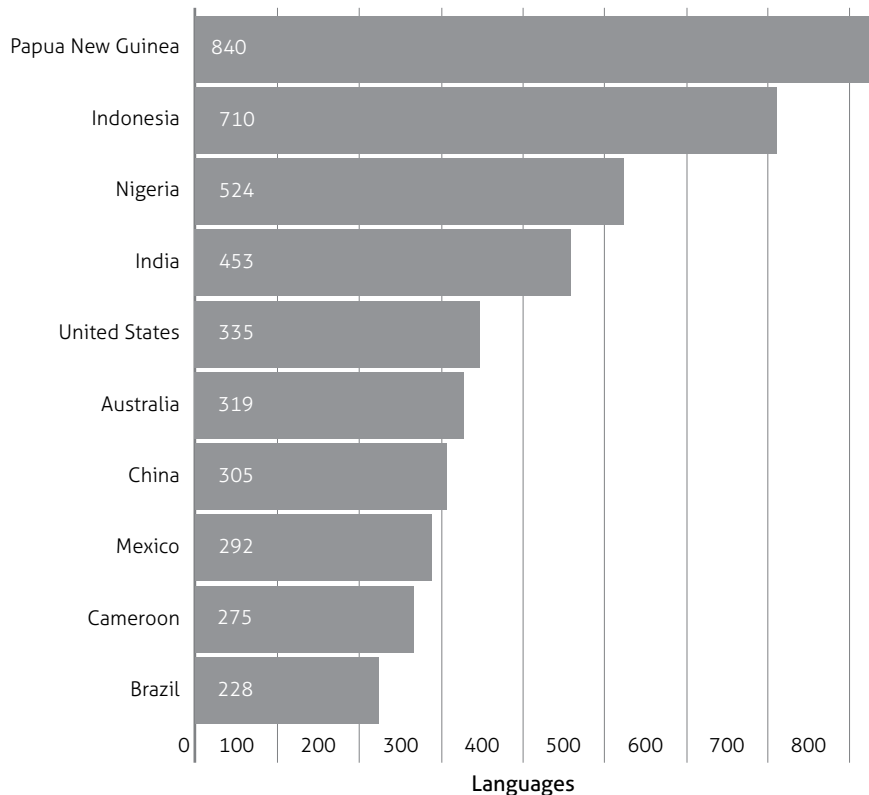
# Mexico's Indigenous Languages An Overview

A language is a world view, a way of understanding and interpreting the world, and, with other dimensions of human communication, makes up an episteme, or a mentality.

The great number of indigenous languages spoken in Mexico also denotes the country's very broad cultural diversity, because each language expresses a culture with its mentality, customs, art, construction of values, and thinking. According to United Nations data, the 69 exist-

ing languages nationwide (68 indigenous languages and Spanish) recognized in Article 4 of the General Law on Indigenous Peoples' Linguistic Rights (LGDLP), make ours one of the planet's most multi-cultural countries (see Graph 1). What is more, the number of linguistic variations and dialects is even greater: it comes to 364, according to the *Catálogo de lenguas indígenas nacionales* (Catalogue of National Indigenous Languages).<sup>1</sup>

GRAPH 1. TOP 10 COUNTRIES WITH THE MOST LANGUAGES, 2019



Source: *Ethnologue. Languages of the World* magazine, en [https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia\\_INDIFINAL\\_08082016.pdf](https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia_INDIFINAL_08082016.pdf).

\* Editor at CISAN; diebb@unam.mx.

Unfortunately this cultural and linguistic wealth is at risk. This is partially due to successive governments' historically failed public policies with regard to indigenous peoples. But also at fault are erroneous paternalistic approaches centered on preserving indigenous languages as though they were museum pieces rather than the creation of conditions for the first peoples to participate in national development without renouncing their cultures, customs, and convictions.

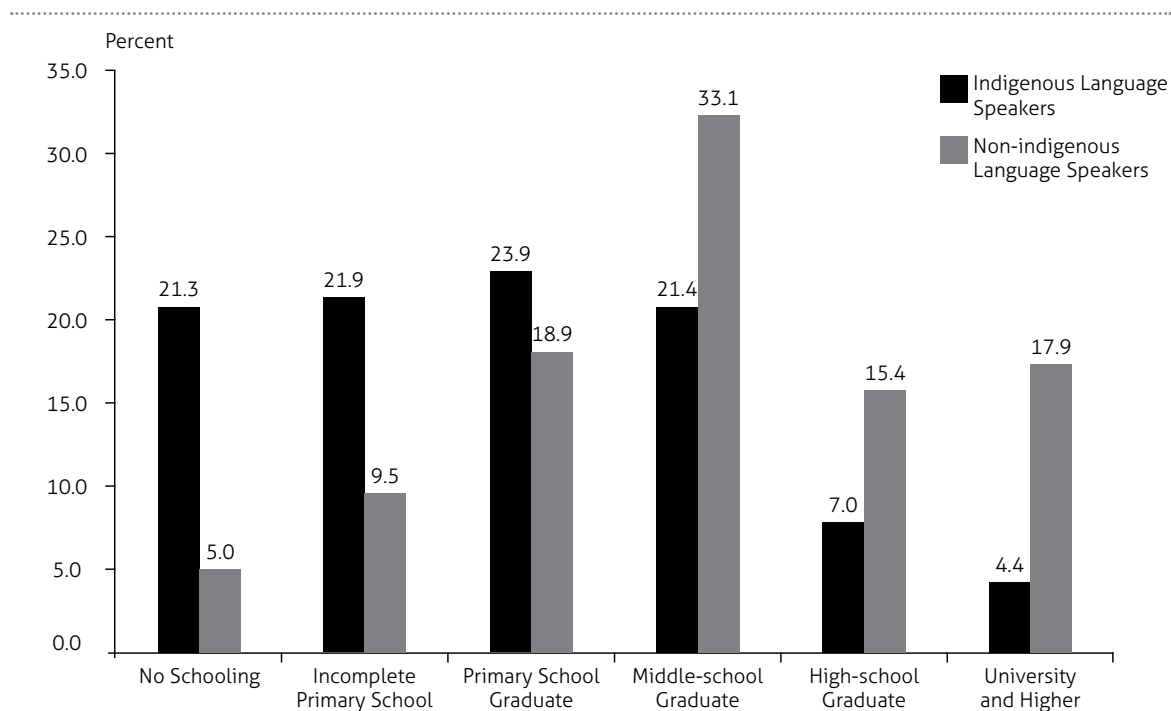
Demographic data from the National Institute for Statistics and Geography (INEGI) indicate that more than 25.6 million persons in Mexico self-identify as indigenous. Of those, approximately 7.4 million still speak an indigenous language: 6 138 000 are bilingual and 810 505 are multilingual.<sup>2</sup> Among the indigenous-language speakers, socio-demographic statistics point to their social marginalization and, on occasion, even discrimination. Some examples: if compared to mono-lingual Spanish speakers, their formal educational levels are much lower (see

It is necessary to allow the indigenous peoples themselves and their independent, non-government-influenced organizations play more of a leading role in defining the public strategies that affect their interests.

Graphs 2 and 3); the fertility rate is much higher (with 3.1 children per woman and only 2.2 children among non-indigenous-language speakers) (see Graph 4); and they are much more prone to be living in poverty or extreme poverty, or having a clear disadvantage *vis-à-vis* job opportunities or access to basic services and material well-being than monolingual Spanish speakers (Figures 1 and 2).

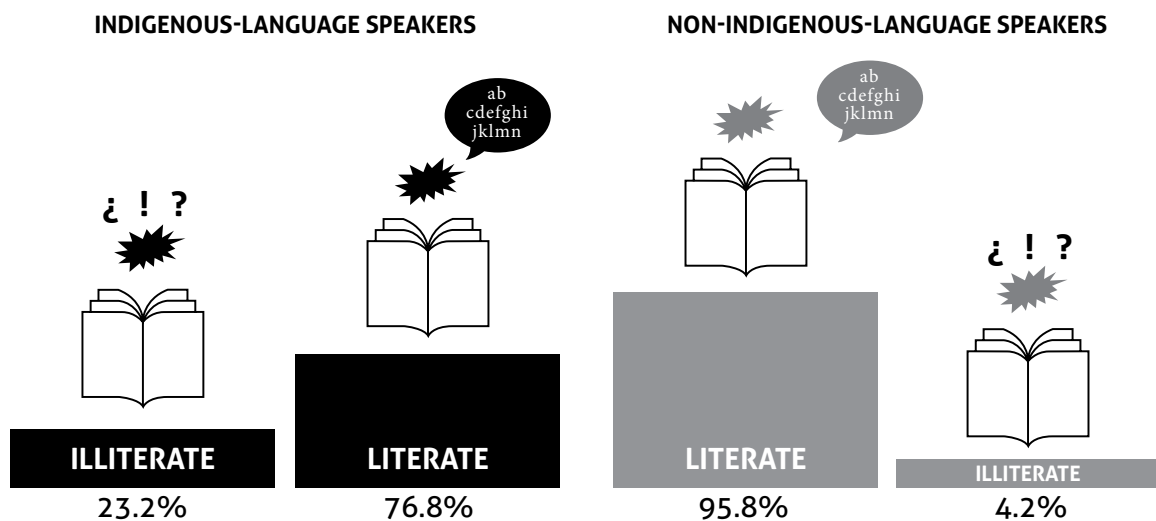
Their marginality and often frank exclusion have also led in practice to the new generations of indigenous-language speakers being smaller and smaller; many of the

GRAPH 2  
PERCENT OF THE POPULATION 15 AND OLDER BY LEVEL OF SCHOOLING AND LANGUAGE SPOKEN (2015)



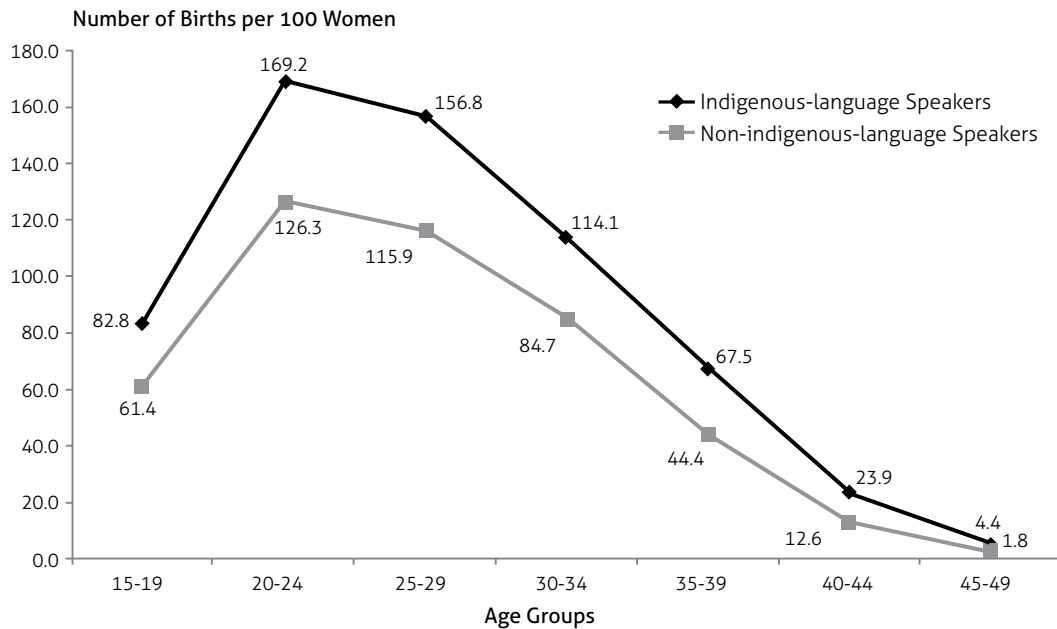
Source: Estimates by Conapo (Consejo Nacional de Población), based on Encuesta Intercensal 2015, [https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia\\_INDI\\_FINAL\\_08082016.pdf](https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia_INDI_FINAL_08082016.pdf).

GRAPH 3  
LITERACY



Source: INEGI (2015), <http://cuentame.inegi.org.mx/impression/poblacion/lindigena.asp>.

GRAPH 4  
FERTILITY RATES FOR INDIGENOUS-LANGUAGE SPEAKERS  
AND NON-SPEAKERS (2015)



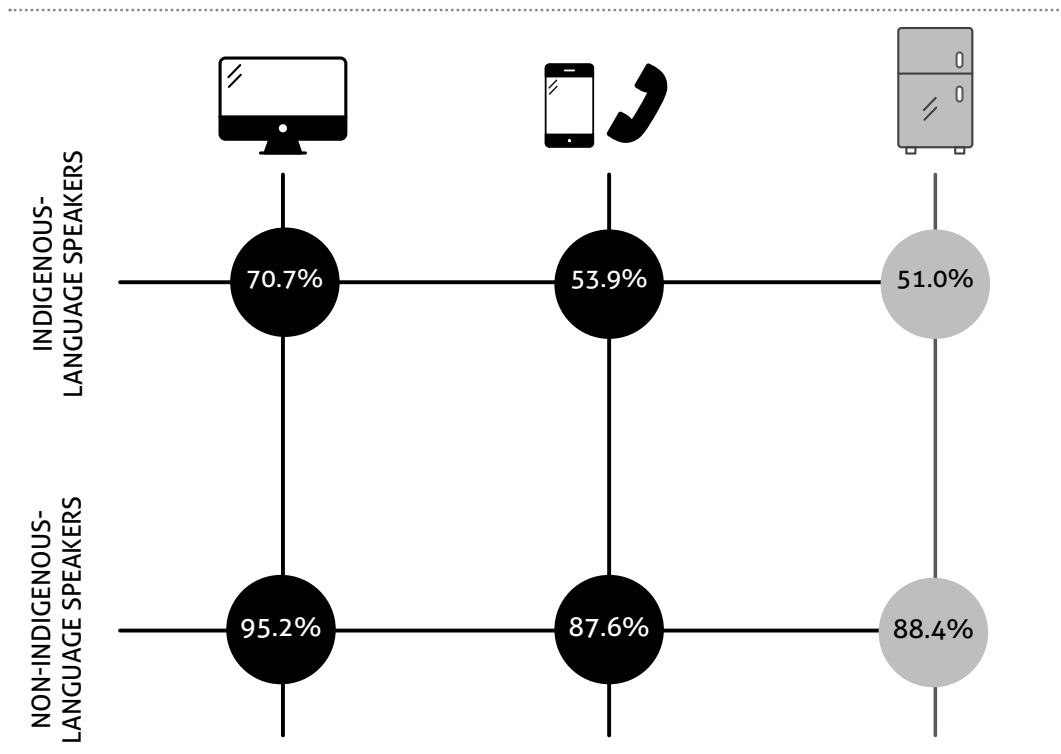
Source: Estimates by Conapo (Consejo Nacional de Población), based on Encuesta Intercensal 2015, [https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia\\_INDI\\_FINAL\\_08082016.pdf](https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia_INDI_FINAL_08082016.pdf).

FIGURE 1  
RATE OF PARTICIPATION IN THE ECONOMY



Source: Estimates by Conapo (Consejo Nacional de Población), based on Encuesta Intercensal 2015, [https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia\\_INDI\\_FINAL\\_08082016.pdf](https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia_INDI_FINAL_08082016.pdf).

FIGURE 2  
ACCESS TO SERVICES



Source: Estimates by Conapo (Consejo Nacional de Población), based on Encuesta Intercensal 2015, [https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia\\_INDI\\_FINAL\\_08082016.pdf](https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia_INDI_FINAL_08082016.pdf).

languages are at grave risk of disappearing, and with them, entire cultures. Others have already disappeared (see Table 1); and few—or practically none—have been able to maintain a proportional number of speakers in recent years. The three most widely disseminated languages are

Náhuatl, Mayan, and Tseltal (Table 2). The geographical areas with the largest number of speakers are in Mexico's South and Southeast, followed by Central Mexico, Veracruz, and Michoacán (Map 1). The states with the largest population of indigenous-language speakers are Oaxaca,

TABLE 1  
DEAD LANGUAGES OF MEXICO

Extinct Indigenous Languages in Mexico

Language	Last Spoken
Ópata	2000
Eudeve	1940
Lipán	1970
Pochutec	1980
Tubar	1940
Piro	XIX Century
Cuitlatec	1960

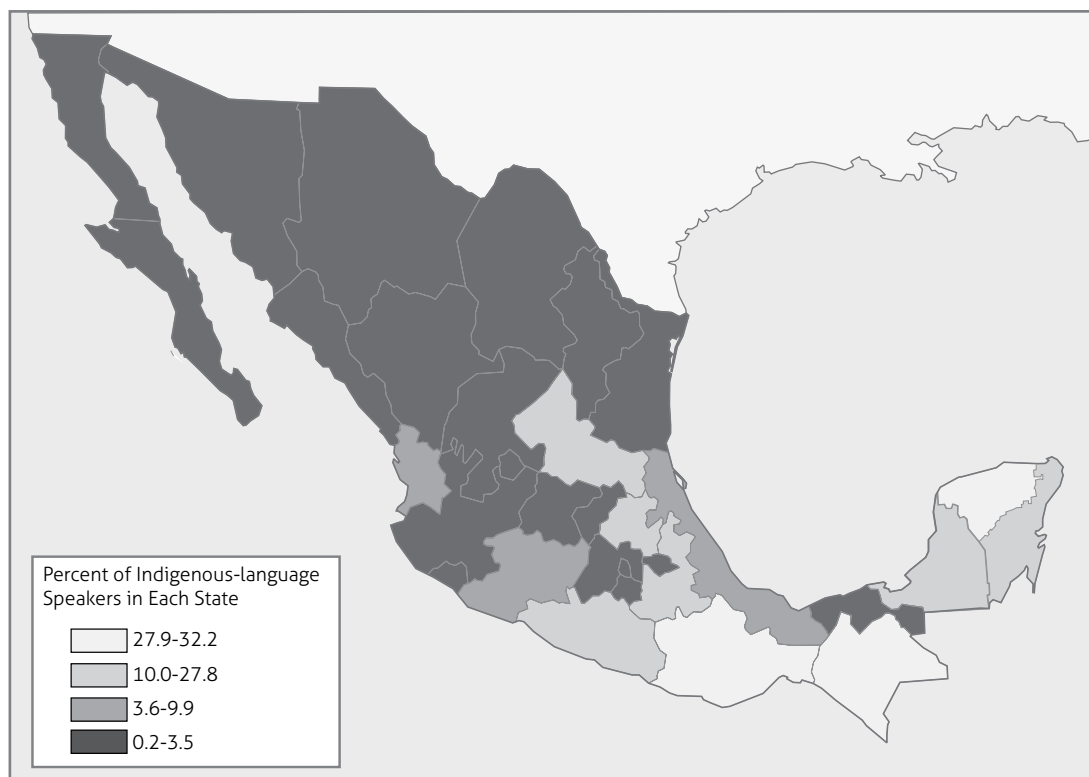
Source: INEGI (2015), <http://cuentame.inegi.org.mx/impresion/poblacion/lindigena.asp>.

TABLE 2 INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES MOST SPOKEN IN MEXICO

• Náhuatl	1 275 620 speakers (23.4%)
• Mayan	859 000 607 (11.6%)
• Tseltal	556 720 (7.5%)
• Mixtec	517 665 (7.0%)
• Tzotzil	487 898 (6.6%)
• Zapotec	479 474 (6.5%)
• Otomí	307 928 (4.2%)
• Totonac	267 635 (3.6%)
• Chol	251 809 (3.4%) and,
• Mazatec	239 078 (3.2%)

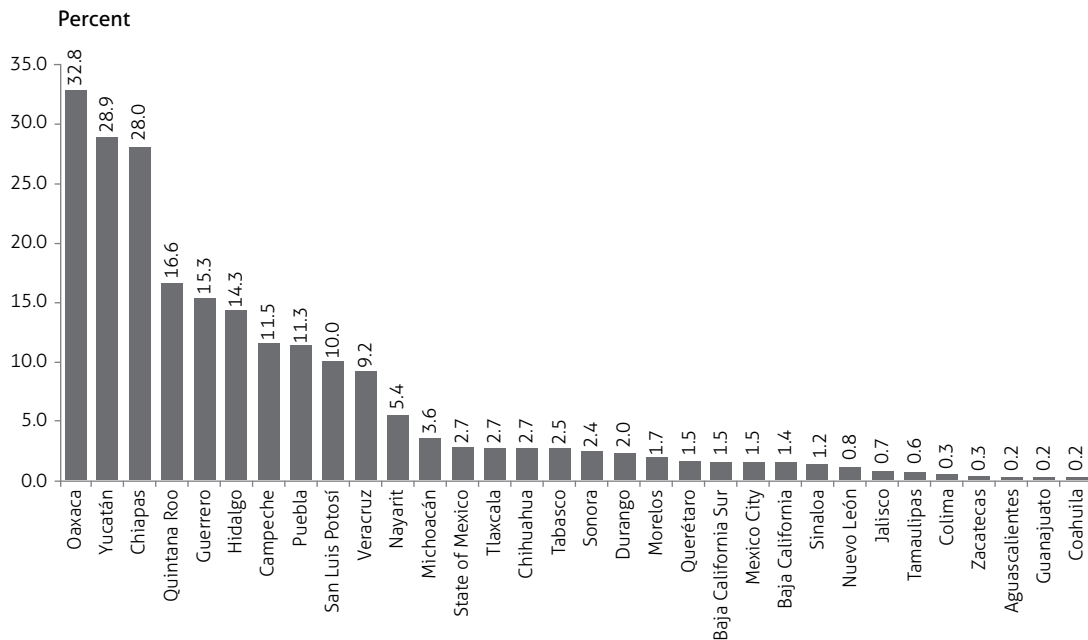
Source: Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas (Inali), [https://site.inali.gob.mx/Micrositios/flin\\_2018/informacion.html](https://site.inali.gob.mx/Micrositios/flin_2018/informacion.html).

MAP 1  
PERCENT OF POPULATION AGE 5 AND OVER THAT SPEAKS AN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE (BY STATE)



Source: Estimates by Conapo (Consejo Nacional de Población), based on Encuesta Intercensal 2015, [https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia\\_INDI\\_FINAL\\_08082016.pdf](https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia_INDI_FINAL_08082016.pdf).

GRAPH 5  
PERCENT OF THE POPULATION THAT SPEAKS AN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE (BY STATE)



**Source:** Estimates by Conapo (Consejo Nacional de Población), based on Encuesta Intercensal 2015, [https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia\\_INDI\\_FINAL\\_08082016.pdf](https://www.gob.mx/cms/uploads/attachment/file/121653/Infografia_INDI_FINAL_08082016.pdf).

The great number of indigenous languages spoken in Mexico also denotes the country's very broad cultural diversity, because each language expresses a culture with its mentality, customs, art, construction of values, and thinking.

Yucatán, and Chiapas, in that order, which together concentrate 42.6 percent of the total (Graph 5).

The National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI) and the Inali have made great efforts not only to support the preservation and development of indigenous cultures and languages, but also to create awareness among the general public of the need to create conditions that will guarantee them fully equal rights and obligations. However, socio-demographic indicators show that government actions and public policies have not been enough. Perhaps it is also necessary to allow the indigenous peoples themselves and their independent, non-government-influenced organizations, such as the National Coordinating Committee of Indigenous Peoples or the Chiapas autonomous Zapatista communities, to play more of a leading role in defining the public strategies that affect their interests. This would

presuppose a change in paradigms, moving away from a vision that seeks to integrate, "assimilate" the communities into national development, implying that they generally take on board the language and culture of mainstream society, and toward a multicultural perspective that, rather, promotes or fosters peaceful and mutually enriching co-existence among all the country's groups and cultural world views. ■■■

## Notes

- 1 The catalogue indicates the language, its variations, and the places it is spoken; the names of the languages are listed in their original phonetic form and in Spanish; [https://site.inali.gob.mx/pdf/catalogo\\_lenguas\\_indigenas.pdf](https://site.inali.gob.mx/pdf/catalogo_lenguas_indigenas.pdf).
- 2 Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas (Inali), Sections "Datos duros" and "Lenguas más habladas," [https://site.inali.gob.mx/Mi\\_crositios/flin\\_2018/informacion.html](https://site.inali.gob.mx/Mi_crositios/flin_2018/informacion.html).

Claudia Lucotti\*  
 María Antonieta Rosas Rodríguez\*\*

## *Meridian 105°:* Voices (Found) In Translation<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

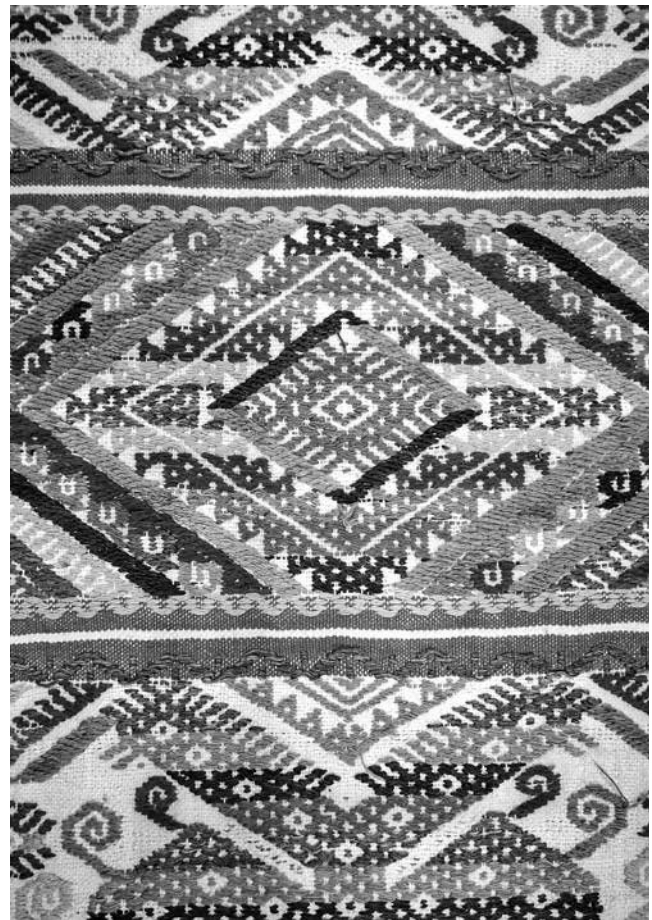
Implicit in the concept of translation is the supposition that the goal of the act itself is to facilitate the meeting of different linguistic cultures. The truth, however, is that every translated text reflects not only communicational intentions, but also the objectives of whoever commissions or carries out the translation. Thus, the bodies of translated literature implicitly represent the extra-textual factors that motivated the translation of this or that text and the agents involved in the process. This means that we can consider translated literature a bibliographical category or, in our case, a map of the different kinds of tensions underlying the decision to translate this text or the other.

### Texts and Voices

The origins of the *Meridian 105°* project date back to 2004, when a group of poets and academics decided to illustrate through translation the convergence of some of the

\* Professor at the UNAM School of Philosophy and Letters College of Modern Letters, and coordinator of the Margaret Atwood-Gabrielle Roy Canadian Studies Chair; claudialucotti@gmail.com.

\*\* Professor at the UNAM School of Philosophy and Letters College of Modern Letters; antonietarr@gmail.com.



R. Schneider

Chinantec *huipil* from San Felipe Usila, Oaxaca, Mexico. Cotton woven and brocaded on a back-strap loom. This piece was made for the Remigio Mestas workshop.

underlying cultural, intellectual, ideological, historic, economic, and geopolitical factors in the dissemination of women's poetry in indigenous languages in Mexico and Canada. That year, the Margaret Atwood-Gabrielle Roy Chair, established by the UNAM and the Canadian embassy in Mexico, organized a conference of women's poetry in Cree, Mayan, and Zapotec with indigenous women poets from both countries. At the end of the conference, the participants noted the need to disseminate the poets' work more collectively and that spaces did not exist for doing that. That is why establishing a network of contacts to develop a way of disseminating indigenous women's poetry would be the project's central objective in its first stage.

Implicit in the concept of translation is the supposition that the goal of the act itself is to facilitate the meeting of different linguistic cultures.

The project's (academic) coordinators asked the poets to each send a brief poem written in their indigenous language, accompanied by its translation to a "bridge" language (Spanish, English, or French). Parallel to this, they also more or less successfully sought out writers in other indigenous languages: in the case of Canada, poets in Haida or other variations of Cree; in the case of Mexico, in Náhuatl, Purépecha, Tzotzil, Tseltal, Wixárika (Huichol), and Zoque.

Once the poems had been gathered, together with their first translation, the next step was to translate them, using that first translation, to the other "bridge" languages. Then, the "bridge translations" were sent to each of the poets so they, or someone else from their linguistic community, ideally a woman, could translate them to the language of their original culture.

This was how the anthology began to be "knitted together": we began thinking about the format for publication, since the overlapping of the languages and voices showed us that each poem should be read accompanied simultaneously by all its translations. Given that, rather than hiding or eliminating the differences among the languages and cultures, what we wanted was to highlight and create a dialogue through these women's voices and experiences between the cultural and linguistic diversity of North America in ways that would question the current borders and political divisions imposed by colonial and modern projects, with their often painful consequences. We also did not want the "bridge" languages to occupy center stage in the project, as is usually the case in the publication of translated indigenous literature. The issue of the format went, then, from being an editorial complication given the multi-lingual nature of the project to becoming an essential part of it. However, it was at that point that the project came to an impasse.

### *Meridian 105° Is Born*

It was in 2012 when the project took on new life, then under the name *Meridian 105°*, referring to the meridian

that traverses North America and represents for us an axis of textual union between Canada and Mexico.

The inspiration behind this second phase was the new digital publication platform formats, which are not constrained by orthodox publication models or by the profit margins determined by the hegemonic cultural consumption habits. We found that the electronic format and the open nature of the Internet were ideal for our purpose. And that is why we finally decided on this form of publication and not a printed version.

Since it does not use traditional publications in which everything circulates translated into a European language, publication online allowed us to represent not only the linguistic diversity that continues to exist in our continent, but also the possible connections and missed connections inherent in the poets' multilingual daily lives. That is why the final design of the book of poems, the central part of the anthology, offers a novel way of reading that blurs the lines between the original and the translation.

In the first place, the table of contents allows the reader to choose what language(s) he/she wants to read the poem in. This choice is not conditioned by hidden differences of power, as happens in printed editions. In the second place, the page on which each poem is read is designed to allow the reader to select two languages to read in simultaneously and in the combination that he/she prefers. This is a reading experience that, for us, reproduces the poets'—and indigenous people's— daily multilingual experience. In addition, this exercise also makes it possible to establish new dialogues between languages and cultures, since it presents the possibility of creating connections without having to necessarily pass through European linguistic and cultural filters. In that sense, the only criteria used to list the reading (language) options was alphabetical.

Thus, for example, if we decide to read Marilyn Dumont's poem "Recovery," the possible reading options allow us to combine Cree, Spanish, English, Tseltal, Wixárika, and Zoque, with translations pending for the rest of the languages present in the book.



<b>M̄inowāyaw</b> (Cree)	<b>Recuperación</b> (Spanish)	<b>Recovery</b> (English)	<b>Cha'stael</b> (Tsel̄tal)
âhpo etikwe wâwīyak t̄imew kīyohci tita p̄htikwēyin	puede ser muy profundo para que entres ahora	it may be too deep for you to enter now	Stak' najt' yu'un x-ochat yo'tik
mekwac kakiyah p̄htikwan	puedes entrar lentamente sabes	you can enter slowly you know	stak' k'un k'un x-ochat ya'bal ana'
p̄yâhtik ki kiskēyhten	entras respirando profundo y cuando exhalas	you enter by breathing in deep and when	entras respirando profundo sok k'alal alok'es
mahkatahtamowinihk kitsi p̄htikwan	estás adentro un árbol ramifica	you breathe out	ik'
ekwa yehyeyini ki p̄htawenen	tus palmas que recorren el interior de los	you 're inside	ayat ta yutil xlok' sk'ab pejt' te'
esi wâtīhkwanowit m̄iytos eh sowinis	troncos en brazos que buscan	a tree branching out your palms running up	tus palmas que recorren yot'an xch'ujt'
kâhtaman w̄ihpâhtikohk	el aire de la primavera y la esperanza,	the inside of trunks	te'etik ta k'abiletik te sleik
îsko esi tep̄i watīhkwanowik tehke isih	dedos extendidos que señalan	into limbs that reach for spring air and hope,	yik'al yuinal nichimetik sok bina yich maliyel,
m̄iyoskamihk ekwa pākoseymowinihk	hojas briznas de hierba, ahora dedos que	spreading fingers that point into leaves	sin' k'abiletik yak'ik ilel yabenaletik,
eh t̄aso iyhkcihce	recorren tierra	blades of grass, now fingers	sts'ujul wamaletik, yo'tik k'abiletik te
inskêstamihk n̄ipiyah	negra húmeda	running through black	ya st'un lum
maskosīsiyah mekwac	comestible	moist	ijk'
yayīnkatew eh kaskitēwak	que inhalas y empiezas a nacer	edible earth	tep' ajch'em stak' lajinel
eh m̄iymāwak eh om̄iycowinowik asiskiy		that you inhale and enter birth	te asik' jich xkajat ta bejk'ajel
eh ôtâtâhtaman ekwa ôcihc̄i n̄ihtâwikihk			
<b>Beverly Crier and Jerry Saddleback, Trans.</b>	<b>Liliana Andrade Llanas, Trans.</b>		<b>Adriana López Sántiz, Trans.</b>

### The *Meridian 105°* Anthology

In this first stage, *Meridian 105°* included seven Mexican poets: Briceida Cuevas Cob (Maya), Adriana López Sántiz (Tsel̄tal), Enriqueta Lúnez (Tzotzil), Angélica Ortiz López (Wixárika), Elizabeth Pérez (Purépecha), Irma Pineda (Zapotec), and Mikeas Sánchez (Zoque). Four Canadians also participated: Marilyn Dumont (Cree), Louise Halfe (Cree), Rita Mestokosho (Innu), and Buffy Sainte-Marie (Cree).

Most of the poems speak of love (Angélica Ortiz, “Mi Nausi”; Irma Pineda, “Acaso un día”); birth (Briceida Cuevas, “Tu madre”); death (Enriqueta Lúnez, “Sobre el en-

tierro”); family and tradition (Adriana López, “Presencias”); daily activities (Elizabeth Pérez “Bordado”; and Mikeas Sánchez, “VIII”); and nature (Marilyn Dumont and Rita Mestokosho). Another characteristic is that they operate within atemporal frameworks, with a tone of recognition valuing the feminine situation or experience they describe. Finally, the voices that emanate from these poems tend to not be heavily marked by individual specificities; rather, they are voices that speak in the name of a collective of women.

One example of this is Briceida Cuevas's poem "A na":

<p><b>A na'</b> (Mayan)</p>	<p><b>Tu madre</b> (Spanish)</p>
<p>A na'e kiimachaj u yol. Ichil u jach taamil u yich p'och u yaamaj. X-alansaj tu ya'laj ti' leti' ko'lel ken u siis le ka tu paaktaj ch'uyukbalech tu paak' xuuxil u chun u nak' a na'. A na'e kiimachaj u yol. Ti' u jach popok' look u dziibol pepekxik'naj u ch'eneknakil.</p> <p>Leti'e bin jel kaa' s'ijik kun s'ijikech.</p>	<p>Tu madre se puso contenta. Desde lo más profundo de sus ojos brotó su amor. La comadrona le dijo que serías hembra cuando te vio colgante del viento panal de avispa de tu madre. Tu madre se alegró. En el borbotello de su añoranza Revoloteó su silencio.</p> <p>Ella renacería con tu nacimiento.</p> <p><b>Briceida Cuevas Cob, Trans.</b></p>
<p><b>Your Mother</b> (English)</p>	<p><b>Tshikau</b> (Innu)</p>
<p>Your mother was glad. From the depth of her eyes Her love arose. The midwife told her you'd be a female When she saw you hang from your mother's wind-of-wasp- honeycomb. Your mother was pleased. In the bubbling of her yearning Her silence fluttered.</p> <p>She would be reborn with your birth.</p> <p><b>Liliana Andrade Llanas, Trans.</b></p>	<p>Mishta minuenitam tshikau Niuapatamuan uminuenitamun nete tahmit ussishukut U shatshitun utshipanu tahmit. Minanipan tshetshi ishkueu Kauapimuk nete peshish uteit Minuenitamupan tshikau Kie matenitakuanipan ishpish uakatshinuk Nash apu tshiekuanu petakuanit</p> <p>Kie utshimashkueuipan ka inniuin...</p> <p><b>Rita Mestokosho, Trans.</b></p>

However, we also find exceptions to this generalization. In the case of Buffy Sainte-Marie, for example, her poem/song "Universal Soldier" is an anti-war text, very current today, that does not address a women's issue. Louise Halfe's poem "So Sorry," which we include here, presents a Cree woman's critical, contemporary vision, with certain touches of black humor, of the role the Catholic Church played in colonizing Canada (see next page).

All this shows that, while certain common trends exist, we cannot —nor should we— say anything definitive in that vein, since these women explore their experiences anchored in their specific day-to-day realities, where women's indigenous identity is neither monolithic nor unchanging. Here, we also must clarify that we make many of our observations from the viewpoint of an academia marked by a world view that does not always share or profoundly understand much of what these poets are of-

We can consider translated literature a bibliographical category or, in our case, a map of the different kinds of tensions underlying the decision to translate this text or the other.

fering us. This can even give rise to putting a priority on stereotyped visions of what is understood by identity and indigenous women's experience.

In addition to all of the above, we have the fact that our contact is made through translations.

We must not forget that the poems by Mexican poets were translated into Spanish by the authors themselves, since in Mexico, the translation of indigenous language texts, above all literature, is still in development. This need to translate your own work often means that the poets write their poems thinking in advance of a later transla-

"So Sorry" (English)	"¡Qué pena!" (Spanish)
the pope said i'm sorry i sent a useless sack of scalped potatoes.	el papa dijo lamento haber enviado un inútil costal de costosas papas.
he said indian agents would give daddy a roll of twine, a box of shells and whisky. the spirits crawled inside my daddy and never left.	dijo que representantes indios le darían a papá un rollo de mecate, una caja con cáscaras y whisky. los espíritus se metieron poco a poco en mi padre y nunca se fueron.
he sent blankets and my babies died. he sent wooden sticks with a dead man to hang around my neck.	envió cobijas y mis bebés murieron. envió palitos de madera con un hombre muerto para que colgara de mi cuello.
he said if i prayed to you, geezus, ate your body, drank your blood, threw out my bannock, lived on my knees counting stones,	dijo que si te rezaba, gezús, si comía tu cuerpo, si bebía tu sangre, si tiraba mi pan, si vivía arrodillada contando piedras,
i'd never be without my family.	nunca me quedaría sin mi familia.
	<b>Liliana Andrade Llanas, Trans.</b>

*Meridian 105°* illustrates the convergence of some of the underlying cultural, intellectual, ideological, historic, economic, and geopolitical factors in the dissemination of women's poetry in indigenous languages in Mexico and Canada.

tion into a Spanish marked by culturally very specific poetic conceptions and conventions that are very different from their own, although that does not detract from the importance of the careful inter-linguistic effort they make and their reflections about the process. In this sense, we should underline the text by Zapotec poet Irma Pineda, "La amorosa traducción" (The Loving Translation), which speaks to the translator's constant concern to uncover the truth of the Other enclosed in a poem and to transfer it to a new text despite cultural and linguistic differences.

The case of Canada is even more complex since many of the poets, while they identify as indigenous, to differing degrees—and some completely— have lost their knowledge and mastery of their language. As a result, only Rita Mestokosho sent her version in Innu. The others had to seek out translators to enrich the project with their translations and comments, which was by no means easy.

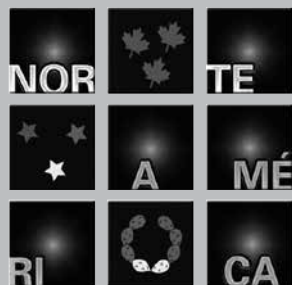
### Conclusion

In Mexico and Canada, contemporary indigenous literature has scant presence in each country's publishing industry. We think this is a reflection of the historic silencing of the indigenous peoples who produce it. Thus, the unusual characteristics of the *Meridian 105°* electronic anthology makes it an attempt to find those lost voices by opening up a novel space for contact and dialogue among poets, translators, and academics. In turn, this made the need to have more and more new ways of relating to each other increasingly evident and urgent.

These new forms, by reading translations accompanied by informed, careful reflections, allow us to develop the skills that promote the meeting and understanding of the many voices that inhabit our world today. This is why we are working on a second volume that will contain women's texts in other indigenous languages. The "virtual" nature of the anthology makes it possible for it to turn into a continual literary exercise in which more and more North American women and their voices can be present, above all indigenous women, in an affirmative, interconnected way and in a plural, open process. ■■

### Notes

1 *Meridiano 105°* is available at <http://105grados.filos.unam.mx/>. Also see C. Lucotti and M. A. Rosas, "Meridiano 105°: An E-Anthology of Women Poets in Mexican and Canadian Indigenous Languages," in L. von Flotow and F. Farahzad, eds., *Translating Women. Different Voices and New Horizons* (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 194-208.



# NORTEAMÉRICA ACADEMIC JOURNAL OF CISAN-UNAM

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CISAN Centro de Investigaciones sobre América del Norte  
(Center for Research on North America), UNAM

Av. Universidad 3000, Torre II de Humanidades,  
piso 9 Ciudad Universitaria, Coyoacán, 04510,  
Ciudad de México.

Información general: [namerica@unam.mx](mailto:namerica@unam.mx)  
<http://www.revistanorteamerica.unam.mx>

VENTAS [voicesmx@unam.mx](mailto:voicesmx@unam.mx)  
Telephone (011 5255) 5623 0308 y 5623 0281  
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Oscar Mendoza

Tonana\*

## Song in First People's Languages, Beyond Stereotypes<sup>1</sup>

There are many ways of getting to know a country, and in my case, music is what has let me dive into diverse, thrilling territories. I am a singer who has constructed her voice with the pulse of Mexico, perceptible through its sounds, its instruments, its rhythms, its ancestral languages, and its poetry. I am interested in the songs that speak of landscapes, the people, the world views, involving the essence of the world of feelings, more than logical explanations; the ones that deal with the mystery transmitted day-to-day through rituals since ancient times: a murmur, a song to our animals, to a sick heart, or in the face of an imminent farewell.

My passion has been to put poetry to music or sing what others sing, to delve into their hearts with my voice.

Singing unveils my inner world. The very fact of sharing it is, perhaps, one of the most beautiful offerings that can be made. Composing has also been another important

activity to satisfy my need to communicate, something I always seek, because I think that we are children of our time, and it is fundamental to transmit it and preserve it.

The musical voyage that I have built demonstrates the eclecticism of this earth that trapped me, thanks, in great part, to musicologist César Tort, who taught me the languages of the indigenous peoples through their songs, in the classrooms of Mexico City's National Conservatory of Music, when I was nine years old. Those words have turned into an itinerary that reveals the cultural diversity, not only of Mexico, but of many other countries.

Another of my delights has been the re-creation of the paths of musical expression enriched with multiple possibilities of sounds from today's world. That is how I have been able to bring together elements from Mexico's legendary indigenous cultural heritage and Western genres, which have contributed to the construction of my country's music. I have done that by singing in different languages: Tzotzil, Papotec, Náhuatl, and Totonac.

\* A new spirit in Mexican traditional music; tonana@tonana.com.



Singers, poets, and writers in indigenous languages must be preserved as some of the world's greatest treasures. The face of our languages cannot fade. But this effort will not be possible without a change in paradigms.

Music is one of the most powerful roads on which to enjoy this voyage of sound nourished by our ancestral history, but also by the transformations down through the years.

I would like to underline that my repertoire in indigenous languages has given me great freedom in several senses, more than songs written in Spanish: it invites me to imagine more deeply and be more precise when I sing them, because a language that is not understood by most people forces the instrumental musical language and the singer's performance to be richer and more transparent.

I have had the good fortune to work with a talented group of musicians, to whom I owe to a great extent the success of this very special effort. We have achieved almost complete freedom in creation, interpretation, and execution, without a care for the norms that apparently should be followed in certain genres. So, transgressing has been a pleasure.

Recently I was reading writer Miguel León-Portilla, and he talked about the future of the indigenous languages in the third millennium, amidst the increasingly intense processes of globalization. He said that the health of a language is directly related not only to the number of people who keep it alive, but also to its usefulness as an instrument for communication in the face of another language spoken by the majority with which it has to co-exist.<sup>2</sup>

And perhaps it is in this context of languages-made-minority in which song, mainly that based on poetry, finds its *raison d'être*, and so must be disseminated, offered to everyone, making it difficult for these languages to be forgotten, since he/she who loses words remains orphaned forever.

If we accept that some languages will not survive, music will have to be the most unsettling vehicle for somehow enjoying and preserving them. That is why this artistic production must be fostered and disseminated as a support for identity and joy in favor of cultural diversity.

### Song in First Languages, Beyond Stereotypes

Singers, poets, and writers in indigenous languages must be preserved as some of the world's greatest treasures. The face of our languages cannot fade. But this effort will not be possible without a change in paradigms.

We must be realistic about what we expect and what we want to remain beyond the "official version." Creators' participation in this effort will have to be adventurous, looking to create a break, with innovative proposals. They will have to make contributions that are consistent with personal and community realities, with talent. This production will have to be disseminated through all means,

even the institutions that promote art in general, in order to show and grow the multi-cultural mosaic that is Mexico, where we can all look at each other and co-exist.

The inclusion of these languages in the national and universal artistic melting pot is a commitment that has not been completely achieved. It has only been a few years now that people have looked to this heritage; what is still lacking is the integration of all the ingredients of these cultures in a single receptacle, making the pieces fit together naturally, and not giving unsolicited explanations. But if we do not change our idea about this linguistic heritage, it will be very difficult to achieve a positive result in the short or medium term.

### Why Do You Sing in Indigenous Languages?

This is a question I'm always asked when I perform, perhaps because I was born in Mexico City and I don't look like the stereotypical Mexican woman. It took me a long time to find the right answer; now I simply respond, "Because I'm Mexican."

My aim as a singer has not been to recover the languages of our ancestors, but to build bridges, to create together, to spread the ancient word of those sweet languages that are also ours, to make inroads in their dissemination with novel rhythms proposing other connections. Visualizing how art can dream new soundscapes, without either clichés or stereotypes, is perhaps the way to reconcile what in other arenas seems impossible.

Life has given me the gift of the chance to sing and record with a group of Seri fisher folk, a first people from the state of Sonora, called Hamac Caziim.<sup>3</sup> These musicians mix hard rock with their own rhythms, their world view, and their language. We have spent love-inspiring time together playing through the sounds and bringing our artistic worlds closer together.

I have composed music inspired in the poetry of Tzotzil women, who for 500 years have communicated those words inherited and written in the beautiful book *Conjuros y ebriedades* (Incantations and Inebriations).<sup>4</sup> Later, I invited the great Tzotzil poet Alberto Gómez Pérez to work with me. Alberto had to face the challenge of composing new texts for music that was already written, since I was not given permission to commercialize his original works. Together we played Asturian bagpipes, musicalizing

with a rhythmic mantra on an acoustic guitar a poem that is a Tzotzil lullabye, "*Vayan olol vayan*" (Sleep, Child, Sleep).<sup>5</sup>

Imagining the texts musically is fascinating, and along those same lines, I have worked with other musicians, for example, Sk'anel Jo', who uses one of his traditions by playing pots to ask for rain and for the crop not to dry out. We made a mixture of old and modern (electronic) sounds to evoke those moments.

For my album *Xquenda* (1996), we reworked songs from the Isthmus of Oaxaca, often forgotten, that invited us to think about, for example, death. To deal with this inevitable farewell, we resorted to an arpeggio of a Peruvian guitar, played by Ángel Chacón, using as a counterpoint the rhythmic *ayoyote* or Aztec jingles of producer and percussionist Rafael González, evoking the pulse of life.



Pepe Mata

Music is one of the most powerful roads on which to enjoy this voyage of sound nourished by our ancestral history, but also by the transformations down through the years.



Piti Campo

I could give many more examples, like my version of *La Llorona* (The Wailing Woman) in Zapotec, recorded with the mestizo guitar, also played by Chacón, or sung with Djely Tapa, a singer from Mali, or with the sound artist Alyosha Barreiro, with the Iranian singer Kabeh Parmas, or the Haitians Manoel Anglade and Sylvie Henri.

Art, and particularly the lyricism of these songs, allow for this playful spirit. Alberto Gómez Pérez, the aforementioned Tzotzil poet, says that these peoples are tired of being anthropology museum pieces. And I agree with him that we have to be the children of our era, leaving behind the stereotypes that have been so predominant, and dare to go beyond the prejudices limiting us.

Discovering this and taking the freedom to soar has been wonderful for me and those who accompany me. I feel that art and music are all about that, even if the purists, who we will never please, are still out there.

Galvanizing and inspiring indigenous creators and interpreters to sing in their own languages is an invaluable task that we must encourage. And it seems to me that we will have succeeded on the day that no one finds it strange that those who do not speak these languages from birth or whose physical appearance does not fit the stereotype of what is seen as Mexican can sing, converse, and be interested in disseminating and enjoying this marvelous art of the word, of music, and of song.

I want to close with words from Eduardo Dyer:

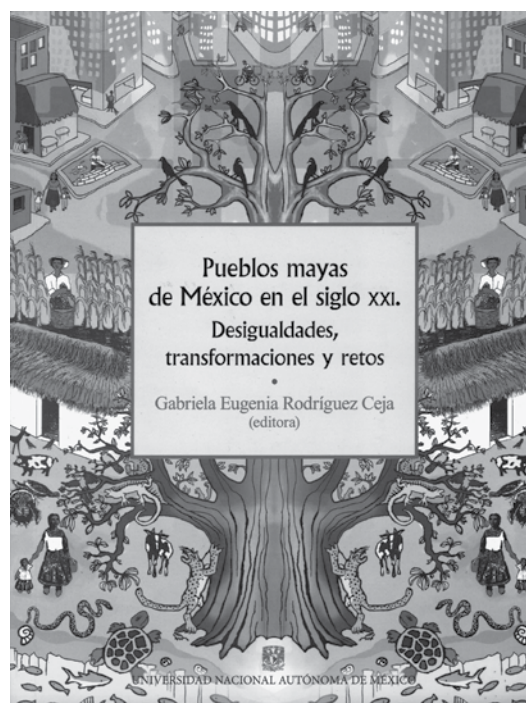
Let us remember that we Mexicans receive music like a wild, magical, instantaneous substance, that enters and courses through our veins, that comforts the soul, that connects us through all our senses and accompanies us on the voyage that begins at the door of the emotions. Music that celebrates the moment, that honors nostalgia, that calms the living and the dead, that receives what comes with celebration, that bids farewell to what goes with celebration. ■■■

## Notes

- 1 In addition to her direct work with certain indigenous poets, as she mentions in this article, Tonana's musical style is born of her interest in Mexico's black, indigenous, and mestizo roots. Her discography includes albums like *Xquenda* (1996), *Tonana* (2000), *Lazos* (2006), *Agiüta de tequila* (2010), and *Con el viento*. Her work has been included in collections put out by record companies like Putumayo, Milan Records, Windham Hill Records, and EMI. Her work and career can be followed through her web page ([www.tonana.com](http://www.tonana.com)) and on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/TonanaOficial>) and Instagram ([http://picdeer.org/tonana\\_music](http://picdeer.org/tonana_music)). [Editor's Note.]
- 2 Miguel León-Portilla, "El destino de las lenguas indígenas en el tercer milenio," *Arqueología mexicana* no. 85 (dedicated to Mexico's indigenous languages) (2019), pp. 10-12. [Editor's Note.]
- 3 For more about this group, go to their Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/Hamac-Caziim-159099780851137/>. [Editor's Note.]
- 4 See the "Conjuros y ebriedades" blog, <http://conjurosyebriedades.blogspot.com/>. Also available is the YouTube video "Poesía y rezos tzotziles 2. Conjuros y ebriedades," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sbvQItA3RHY>. [Editor's Note.]
- 5 Tonana, "Vayan lolol vayan," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oc4WVx37VcY>. [Editor's Note.]



**Pueblos mayas de México en el siglo xxi.  
Desigualdades, transformaciones y retos**  
(The Maya Peoples of Mexico in the Twenty-first  
Century. Inequalities, Transformations,  
And Challenges)  
Gabriela Eugenia Rodríguez Ceja, ed.  
IIFL, UNAM  
Mexico City, 2019, 314 pp.



Analyzing the Maya peoples' relationship today with the local and global context allows us to critically explore both the loss of their traditional knowledge and the processes that open new possibilities and foster opportunities for development. The latter, however, presents itself as a —negative or positive, depending on the case— consequence of the former.

In an attempt to endure, the Maya peoples have remained in a constant state of transformation and adaptation to new contexts. This means they have had to defend their rights, participating actively in local and global processes, even under the very power relations they are challenging.

The articles in this book are the product of some of the presentations made at the x International Congress of Maya Experts, organized by the UNAM Institute of Philological Research. The book is divided thematically into three sections dealing with the different spheres of the peoples' lives that —despite the fact that they would damage any community, not only the Maya— specifically affect their traditions, customs, and, therefore, their culture.

The first section, “Batallas cotidianas en las vidas de las mujeres mayas. De lo local a lo global” (Daily Battles

in the Lives of Maya Women. From the Local to the Global), explores the forms of oppression these women have suffered because they are part of an excluded and discriminated people, and also because they are women. It also looks at what they face in their daily lives, what they have done to deal with adversity, and how the changes in customs benefit their economic and social well-being.

The chapter by Adriana Cruz-Manjarrez documents the transgression of gender rule: Yucatecan women who decide to migrate with their spouses to California, refusing to stay behind, regardless of what their husbands might say. These women, therefore, benefit in ways they would not otherwise have done since they establish themselves in a community that defends their rights, and they learn to live free of violence.

Adriana Leona Rosales Mendoza presents agricultural temporary day-workers' migration to Canada as a relevant factor in inequality and gender roles. The author describes how, even if the women suffer no violence, they do experience inequality, since they are restricted to relationships within their family networks and among women of their community. However, she emphasizes that, thanks to the income generated from migration, their

home life is more pleasant, and they have enough money to send their children to school.

Gabriela Eugenia Rodríguez Ceja shows how the benefits to women from studying middle or high school through federal programs have contributed to their decision to emigrate to get paying jobs and divorce if they want to. This gives them autonomy, unlike previous generations, in which the men maintained gender norms that ruled the women's lives.

The second section, "Conocimientos locales y estrategias enfocadas en el bienestar y la sobrevivencia. La atención a la salud y el cultivo de la milpa" (Local Knowledge and Strategies Focussing on Well-being and Survival. Health Care and Cultivating the *Milpa*), describes public policy strategies focused on agricultural production and health, as well as the use of different kinds of knowledge to improve these aspects of life locally.

Jaime Tomás Page Pliego's chapter demonstrates the conditions of extreme vulnerability of Mexico's indigenous peoples with regard to health matters. They use different alternative health care options in addition to traditional methods—which they use as complements. These new methods have prompted them to change and adapt in order to decrease structural violence.

José Armando Alayón-Gamboa and Sandra Luz Perea Mercado analyze the changes and continuities of traditional ecological knowledge through an intergenerational comparison of the knowledge that is profoundly linked to different aspects of traditional Maya culture and their identity as ethnic groups.

This chapter shows that young farmers are familiar with and use traditional growing methods less than their parents, since the changing public policies in the region have established a modern agricultural model. This new model is oriented to increased productivity, making use of new technologies like improved seeds, machinery, and agro-chemicals, which offers them more financial resources. However, it also shows that sowing different varieties of genetically modified organisms damages their products and people's health.

The last section, "Políticas públicas y sus consecuencias en el ámbito rural" (Public Policies and Their Consequences in the Countryside), explains the negative impact of public agricultural policies on a local level. A large part of these policies have created supposed development initiatives that have promised to reduce poverty, but many

communities have been thrown off their lands by national or foreign businessmen and government officials, forcing them to exchange their land for precarious jobs.

Many fields have been turned into housing or tourist projects. This is the case presented by Lourdes Guadalupe Rejón Patrón about the grabbing of more than 1000 hectares of land from an *ejido* collective farm through immoral, fraudulent practices that took advantage of their inhabitants' marginalization, poverty, and false information. One of the main causes of this abuse is that the peoples are not familiar with the government bureaucracy, which, in addition, is not designed for them, because language limitations, illiteracy, and ignorance of their rights make them vulnerable in these situations.

In the next chapter, Alejandro Cabrera Valenzuela relates the local impact of the changes in the Yucatán Animal Husbandry Law, whose purpose was to foster production with higher economic yields. However, the way this worked showed the government's insensitivity, as well as its lack of interest in protecting the local fabric of society. The author also presents cases in which municipal and *ejido* authorities acted in favor of the interests of local strongmen, merchants, and private cattle ranchers, demonstrating corruption that negatively affected the lives of Maya peoples.

Finally, Patricia María Balam Gómez explains the consequences of the changes in Article 27 of the Constitution. Many peasants have opted for the new provision of the lease or sale of *ejido* lands or of using the land as collateral to borrow money that they have great difficulty in paying back because of the very high interest rates. In both cases, they obtain small sums of money and/or lose their land.

The author also explains intra-family conflicts that emerge as a result of the current changes. For example, the *ejido* farmers can be forced to sign over their rights to the land since the law states that only one person (one of the children) can inherit them; formerly, they used the land communally, and the new situation has caused divisions among them. These policies do not take into account the specificities of the peoples' customs or their urgent needs; this generates innumerable difficulties that deepen their poverty and marginalization.

Although the articles are divided thematically into sections, they establish a dialogue with each other: they are related because they deal with problems that the Maya peoples have in common. The articles also counter each

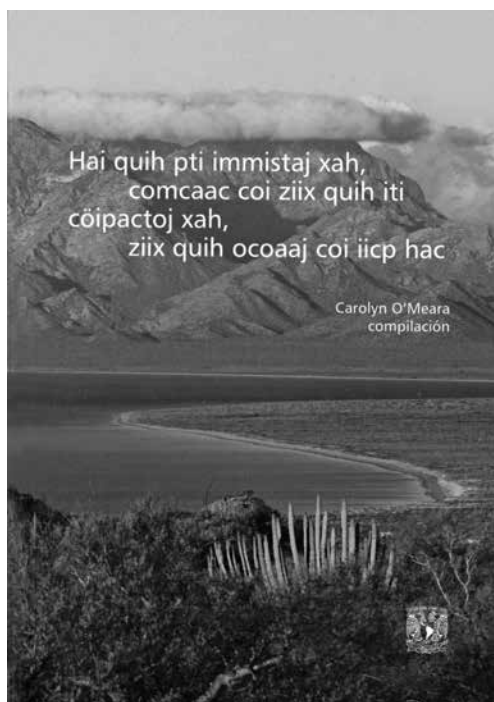
other, describing both good and bad aspects of today's situation and how it has positively or negatively affected the Maya peoples. That is, in some cases, changes in customs benefit their economic and social well-being. At the end of the day, it should be underlined that the conflicts

they face are common to all of them, not limited to one community; the challenges, therefore, are shared. ■■■

*Ana Teresa Luna del Olmo*

**Staff writer**

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**Hai quih pti immistaj xah, comcaac coi ziix quih iti  
cöipactoj xah, ziix quih ocoaaj coi iicp hac**

Carolyn O'Meara, comp.

Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas/UNAM

Mexico City, 2014, 99 pp.

Languages are a universe of ideas, images, meanings, and cultures; so, penetrating each of them supposes a journey with infinite different perspectives. Carolyn O'Meara opens up the possibility of reading, listening, and imagining the Seri world, or *cmiique iitom*, but, above all, she offers students and speakers of the language a didactic tool and means of entertainment in *Hai quih pti immistaj xah, comcaac coi ziix quih iti cöipactoj xah, ziix quih ocoaaj coi iicp hac*. This is a collection of stories from the inhabitants of the northwestern coast of Sonora, the Comcaac.

The work is the product of O'Meara's doctoral thesis research project about the linguistic classification of landscape and the grammar of spatial reference. For several years starting in 2006, she gathered stories from the inhabitants of the towns of Socaaix (Punta Chueca) and Haxöl Iihom (at the mouth of the San Ignacio River). She quotes outstanding Seri language researcher Steve Mar-

lett as saying that it is considered an isolated language because it cannot be related to any other and it only has about 1000 speakers.<sup>1</sup>

In her Spanish-language introduction to the stories, O'Meara emphasizes the importance of creating didactic materials given the urgency pointed out by the Comcaac themselves. Despite the fact that she collected the stories through recordings and writings translated into Spanish, the final edition was monolingual. Following Marlett's advice, O'Meara decided that the book should not be published in a bilingual version, thus giving place and voice exclusively to the original language. While including Spanish-language versions would have attracted a larger reading public in other regions interested in knowing more about the Comcaac, it would not have been a means for teaching and learning the language. Therefore, the didactic and cultural needs of the Sonora communities molded the book's structure. With this awareness of the language's

structural, social, and cultural flexibility, the compiler also proposed a future edition, since new needs could present themselves in the communities or a new edition could even be conceived solely for readers specialized in linguistics. Therefore, the book is presented as “the beginning of future collections of this kind” (p. 13).

O’Meara’s introduction also includes a summary of Seri spelling and pronunciation norms, which acts as a bridge to a series of general reflections about the relationships between words, the body, and the world surrounding them, created through detailed but brief basic rules for reading or speaking the language.<sup>2</sup> For example, the author carefully explains the following: “[The ‘e’] is pronounced with the mouth slightly more open and the tongue slightly lower in comparison to the vowel written with ‘e’ in Spanish” (p. 13). When reading the phonetic descriptions, it is almost impossible to put to one side the awareness of the body’s movements in order to produce a sound and, at the same time, a meaning. Each language is specific to a people or region, but, in turn, each region has bodies that adapt and accustom themselves to different movements.

After the introduction, the work in Seri is divided into two parts: the stories, “Comcaac coi ziix quih iti cöipactoj xah, ziix quih ocaaj hac, and the explanation of the winds of the region, “Hai pti immistaj coi iicp hac.” As mentioned above, O’Meara chose the stories after years of hearing them in Sonora. For example, one, told by Lorenzo Herrera Casanova, underlines the importance of the food proper to each area and how changing food has consequences: “Comcaac coi ziix hapahit oiitoj coi iicp hac.” This story describes how the Comcaac used to eat mollusks, sea snails, turtles, dragon fruit, and deer, among other things, and after recent changes, serious bouts of disease have broken out because they now eat mainly fried food.

The book also includes a children’s story with a community song in which a cuckolded chameleon is attacked by ants and starts asking for help. It also features an old legend about a mysterious woman who doesn’t know where she’s from, and, after getting drunk and dancing with the girls of the community, disappears as night falls. So, this collection not only allows any reader to know and familiarize him/herself with the Seri language and culture, but it does the same for the Comcaac themselves, who read in their language about their land, and (re)think and get to know the legends and the stories that have shaped their communities for years.

The second part of the book, about the wind, is encyclopedic, because it describes the wind’s properties. O’Meara explains that a translation would not do justice to the Seri words that name the nine winds blowing in the region. For example, “hai isoj caai” means “wind that is preparing for something” and “hoocala imatax” means “cloud that does not leave.” Seri’s linguistic registers presuppose images in and of themselves that are not seen in commonly used terms in other languages, such as Spanish. That is, linguistic diversity also supposes a variety of perspectives that hone in on different details of the natural world, such as the case of intent born with a specific wind: “hai an icaasaj,” explains O’Meara, is used in summer when it’s hot. Both parts of the book are complemented by simple but warm illustrations by Blanca A. Flores Montaña, a Socaaix resident.

O’Meara’s collection does not leave out her linguistic interests, briefly put forward in the introduction, and it also underlines the importance of creating a space for the Seri-speakers to listen to and read themselves. The languages of Mexico’s different regions are an invaluable treasure that nourishes the country’s diversity. In this case, Seri implies structures added to a spatial awareness and, to a certain degree, an ecological awareness. These ideas are also observed in the kind of stories presented and the brief encyclopedia of winds.

Also, the compiler’s reflections at the beginning of the book allow the reader to explore the formation of meanings not only through what is written, but also through the sounds created based on specific body movements. The indigenous languages are commonly seen as something that needs to be rescued, and that position supports the preservation of the ideas they contain and that extol the natural space around us that we have stopped caring for. ■■■

Paula Vázquez  
Staff writer

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Notes

- 1 Stephen A. Marlett, “The Seri and Salinan Connection Revisited,” *International Journal of American Linguistics* vol. 74, no 3, pp. 393-399.
- 2 The summary was mainly developed based on the trilingual dictionary, Mary B. Moser and Steve A. Marlett, *Comcaac quih Yaza quih Hant Ihiip hac. Diccionario seri-español-inglés* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdes Editores, 2005).



ART AND CULTURE

Teresa Jiménez\*

# Sergio Hernández's *Popol Vuh*

**S**ergio Hernández, born in 1957 in the town of Santa María Xochistlapilco, in the Mixtec Mountains, is one of Oaxaca's most distinguished representatives of the visual arts. In his hands, any material becomes art.

Hernández has recreated the cosmogonical book of the Quiché Maya, the *Popol Vuh*, in a 30-sheet engraving portfolio. In this work, he reinterprets not only the origin of humanity, but also of himself, of his Oaxaca, his country, his lineage. Here is a conversation with this artist of bright colors, ancestral forms, and flowing lines reminiscent of cave art and the beginning of all things. Sergio Hernández, a member of a first people and an original.

\* Editor-in-chief of *Voices of Mexico*, CISAN, UNAM; tejian@unam.mx.  
Sergio Hernández *Popol Vuh*, engravings, 20 x 20 cm, 2011-2012.  
Photos, courtesy of the author.



**Voices of Mexico:** As Jaime Moreno Villarreal said, “With your *Popol Vuh*, you have created creation.” Why would you interpret the sacred book of the Maya? Was it to find your own origins?

**Sergio Hernández:** The origin of our species is rooted in shamanism, in magic, and the book of the Quiché Maya is no exception. This book holds the knowledge of their daily life in the jungle. A journey in my work is the journey to the creative pictorial world, bringing them alive through a comic or manga technique, like a comic book where these magical siblings of the grandmother and the fauna are sketched: ants, fleas, bats, the serpent, the frog, the eagle, who swarm through that history. The dramatic ending, which includes the tragedy of life in that book, is that our brothers, both in the past and in the present, are scorched, burned to a crisp, and ground up on their grinding stones, thrown into the river, transformed into stars with the light of the night. . . . From then on have the stars existed. All these scenes are sketched, lit, and interpreted with more questions than answers.

**VM:** Where does your imaginary come from? What have your visual reference points been?

**SH:** The literary works of León-Portilla, *La visión de los vencidos* (The View of the Vanquished); Mayao Miyazaki, with *Spirited Away*; *Chanoc*, by Martín de Lucenay and Ángel Mora; *La Familia Burrón* (The Burrón Family), by Gabriel Vargas; the dead characters of Carlos Castañeda and Juan Rulfo . . . stories of the underworld.





**VM:** Your series of engravings includes plants, animals, deities, and humans in a space where the primordial and the original evolve into other forms and other beings, but they also seem to retreat. Is involution perhaps inevitable?

**SH:** Yes. Humanity has come to a point in which it has marked its own extinction, "like crabs walking backwards." And these drawings make the observation that the book talks about, the beginning and the end. At the beginning, nothingness; but at the end, nothingness again. Involution is inevitable; the extinction of many species has caught up with the human species, which is destroying itself. I mention that the visual interpretation of this portfolio is a celebration of this prophetic teaching.









**VM:** The ancient Maya beliefs in the *Popol Vuh* refer to the men of corn being limited by the gods so they could not see and hear everything. What do you think limits us today, preventing us from seeing and hearing our indigenous roots?

**SH:** Humanity does not want to know, hear, see. . . . It is soaked in information without understanding. Information, culture, education are consumed in supermarkets. We do not accept our past; we deny ourselves by denying our origins.

We have become great consumers of lies. We don't want to seem like our ancestors; we're ashamed. We emigrate to the big cities and are happy in malls. **VM**

Ignacio Díaz de la Serna\*

# Indigenous Peoples In the European Cartographic Imaginary<sup>1</sup>

Since they are deeply rooted in history and most cultures develop them, maps offer a vision of the world as a whole, or at least of a specific territory in evolution. Every map is a tributary of knowledge, of the tools and aims collectively sought after in a given era. Not only do they offer us an image with geographical details, but they also reveal a series of social, geopolitical, and semiological conventional implications, that is, signs that are the heritage of this or that community and whose graphic presentation plows the life of society. Thus, depending on the graphic language of their own, they show and understand the world around us. Very few maps of antiquity have come down to us. By contrast, a considerable number of cartographic productions have survived from the Middle Ages and later centuries. Maps of the world, maps of continents and countries, maps of dioceses and governmental districts, of cities, topographical and hydrographical maps, nautical maps, maps of islands and estuaries, celestial maps: all of these are valuable crystallizations of our imaginary, the terrain in which social movement and political discourse come together; in other words, how word and deed come together. The initial lines of the article “Amérique” in Diderot and d’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie* affirm that no other historic event was as singular as the discovery of the New World. On a par with the chronicles and logs of travels and conquest known as the Chronicles of the Indies, other chronicles and stories written by French and English explorers would begin to feed the European imaginary with news about hitherto unknown regions and the aboriginal peoples of North America. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, works would be published that would have such an impact that they would become classics in their own time and, unfortunately, be forgotten in ours. Lafitau, La Hontan, Charlevoix, and Champlain are only a few of their authors. So, multiple philosophical and political discourses would proliferate touching on the American savage, constituting a critique or a defense, depending on the case, of European colonial expansion.

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\* Researcher at the UNAM Center for Research on North America;  
idiazser@gmail.com.

<sup>1</sup> This article is part of a book the author is preparing for publication.



### HARTMANN SCHEDEL

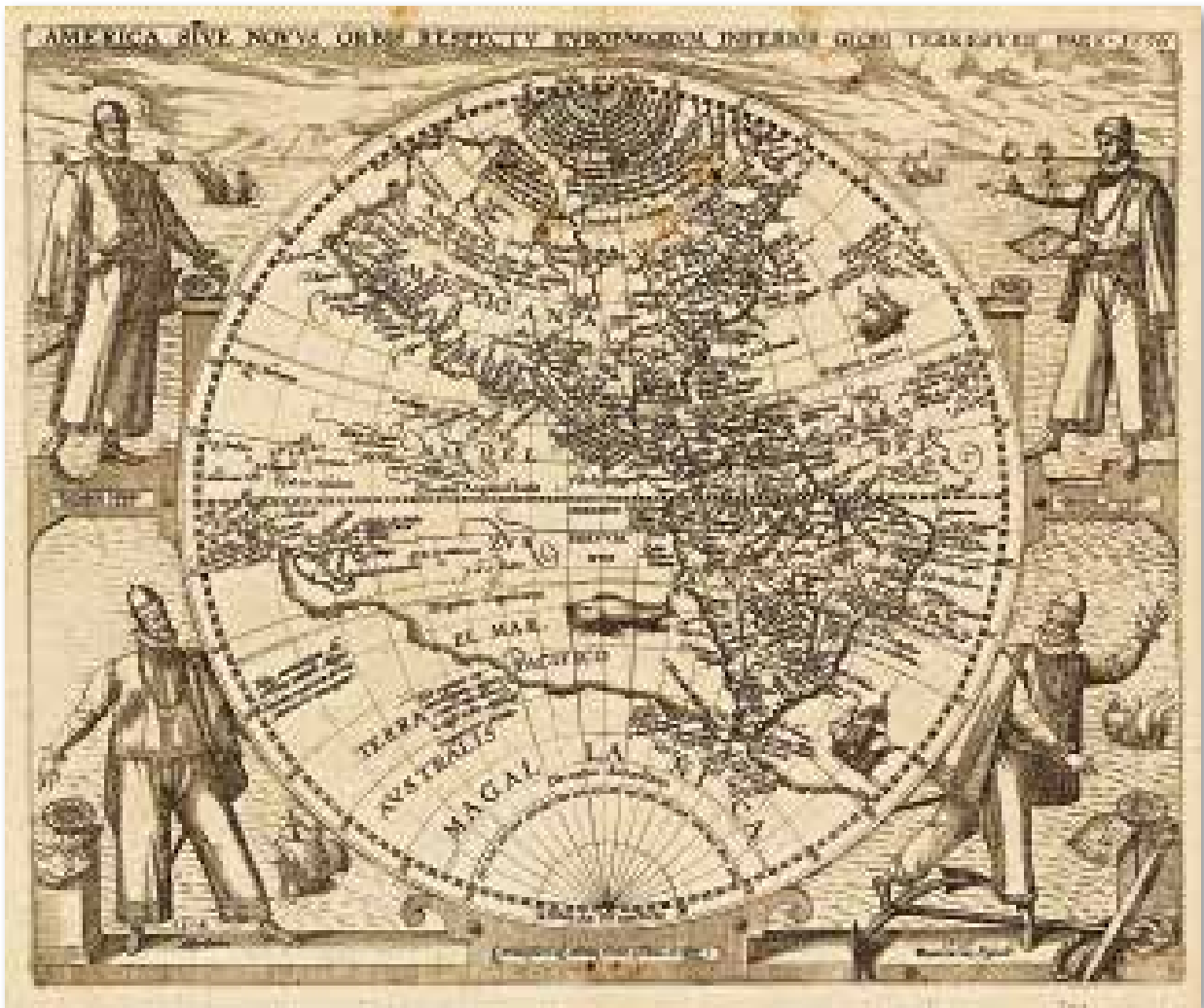
*Secunda etas mundi*. Nuremberg, 1493. Schedel's is one of the first maps ever printed in the world. Published only 40 years after the invention of the printing press, it was inspired by Ptolemy's *Geography*. It omits Scandinavia and the southern part of Africa, and the Indian Ocean appears almost completely surrounded by land. Including the figures of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah who repopulated the world after the Flood, reveals the importance that the theological world view prevailing during the Middle Ages still had at the beginning of the Renaissance. We can also observe the 12 heads of the winds, a very common decoration on the first printed maps. On the left are different fantastical creatures whose appearance comes from the imaginary universe that generally fed medieval chronicles. One such example is *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, a book written by a supposed traveler who journeyed to the Far East and met up with a large number of outlandish beings described in his work: a man with six arms, a centaur, a man with four eyes from a coastal tribe of Ethiopia, a strange hermaphrodite, etc. This imaginary representation often motivated Europeans to identify the native peoples of the New World with those beings who were not very human but were very close to beasts.

## JAN JANSSON

*Mexico and Cuzco*. Amsterdam, 1657. These views of the two cities are among the oldest printed images of American cities. The engraving is from the work by Jansson, *Theatrum Urbium Celebriorum*. It offers an excellent panoramic view of Texcoco Lake. One detail that stands out is that the urban architectural style in the sketch makes Mexico City look more European than American.



All maps are tributaries of knowledge, of the tools and aims collectively sought after in a given era; they also reveal a series of social, geopolitical, and semiological conventional implications.



## THEODOR DE BRY

*America Sive Novus Orbis Respectu Europæorum Inferior Globi Terrestris Pars.* Frankfurt, 1596. This map's circular shape makes it an unusual map of the New World, surrounded by portraits of Columbus, Vesputius, Magellan, and Pizarro. It offers a noteworthy update of the Western Hemisphere using the geographical data available at the end of the sixteenth century. The multiple annotations are related to discoveries; one is that of the Americas in 1492. The west coast of North America stretches in a far-fetched way to include Quivira and the Strait of Anian. De Bry copied Mercator's description of the North Pole and the Northwest Passage. Perhaps the most important aspect is that it incorporates information about the southeastern coast gathered by Huguenot Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues, a member of Jean Ribault's expedition to the New World, and whose sketches of the natives, colonial life, and flora and fauna were an extremely important historical legacy. The extreme southern part of the continent, Terra Australis Magellanica, is exaggeratedly large, as is the width of South America. Undoubtedly, this map is a successful combination of decorations and informational cartography based on experience. **MM**



Teresa Gutiérrez\*  
Illustrated by Ricardo Figueroa\*\*

# The Milpa

## Sowing the Future

Mexico's first peoples have been careful, creative, observant inhabitants of the biodiversity surrounding them. They have created our countryside's rich agro-diversity, mainly through the *milpa*.

The word "*milpa*" is derived from the Náhuatl "*milpan*," the combination of "*milli*," a parcel of cultivated land, and "*pan*," meaning "on top of." It is also known as *milpan*, *chinamilpan*, and *huamilpa* in Náhuatl; in Mixtec, *itzzu*; *cue* in Zapotec; in Purépecha, *tarheta*; in Mayan, *kool*; in Otomí, *huähi*; in Mazahua, *tjöö*; in Tzotzil, *yaxcol*; and in Tarahumara, *ichírari*.

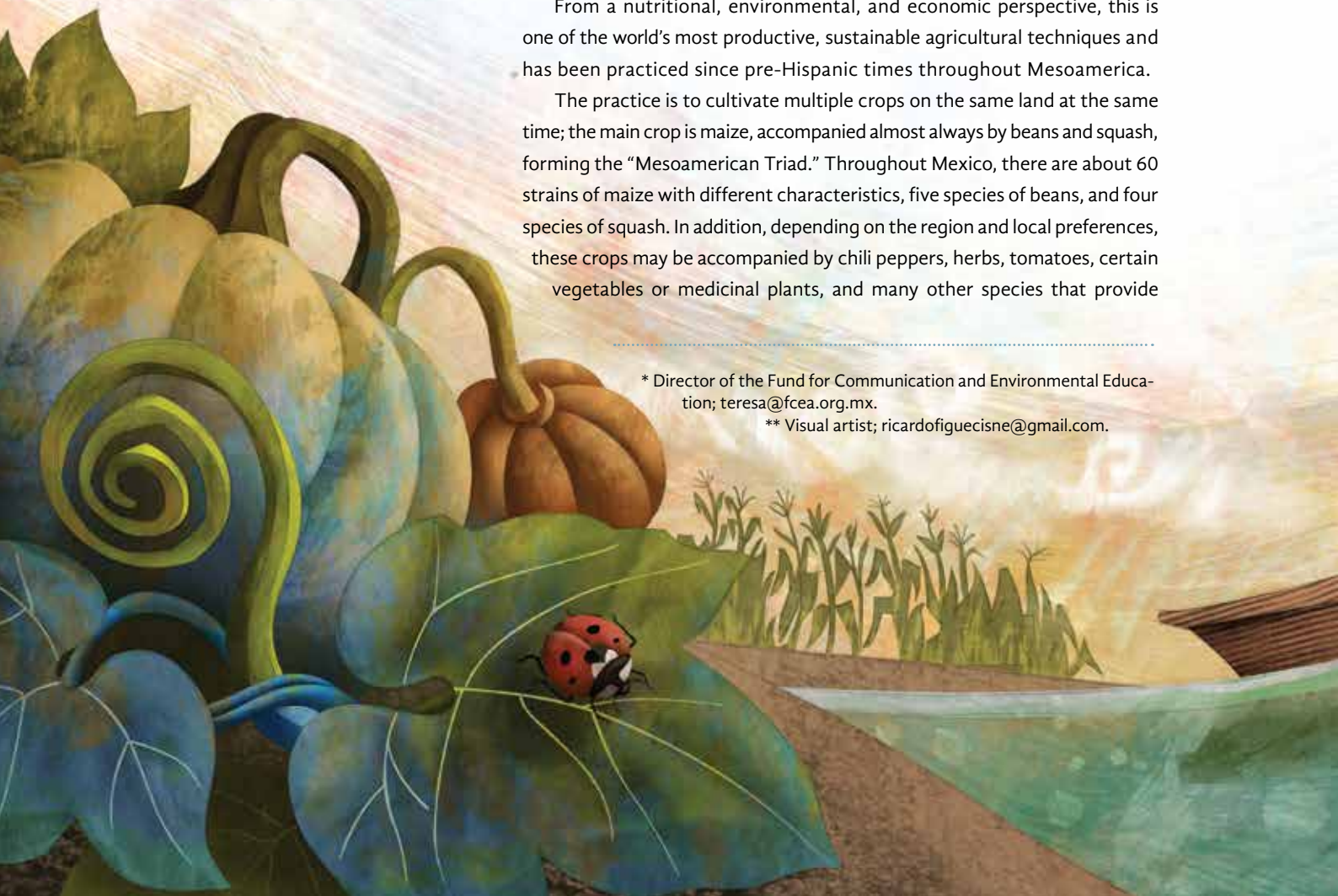
From a nutritional, environmental, and economic perspective, this is one of the world's most productive, sustainable agricultural techniques and has been practiced since pre-Hispanic times throughout Mesoamerica.

The practice is to cultivate multiple crops on the same land at the same time; the main crop is maize, accompanied almost always by beans and squash, forming the "Mesoamerican Triad." Throughout Mexico, there are about 60 strains of maize with different characteristics, five species of beans, and four species of squash. In addition, depending on the region and local preferences, these crops may be accompanied by chili peppers, herbs, tomatoes, certain vegetables or medicinal plants, and many other species that provide

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\* Director of the Fund for Communication and Environmental Education; [teresa@fcea.org.mx](mailto:teresa@fcea.org.mx).

\*\* Visual artist; [ricardofiguecisne@gmail.com](mailto:ricardofiguecisne@gmail.com).



shade, forage, and edible fruit. The interaction of this great diversity of species in the milpa turns it all into an ecosystem in and of itself.

In the *milpa*, all the elements of the system, such as nutrients, water, soil, and light, are used complementing each other, boosting ecological processes like the biological control of pests, fertility, and pollination. The interaction among the elements in the *milpa* is very beneficial: the beans fix nitrogen in the soil; the corn and other species provide support and avert pests and diseases; and the squash prevents erosion and covers and protects the soil from the climate.

Many studies confirm that the *milpa* is much more productive than simple monoculture farming of corn.

The *milpa* offers benefits not only to the species that co-exist in it, but also to the peasants who work it; their products provide balanced, varied nutrition that in many places, particularly in rural areas, continues to be the basis for their diet.

In addition, given this abundance, different birds, insects, and mammals, including domestic animals, also obtain their food from it.

All the space is used in the *milpa*: along the ground grow the squash vines, whose horizontal leaves preserve humidity and control some insect pests. *Quelites*, or edible herbs, grow there spontaneously. What elsewhere may be considered weeds are used here, contributing flavors and nutrients to Mexican dishes, such as seep weed, pigweed, mallows, and purslane, some of them even with commercial value. Often other vegetables and chili peppers are also included that not only contribute vitamins, color, and flavor to dishes, but also discourage pests.

Something else commonly found





in the *milpa* is the delicious fungus that occasionally infests maize called *huitlacoche*, or corn smut, which is also edible and has a high sale value.

Prickly pear cacti, maguey cacti, *ahuejote* willow trees, or fruit trees to retain the soil are usually planted around the edges of the *milpa*.

Thus, every region has its own version of the *milpa*, interspersing different crops with local native species that the first peoples have selected, managed, and replicated for thousands of years. One notable variant of the *milpa* is the *chinampa* (known as “floating gardens”), where up to three corn crops can be harvested a year. In semi-arid environments, we see the *huamil*, *Polaskia chichipe*, columnar cacti, and mesquite *milpas*.

We owe the first peoples/peasants the enormous diversity of species or their variants to be found in the *milpa*, since it has been they who, through processes like seed conservation, experimentation with new crops and variants, and selection of the kinds they preferred, have brought it about.

This process continues through the exchange of fruit and seeds both within and across their communities. Since these crops were originally domesticated in Mexico, they may be similar to the original species, with which they are related, and it may be possible to continue the genetic exchange, thus allowing for even greater diversity and adaptation.

Another important benefit of the *milpa* is that it can be cultivated all year round: when recently planted, the first squash flowers and vines begin to bud and you can later enjoy the squash itself; the bean stalks emerge and later the new beans can be consumed; and then, the ears of corn and the seed beans.

The *milpa* undoubtedly has many more benefits than the monoculture farming of corn that has proliferated over the last 30 years. In contrast with the *milpa*, single-crop cultivation of corn degrades soil productivity, wearing out the soil, and cancelling out the diversity of species that spontaneously grow amid the stalks. This spurs the disappearance of pollinators like honeybees and bumblebees by erasing the diversity of the species they feed on and reducing the possibilities of balanced nutrition for those who consume what they produce.

The *milpa* has promoted and strengthened the identity of first peoples and local knowl-

edge and has been the basis for their economy. It is a powerful alternative in the face of the economic crisis, adapting to each territory and its very specific environmental and social characteristics. Usually, this multi-crop farming does not generate products for sale on a large scale, but rather for consumption by the family unit that produces them. The different varieties of *milpa* are a reflection of the knowledge and technology used to obtain from human labor and the land the products required to satisfy the peasants' food needs, with the great environmental benefits we have already mentioned here.

Climate change is a huge challenge for agriculture, particularly for peasants who farm the *milpas* on nonirrigated land, since they depend on climate stability or the planting and harvesting cycles for their products. Climate change alters rainfall and brings prolonged drought or huge flooding that also affect them.

The *milpas* are an immensely valuable cultural and biological heritage. They maintain a rich agro-biodiversity that preserves the knowledge of many generations of first peoples who have enriched our marvelous Mexican cuisine and the environment that gave rise to it. **MM**

### Further Reading

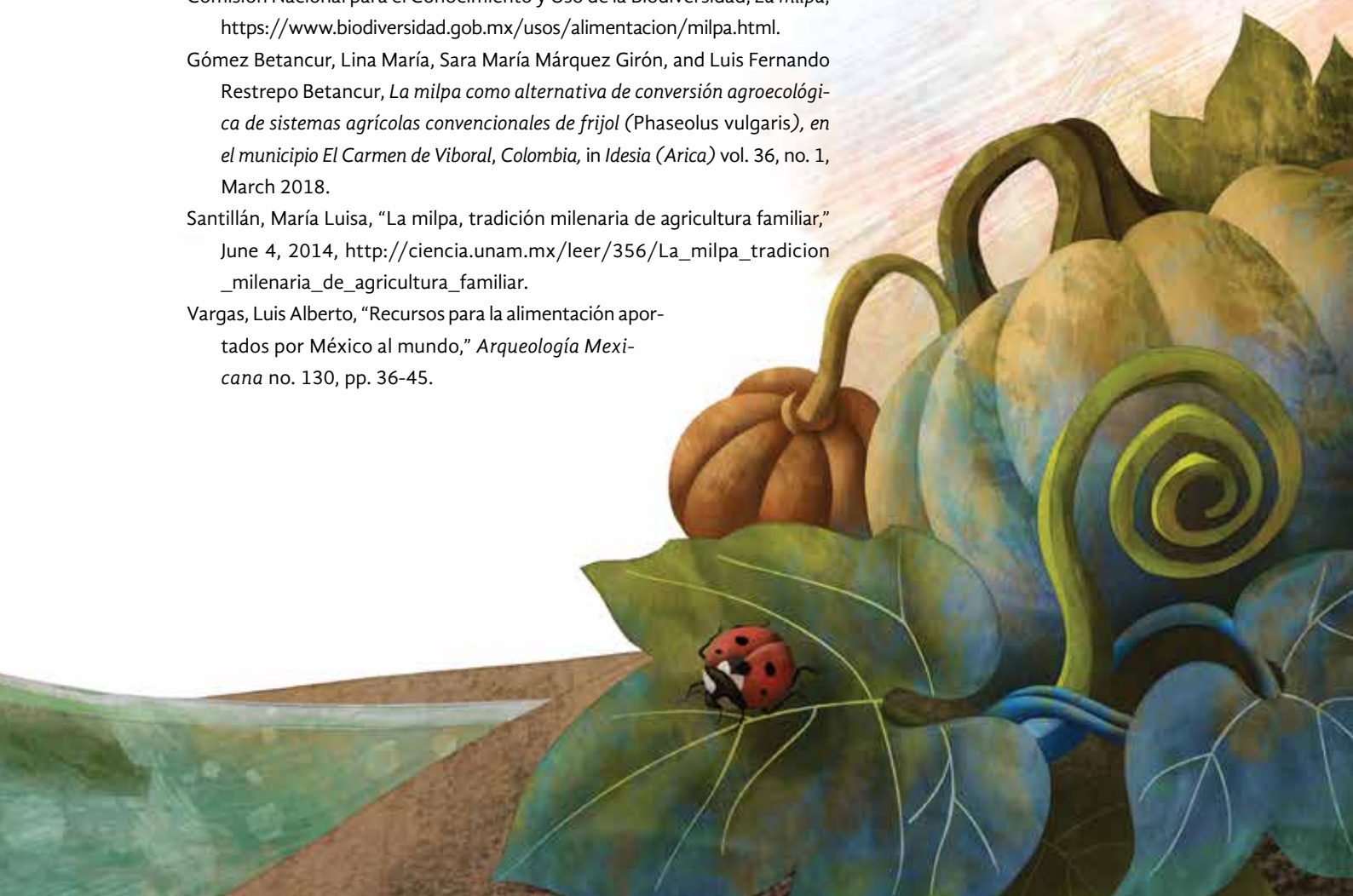
Comisión Nacional para el Conocimiento y Uso de la Biodiversidad, *La milpa*, <https://www.biodiversidad.gob.mx/ usos/ alimentacion/ milpa.html>.

Gómez Betancur, Lina María, Sara María Márquez Girón, and Luis Fernando Restrepo Betancur, *La milpa como alternativa de conversión agroecológica de sistemas agrícolas convencionales de frijol (Phaseolus vulgaris), en el municipio El Carmen de Viboral, Colombia*, in *Idesia (Arica)* vol. 36, no. 1, March 2018.

Santillán, María Luisa, "La milpa, tradición milenaria de agricultura familiar," June 4, 2014, [http://ciencia.unam.mx/ leer/ 356/ La\\_ milpa\\_ tradicion\\_ milenaria\\_ de\\_ agricultura\\_ familiar](http://ciencia.unam.mx/ leer/ 356/ La_ milpa_ tradicion_ milenaria_ de_ agricultura_ familiar).

Vargas, Luis Alberto, "Recursos para la alimentación aportados por México al mundo," *Arqueología Mexicana* no. 130, pp. 36-45.

The *milpa* offers benefits not only to the species that co-exist in it but also to the peasants who work it; their products provide balanced, varied nutrition.





Renata Schneider\*

## One Huipil a Day

▲ Detail of a Mixtec huipil neckline; hand-embroidered ribbon with mercerized cotton, sewn onto silk. Santiago Pinotepa Nacional, Oaxaca, Mexico. Photo: R. Schneider.

**U**n huipil al día (One Huipil a Day) is a project to disseminate Mexico's traditional weaves and clothing, as well as those of Latin America, the United States, and Canada. The aim is to demonstrate the technical, stylistic, and world-view connections among these works, whether ancient or modern, throughout the hemisphere.

The project publishes the image of an entire piece of clothing or a fragment of one every day on social networks like Facebook, WordPress, and Instagram. The image is accompanied by a brief explanation of the kind of garment it is, who made it (if the information is available), the ethnic group or textile tradition it belongs to, the technique used, and the photographer's name.<sup>1</sup>

The aim is to recognize, demonstrate, and identify the aesthetic of our country's groups and locations, as well as differentiate between the pieces made for sale outside the communities and those that are for "internal consumption," including those made to be worn by their creators.

"Un huipil al día" reports if the garments were made using pre-Colombian techniques, such as the back-strap loom for making *huipiles* (lengths of cloth sewn together at the sides, slipped over the head and worn as a top) or *enredos* (long lengths

\* Restorer, specialist in the conservation and restoration of goods from Mexico's rural and indigenous communities, National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH); ren.schneider@gmail.com. Photos, courtesy of the autor.

of cloth wrapped around the body as a skirt), or if they used certain coloring agents (the extract of the cochineal grain, the dyes made from certain flowers, or the purple sea snails, just to name a few). Techniques may also date from colonial times, like the use of patterns for making blouses and skirts, or the modern era, as in the case of the mixed pieces worn in many places in Mexico's North, where today they prefer hand- or machine-sewn garments made out of commercial fabric in bright colors.

The project is collaborative and anyone can send in an image of a detail, a piece of fabric, or a garment for day-to-day, festive, or ceremonial wear, to be shared after a brief edition. The only requirement is that the full garments be photographed after ironing, against a smooth background, with high resolution.

The project is collaborative and anyone can send in an image of a detail, a piece of fabric, or a garment for day-to-day, festive, or ceremonial wear, to be shared.



▲ Detail of a Purépecha/mestiza napkin for public sale; cotton fabric hand-embroidered with cotton thread. Tzintzuntzan, Michoacán, Mexico. Photo: Edith Merino.

Each platform has its own characteristics and its own audience. Until now, the most popular is Facebook, and the project page has almost 10 000 followers. However—and this may be more interesting—the very heart of the project is the blog on the WordPress platform, since it functions as a very simple data base. There, you can do a search, let’s say, from Google, for examples of Chinantec garments (typing “un huipil al día + chinanteco”), and you’ll get a kind of visual library that will allow you to compare textiles from that Oaxacan group.

The combinations in the search engine can be done by garment (“un huipil al día + quexqemetl” or “un huipil al día + lienzo,” for example) to see the similarities and differences among them and among those throughout the country, or, if we have examples from other countries, throughout the hemisphere. The search can be done by state, municipality, country, or a single locale (“un huipil al día + Zinacantán,” “un huipil al día + Santa Teresa del Nayar,” or “un huipil al día + Puebla,” “un huipil al día + Brasil,” etc.). Also, on the WordPress base page is a mosaic of all the pieces. Almost 1 000 have been shared since January 25, 2017, when the project was launched.

## Where Are They From?

Pieces often come from collections, expositions, or historical collections, allowing us to observe the evolution of



▲ Detail of a Mixtec man’s sash; industrial cotton woven on a back-strap loom. Hand-woven cotton ends, probably colored with dye made from sea-snail, have been added. San Pedro Jicayán, Jamiltepec, Oaxaca, Mexico (Oaxaca Textile Museum). Photo: R. Schneider.



▲ Detail of a Q’eqchi’ huipil; synthetic fabric hand-embroidered with cotton thread. Alta Verapaz, Guatemala. Photo: R. Schneider.



▲ Wichi bag (or yica); chaguar (*Bromelia hieronymi*) fibers dyed with root extracts, beads made from palo santo (*Bursera graveolens*) wood, and feathers. The yica often has a strap, but here, the strap has been lost. Gaona, Anta, Salta, Argentina. Photo: R. Schneider.

a kind of garment over time, as well as the stylistic variations (including the incorporation of contemporary materials or techniques) of the community clothing from a specific town or region. I have been very lucky to have been able to photograph pieces from the National Institute of Indigenous Peoples Collection, from the Maya World Textile Center, the Museum of Popular Art, the Textile Museum of Oaxaca, and the Ixchel Museum of Indigenous Clothing of Guatemala, among others. Clearly, textiles are without a doubt one of the most important leading items in the vast folk art tradition, even more important than other everyday objects that share techniques and influences in the Americas (such as basket-weaving, ceramics, etc.).

I should underline that the project has received contributions from the artisans themselves, who have become familiar with the platform and understand that its aim is not commercial, but to disseminate the art. This has enriched its content enormously. Whenever possible, I ask



Pieces often come from collections, expositions, or historical collections, allowing us to observe the evolution of a kind of garment over time.

▲ Detail of a Totonac blouse; hand-embroidered cotton broadcloth, made around 1980 (those of today are very similar). Papantla de Olarte, Veracruz, Mexico (Mexico's National Institute of Indigenous Peoples [INPI] collection). Photo: R. Schneider, courtesy of INPI.

them to tell us about the elements of their understanding of the universe that are displayed on the clothing.

### Where the Genders Converge

Disseminating women's work, traditionally done in the countryside after hours of agricultural labor and housework, often only for self-consumption, is well worth doing. Nevertheless, clothing for day-to-day or festive wear is also done by males, who make shawls on pedal looms or sisal shoulder bags on back-strap looms. They weave and embroider, just like the women, in their free time or full time, and some are organized in cooperatives when it is in their interest. In all cases, if we have that information, or data about when the pieces were made, we include it. Plus, we indicate whether a kind of garment is no longer in use, tracing when that happened if the information is available.

On occasion, pieces arrive and their origin or the technique used to make them is unclear. Bibliographical research has been fundamental for dealing with this, and it is always gratifying to discover the many publications that



▲ Detail of a Tzotzil coat; wool dyed with *chiate* and black earth; woven on a back-strap loom and hand embroidered with cotton thread. This garment is not traditionally worn by men or women in this Tzotzil location; for many years, the pieces have been made exclusively for sale. San Juan Chamula, Chiapas, Mexico. Photo: Sofia Durand.





▲ Ceremonial Tlingit spread; cedar bark fibers, goat wool and sinews; made about 1870. Southeastern coast of Alaska, United States (Quai Branly Museum, Paris, France). Photo: R. Schneider.

offer information about traditional clothing. In addition to written sources and the help of specialists like Octavio Murillo or Karla Pérez, who are always ready to come to my rescue, it has been wonderful to see how a collaborative network has taken shape through the comments, clarifications, and even scoldings received from site followers. In fact, the thirteen photographs that accompany this short article were selected expressly by platform visitors after a brief survey.

### A Field of Debate We Need

When I began this project, my intention was just to learn about a topic that I'm passionate about. So, I thought that publishing one piece a day would be a discipline that would allow me to increase my meager knowledge about the matter. Now I feel that I know less than before, but the enthusiasm for discovering and attempting to project the differences in taste between one group and another that essentially identify them has not diminished.

The demands of globalization vs. the demands of the hemisphere's First Peoples about their territory and political, economic, and cultural rights have created a field of debate that we must pay attention to and analyze. Curiously, thanks to this project, I have witnessed the discussions about issues like cultural appropriation and design theft, indiscriminate commercialization of pieces made as "souvenirs," or the textiles of some regions becoming something for the elites. I do not consider myself a special-



▲ Nayeri (Cora) skirt with apron; commercial fabric cut and machine-sewn by Primitiva Rodríguez. Santa Teresa del Nayar, El Nayar, Nayarit, Mexico. Photo: R. Schneider.

The project has received contributions from the artisans themselves, who have become familiar with the platform and understand that its aim is not commercial, but to disseminate the art.



▲ Tepehua blouse; cotton broadcloth and gingham hand- and machine-embroidered with cotton thread; made about 1990 (National Institute of Indigenous Peoples [INPI] collection, Mexico). Photo R. Schneider, courtesy of INPI.



▲ Otomí blouse made by Dominga Gutiérrez. Santiago Mexquititlán, Amealco, Querétaro, Mexico. Photo: R. Schneider.



▲ Tepehua *tapún* (*quexquemetl*), or slip-on triangular ceremonial covering; cotton and wool woven on a strap-back loom using muslin and brocade techniques in about 1960 (National Institute of Indigenous Peoples [INPI] collection, Mexico). Photo: R. Schneider, courtesy of INPI.

The demands of globalization vs. those of the hemisphere's First Peoples about their territory and political, economic, and cultural rights originated debate that we must pay attention to and analyze.



▲ Otomí bag for incense; hand-spun cotton and wool, woven on a back-strap loom using double fabric technique in the nineteenth century (National Institute of Indigenous Peoples [INPI] collection, Mexico). Photo: Michel Zabé, courtesy of INPI.

ist in any of these fields, and what has seemed appropriate to me is to observe and pay attention fundamentally to the points of view of the women and men artisans who make the pieces—and in most cases wear them. Even though they have no single viewpoint or common form of organization, like with their clothing, these depend, among other things, on a specific world-view and the bio-cultural resources available in their territories, as well as on the social and economic conditions, or their kind of integration and mobilization, which is different for every group.

Celebrating that difference, celebrating the ways in which each culture decides to identify itself and the ways that each weaves networks and collaborates to achieve their rights, is perhaps the best way to honor them from outside. This project seeks to do that by making the clothing visible, showing that the garments are not trivial, a frivolity, but the clearest representation—since they are visual—of a kind of cultural resistance. **MM**

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “Un huipil al día” is available on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/Un-huipil-al-d%C3%ADa-456338117823196/>), Instagram ([https://www.instagram.com/unhuipil\\_aldia/?hl=es-la](https://www.instagram.com/unhuipil_aldia/?hl=es-la)), and WordPress (<https://unhuipil.wordpress.com/home/>). [Editor’s Note.]



Astrid Velasco Montante\*  
Illustrated by Gina Fuentes\*\*

# Roberto López Moreno

Was born in 1942 in Huixtla, Chiapas. With a bachelor's in journalism and as a poet, narrator, and essayist, he is considered one of the writers who is most representative of Mexican artistic avant-gardes of the second half of the twentieth century. He is even recognized as the creator of a current: poemuralism.<sup>1</sup> He has been a contributor to important daily papers, a professor at the Carlos Septién García School and the Acatlán campus of the UNAM National School of Professional Studies (ENEP), and has participated in different radio programs. His impressive body of work consists of more than 30 works published by different publishers. He has written children's books, film and television scripts, essays, short stories, and poetry. Some of his most outstanding books are *Décimas lezámicas* (Decimas in the Lezama Mode) (UNAM); *De saurios, itinerarios y adioses* (Of Sauria, Itineraries, and Farewells) (Autonomous University of Chiapas); *Verbario de varia hoguera* (Verbs of Different Infernos) (Chiapas Institute of Culture); *Sinfonía de los salmos* (Symphony of Psalms) (UNAM); *Ya se lo dije al presidente* (I Already Told the President) (Fondo de Cultura Económica); *Las mariposas de la Tía Nati* (Aunt Nati's Butterflies) (CNCA); *La curva de la espiral en la editorial* (The Curve of the Spiral in the Publishing House) (Claves Latinoamericanas); and *Cuentos en el recuento* (Stories in the Recounting) (UNAM), among many others.

He has been given almost a dozen awards for his work and received national honors. Among them are the Rodolfo Figueroa Prize for Poetry (1969), the Tomás Martínez Prize for Short Story (1969), the Efraín Huer-

ta National Poetry Competition (second place, 1978), and the Rosario Castellanos Chiapas Prize for the Arts (2001).



I met Roberto López Moreno a couple of years ago because he authored an essay about poemuralism and literary magazines over the last 50 years for a book I was editing. I soon discovered his incredible prose and generous wisdom, and later, that he was a prolific writer of poetry, narrative, and essays. When reading him, you discover that there are few like him who play and make their own the different literary forms, the rhythms, and the word in its entirety. What are his themes, his interests? It is difficult to say in such a brief exposition. His work is full of beauty, spaces, persons, feelings, and all human experience.

López Moreno is not only one of the most important living poets of Chiapas, but he has been one of those who has most experimented with genres, ranging from composing in verse, with strict, classical metric stanzas—sonnets, for example—to very free composition, or even using supports that are not paper, plus his work in prose, narrative, essays, and journalism. It is an honor to have him in *Voices of Mexico*.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "A 'poemural' . . . develops a theme through a long strip [of support material] in which different kinds of symbologies and verbal procedures, which does not mean—and this is, in the end, its main characteristic—that it is not fully integrated." Its mechanism is the play and use of all expressive possibilities. Roberto López Moreno, "Poemurales: un acto ético," [https://www.robertolopezmoreno.com/poemuralismo/poemurales\\_un\\_acto\\_etico.html](https://www.robertolopezmoreno.com/poemuralismo/poemurales_un_acto_etico.html).

\* Coordinator of publications, UNAM Center for Research on North America (CISAN); [astrid.velasco@gmail.com](mailto:astrid.velasco@gmail.com).

\*\* Visual artist; [hola@ginafuentes.com](mailto:hola@ginafuentes.com)



Poems by  
**Roberto López Moreno**

## *Palenque*

### *At the Doors of the Jungle*

The threshold of the overflowing jungle  
holds a book of stone containing,  
in glittering lineage,  
chapters of wise flame.

In it throbbed the beloved blood,  
the herbal chisel that holds it,  
blade that wounds, marks, engraves, is  
the color of cacao and the dawn.

The ant and the galaxy inhabit the book,  
the stone turns pink and turns into wind  
into which red and green plunge.

The fire grows since its coming,  
the herbal mane that quivers  
in this mineral tearing.

# Images of the Fifth Sun

## Part One: Toltec Images

Maker of destiny,  
look at your children empty of all blood  
growing the twists and turns  
of the infinite shadow;  
give them renewed movement,  
the strength needed to light the day.  
Travel to the dumb mansion of the absent,  
where the ancestors' sacred bones lie;  
with them you will build us again.  
Overcome, O Lord, the opposition of the master of shadows,  
exterminate his animosity with your ray of light,  
rip from him the "precious bones"  
and give them to us, Giver, launch us once again into life  
to venerate you, the greatest power of our dream world.  
I see your enterprise crowned by success.  
The male of the shadows writhes  
among the clouds of his empire.  
Now, may the gods aid you in this huge endeavor.  
Bleed your skin and muscle, our strength,  
form us out of the divine torrent of your vital sap  
to stop being this nebula of anxiety  
that floats without bodily pain.  
Put the kernel of corn on our lips.

## Part Two: Aztec Images

I was chosen to satiate the thirst of the god  
that will gulp as from the Lerma River in the bubbling of my chest.

Fulfilled the 365 beats of that time,  
the sky will be an immense reddened griddle;  
that my blood will shelter the permanence of the lineage  
that will rise up, vertical, the day when the flowers bloom;  
it will be a red flower of an invincible stalk  
because it will burn with the force of generations.

That day should burst the dance corolla  
that builds everything from its pollen, dust  
of compliant flint.

In the center of the flower  
the tiger and ocelot knights, the eagle knights,  
should fight

to bequeath their energy to the cosmos.

The 365 night howls have been heard,

The 365 shrieks of the day.

I go up the stairs on the arms of the priests,

I give myself over,

the stone hummingbird bursts the flesh of my chest,

a boom of log drums sprays the air,

out of my chest emerges the red flower, beating

like a rising flame,

growing, recognizing its origin, accepting it,

taking its place.

The Sun burns us.

The poems in *Quinto Sol* (Fifth Sun) were previously published in the book *Sinfonía de los salmos* (Symphony of Psalms), Mexico City: UNAM, 1996.



Paul Roubin  
2017

Mario Humberto Ruz Sosa\*  
Illustrated by Joel Rendón\*\*

# Náhuatl Erotica<sup>1</sup>

**A**s poetic as it was tragic, forceful, and revealing, what the colonial Maya scribes wrote has come down to us in the *Chilam Balam de Chumayel*: “To castrate the Sun: that is what the foreigners came here to do.”<sup>2</sup> It could well be thought that, as a result of that castration, several facets of the Mesoamerican cultural prism have since then been eclipsed, buried, and others hidden away in the chest of veiled day-to-day events. . . . Undoubtedly one of those facets, among the most important, was sensuality and, in particular, sensuality linked to eroticism.

In his most recent book, the great Miguel León-Portilla gives us a glimpse inside, not Pandora’s box, but Aphrodite’s chest, or rather, that of her counterparts Xochiquetzal and Tlazoltéotl. As is well known, in the Nahua universe, that chest has two compartments with two sacred mistresses. The former is considered, together with Xochipilli, the divinity of love and the flowers that evoke it, while the second was held to be the goddess of sensual pleasure and voluptuousness. Therefore, while Xochiquetzal protected pregnant women and midwives, Tlazoltéotl was the patroness of the *tlatlamianime*, the “ones who create joy,” as well as those who had illicit sexual relations, activities unrelated by principle with fecundity.

The chest that opens this original and particularly pleasant book by Don Miguel, whose texts are presented in bilingual versions, allows us to catch sight of those open corollas of those who become the owners of half the night when Tlazoltéotl arrives. This is described in the splendid fragment of the “Himno de Atamalqualoyan” (Hymn of Atamalqualoyan), which begins by saying, “Xochitl noyolo...” (Flowers is my heart)...

Flowers is my heart: the corolla is open,  
It is the owner of half the night.

\* Director of the UNAM Institute of Philological Research;  
mhruz@gmail.com.

\*\* Visual artist; joelrendonv@gmail.com.

Our mother has already arrived, Tlazoltéotl has already arrived.

Does, perchance, the young prince lie down

in the house of the night, in the house of the night?

The one who lies down, the one who lies down, lies down:

now with my hand I make the woman turn,

now I am the one who lies her down.<sup>3,4</sup>

And if our mother Tlazoltéotl is pleased to give us the gift of her visit in the middle of the night, that is not the only hour that we may meet with the being also called Ixcuinan and Tlaelcuani, “Mother who becomes the owner of the face,” since, as León-Portilla reminds us, citing the *Florentine Codex*, she was called the “devourer of filth”:

Because before her face, it was said, before her, all vanity was told . . . all the actions of the flesh, no matter how horrific, no matter how depraved, nothing was hidden from her out of shame. . . . It was said that Tlazoltéotl caused the dust and waste, the works of the flesh, Tlazoltéotl fostered them. And only she discharged, she purified, relieved; she washed, she bathed; in her hands were the waters, the green waters, the yellow waters. Before her the heart was known, before her face, people’s hearts were purified.<sup>5</sup>

Included in this book/chest (which, when opened, spills out sheaves of text filled with carnal games and vanities carefully chosen by the author, and suggestively and very attractively etched by Joel Rendón) is, among others, the famous story of Tohuenyo. He is none other than the warlock god Titlacahuan Tezcatlipoca, who, after assuming the guise of a Huastec merchant, began selling chili peppers in the Tula market without a truss, “wandering around nude, with his thing hanging out,” causing the daughter of Huémac “to become anxious” (who, it is also noted, was sought after by many Toltecs, because she was “*muy buena*,” “very desirable”).<sup>6</sup> After seeing him, she became ill, “feeling poorly from Tohuenyo’s little bird,” saying that she



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would not get well until she cohabited with him—not without first sending him to bathe, be anointed and dressed, and have his hair cut. Having done so, “the women got well in the moment.”

Another story shows that desire is not only for the young: two old women considered libidinous, after being surprised about to commit adultery with some young men, were questioned by Nezahualcōyotl (1402-1472) about whether they still desired “the things of the flesh” like when they were young:

Our ladies,  
¿What is this I hear?  
What is it you can tell me?  
Do you, by chance, still desire the things of the flesh?  
Are you not satisfied now,  
Being as you are?

They responded that, in contrast with the old men, who “have no appetite for the flesh because they have already lost their potency, having spent it all in a rush and being left with nothing,” women never tired of it since, “there is in us like a cave, a ravine. Just wait. . . because its office is to receive.”<sup>7</sup>

Even today, as though echoing that ancient Mesoamerican idea, the jocular ritual language spoken by the Tzotzil from Chamula during Carnival uses euphemisms like “hole,” “cave,” and “place” for “vagina,” and “bone” and “muscle” for “penis.” They recite,

Stretch out, bone! Stretch out, muscle!  
Remember your place, bone! Remember your place, muscle!  
Don't leave your cave, muscle! Don't leave your cave empty,  
bone!<sup>8</sup>

The tone is imperative, as though urging them to battle. And, in that sense, I could not help but remember that the first Tzeltal dictionary we have, written by Friar Domingo de Ara around 1560, translates “matchmakers”

as “*yhcoghel*,” which, literally, means “for the battle.” But another term, “*ghmonoghel*,” part of which is “*mon*,” or “carry in your arms, like a mother would a child”; and in the entry for “soothe,” we find that “*qmon*” means the same as “*yhcoghon*,” or “call, like the procuress, to sin.” Battle and soothing, an expressive binomial for carnal love.<sup>9</sup>

It is to these desirable battles that the *Chalca cihuacatl* (The Song of the Women of Chalco) refers. Don Miguel calls it the “song of enchantments, mocking, and tickling,” in which the poet Aquiahuatzin, a native of Amecameca (c. 1430-c. 1490), has the women of Chalco challenge the *tlatoani*, or chief, Axayácatl to a struggle that he can only win if he is sexually well endowed. Tradition has it that the song pleased the lord of Tenochtitlan so much from the first time he heard it in his palace, sung by a young Chalco resident, born in the year 13 Cane (1479), that he began to dance. And, thankful, he showered the singer with gifts (blankets, sandals decorated with turquoise, cacao, quetzal feathers . . .). And, what is more, chronicler Chimalpahin writes that “he made this song his own. When he wanted to feel happy, he always had it sung.”<sup>10</sup>

The erotic poetic assault continues throughout the book's seven parts, and the reader will discover it as he/she moves through the battlefield the book becomes. I will merely point out that it begins with an invitation to women to go in search of certain flowers, flowers “of water and of fire,” in *atl, tlachinolli*, flowers of the shield that evoke war, and it continues with the challenge to “little Axayácatl” to see if he is capable of “making” what makes me a woman “erect,” and that he do it little by little, in the manner of a charge and withdrawal, as corresponds to a true battle: “But no, no, do not deflower yet, little man. . . .” A companion in bed, intertwined and encircled by flowers, the *tlatoani* is invited to frolic on the exquisite mat while the female warrior, “with flowers the color of the bird of fire” makes her womb sound and offers herself up to the perforator.

Xolotzin. . . “Little companion, my little boy, you, Lord, little Axayácatl, we are going to be together, settle yourself at my side, make your man-being speak.” “Flavorful is your seed, you yourself are flavorful.” “Stir me like corn dough. . . Are you not an eagle, an ocelot? Do you not call yourself that, my little boy?” “Perhaps that is how your heart wants it, like that, little by little, let us tire ourselves. . . .” “Let us have pleasure on your flower-strewn mat, where you exist, little companion, little by little give

yourself over to sleep, be at peace, my little boy, you, Lord Axayácatl.”<sup>11</sup>

It becomes clear to us that “playful Eros,” whom León-Portilla mentions, delights in Greek and Roman beds as he does on mats covered with quetzal feathers or simple woven cypress pallets when we carefully review the ancient and current Mesoamerican concepts and practices. It is impossible to dwell on it here, but just as an example, since the poem *Cococuícatl*, or turtle dove song, (in which the women joy-makers speak), mentions the “Otomi woman Champotzin,” I allow myself to remember that the Otomí of today conceive of the energy necessary for reproducing the universe as polarized in the form of two complementary male and female entities. According to Jacques Galinier, this would explain to a great extent the generalized sexualization and erotization that characterize their way of understanding the universe: a vast allegory centered on the topic of cosmic fertility, which even spills over into the language. There is a reason the labia majora are called mouth or sacred lips; the clitoris, the sacred eminence; and menstrual blood, blood of the moon.<sup>12</sup> The skin is understood as a kind of wrapping, shell, or bark that envelops the life force; this is why its “degeneration” anticipates the resurgence of life, like the wrinkled foreskin before an erection. The penis, in turn, is considered a cultural analogy for man, just like the individual has a life cycle: growth, climax, and decline. Without an erection, it is like a little boy; during the sex act, it arrives at its apex, and in death and after coitus, it prefigures the first ancestor: aged, wilted, spent.<sup>13</sup>

León-Portilla points out from the very first lines of the preface that the life and art of the indigenous cultures have lacked “the presence of erotic themes. As if the rigid ethics of the Indians, in this case the Nahua, had made it impossible for them to find inspiration and joy in love and sex.”

As Don Miguel points out, the texts in this book contradict that idea, as well as the idea that sexual enjoyment was conceived as one of the gifts of the gods and it was spoken of directly. This can also be seen in the *huehuetlatolli*, brief speeches that the pre-Hispanic Nahua foisted on their children to instruct and educate them. One of them says,

Listen well, my daughter, child of mine: the Earth is not a pleasant place [but]. . . so that we do not exist amidst tears

forever, so that we Men do not succumb to sadness, he, Our Lord, deigned to give us laughter, slumber, and our sustenance, our strength, our brightness. And this more: the earthly [sex], so reproduction could happen. All this intoxicates life on Earth so no one wanders a-weeping.<sup>14</sup>

We should also remember that other *huehuetlatolli* make it clear that the Nahua culture has rules and precepts about exercising sexuality. These included, for example, the value of temperance and discretion, like the one that warns youngsters, “even if you have an appetite to eat, resist; resist your heart until you are a perfect, sturdy man; note that if they open the maguey when it is young to extract the honey, it has neither substance nor does it drip honey; it is lost.”<sup>15</sup> It is not for nothing that the evangelizers appreciated and recovered texts like these.

In any case, it is clear that if its divine origin marks the myth, linguistics makes the earthly nature of sex obvious: *tlaltipacáyotl*, “what belongs on the surface of the Earth.” From here we can deduce that being divine and pleasant in nature did not make him absolutely perfect and clean. It was thought that it cleansed forces of harmful, dishonorable impurities, while what was understood by “impure” varied according to social standing, sex, and marital status. For example, plebeians (those who were dissolute and incapable of governing themselves) were permitted greater freedom. It was also thought that fornication lessened the strength of the *tonalli*, on which the power of the government largely depended.<sup>16</sup> Also, copulation of a married man with a single woman was not considered adultery, but the reverse, a single man with a married woman, was punishable by death. This proves that the objective was not so much to defend the integrity of the home, but the right of the husband over his wife’s sex life.<sup>17, 18</sup>

The need to maintain a balanced population, in continual danger due to the death of men in battle and women in childbirth, translated into the insistence on monogamy; a repudiation of abortion (punished by death), sterile women, celibacy, separation, homosexuality, dissolute women, bawds, and prostitutes (considered “dead,” just like the adulteress). In fact, all the latter were conceived of as beings who had lost their human condition, and society resorted to threats of diseases in order to channel people’s sexuality.<sup>19</sup>

But, channeled or not, sexuality and eroticism in poetry were sung. We find this in the book *Tlaltónayan atla ca*

This book/treasure chest when opened, spills out sheaves of text filled with carnal games and vanities carefully chosen by the author, and suggestively and very attractively etched by Joel Rendón.

*tempan*. . . , “Where the earth warms, on the edge of the water, the flowers have come to stand straight, where the rushes are, playing the flute. I, beautiful bird, in the hands of someone alive, I am only a woman.” “I, woman, beautiful vagina, my heart interlaces the orange rattle flower.”

The many ways of interlacing flowers and rattles would change in tone, rhythm, and melody, and went from singing aloud to become a cyphered language, a whispered melody, and even hidden writing in the colonial era—through-out which, despite many attacks, it managed to survive—and are undoubtedly a topic of enormous interest, but unfortunately, I cannot go into it here. However, I do want to mention at least three points:

1. The way in which the Spanish Crown and the Church attempted to apprehend several of these concepts and practices (all the better to more easily change them) can be seen, even if only indirectly, in the linguistic and doctrinal works, usually written by evangelizing friars. These works, despite all their deficiencies and biases, are invaluable aids in approaching topics like the human body, sensorial realities, and the reproduction of indigenous peoples in the colonial era, from the vantage point and ethics of their conquerors, it is true. But, tangentially, they also inform us of some Mesoamerican concepts and attitudes or even about the indigenous resistance to accepting certain concepts of European origin.

Thus, to cite one example, the famous *Confesionario* in Náhuatl by Friar Alonso de Molina, written in 1569, mentions “coveting” another body, extramarital relations, “touchings” that were considered “impure,” the use of or being a procurer, homosexual practices, marriages made not “to have children . . . , but only for mundane reasons or for dirty delight,” infidelity, adultery, having sex during menstruation, or by non-vaginal means, etc.<sup>20</sup>

2. The subjected indigenous peoples came to know that, in addition to the transgressions of the body and the whims of the soul that their forbears had known, in the Christian view, it was possible to sin not only in “practice,” but even in the realm of volition. It was no longer necessary to actually carry out—or even attempt—this or that act in order to sin. It sufficed to want it or, having committed it involuntarily (as with nocturnal emissions), take pleasure in it. Time and again confessors are alerted: they had to specifically and repeatedly ask penitents about this, since the Indians rarely considered desires or thoughts as sins.

3. Thanks to the efforts of those Mesoamericans who learned to express themselves through the alphabet, letters, and ink of the new masters, as did the indigenous and mestizo chroniclers and other scribes, today we can get a glimpse of ancient wisdom, transmitted from generation to generation, and that migrated from the verbal arts to written texts. Some of these are enormously beautiful, such as, just to cite a few examples from the Maya world, such eloquent works as the *Cantares de Dzitbalché* (The Song of Dzitbalché) or *El ritual de los Bacabes* (The Rite of the Bacabes),<sup>21</sup> where we see the erotic mixed with the religious and even with the esoteric, since the pleasure that accompanies the acts of impregnation brings with it not only the permanence of the group, but of the whole universe. Not in vain do the ancient Maya stories like the *Popol Vuh* speak to us of generations that were successively destroyed by their inability to maintain the deities, who were in turn, the sustainers of the cosmos.

I will close by citing two fragments of the *Cantares de Dzitbalché* that, together with the texts recovered by Don Miguel León-Portilla in this, his last book, help us to glimpse what the Mesoamerican sensual world retains of pleasure.

The first is part of Canto 4, *Coox-H-C-Kam-Niicte*, “Let us go to the reception of the flower,” a clear allusion to our topic, since, among the Maya, the flower (particularly the frangipani) is the symbol of sensuality. The poem reads, “All the beautiful women [have in] their faces pure laughter and laughter, while their hearts jump in their breasts . . . because they know that they will give their feminine virginity to those they love. Sing ye the Flower!”<sup>22</sup>

The second fragment is from Canto 7, *Kay Nicté*, The Canto of the Flower, and refers to a ceremony that had to be performed on a moonlit night in a *haltun* (a natural well in live rock), where women used to go—and it is said in several towns that they still go—, led by an old woman “to make their lover return if he has gone away, or ensure that he remain near.” Even without the euphoria of the Mayan text, the canto still breathes sensuality and beauty:

The beautiful moon has risen over the forest; it ignites in the heavens where it remains suspended to illuminate the Earth, the entire forest. The air and its perfume sweetly come. . . . We have arrived inside the forest where no one will see what we have come to do. We have brought the frangipani flower, the *chucum* (*Harvardia albicans*) flower, the jasmine flower. . . . We brought the copal, the *cañita* ziiit vine, and the tortoise shell. . . new shoes; everything new, including the ribbons that tie our tresses to touch us with the water lily; and also the humming shell and the old woman.

We are here, here in the heart of the forest, beside the well in the rock, waiting until the beautiful star that fumes over the forest comes out.

Take off your clothes; release your tresses; be as you came into the world, virgins, beautiful women. . . <sup>23</sup>

We should not be surprised that through ceremonies like this one, which engendered the senses by intertwining privileged landscapes, with music sweet to the ears, dress pleasant to the touch, perfumes of flowers and copal, and the luminosity of desire, the Mesoamericans could feel, as the sixteenth-century Tzeltal poetically said, *Nop-quinál xcabi*, or meshed with the world.

Nothing is left to say except to thank Don Miguel León-Portilla, who, through this book, allows us to also mesh with the perpetual pleasure that is life. **MM**

Day of the Holy Cross, 2019

## Notes

- 1 This article is a commentary on the book *Erótica náhuatl*, by Miguel León-Portilla (Mexico City: Artes de México and El Colegio Nacional, 2018).
- 2 Antonio Mediz Bolio, trans., *Libro del Chilam Balam de Chumayel* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1973).
- 3 I will cite the page(s) where the longer quotes can be found, so anyone who wants specifically to check the Náhuatl version (which I refer to only rarely) can do so. In order not to saturate the article with notes, I will not cite the page where shorter quotes are to be found, but they will always be put in quotes.
- 4 León-Portilla, op. cit., p. 106.
- 5 Ibid., p. 103.
- 6 León-Portilla notes that the expression “*muy buena*” (literally, “very good,” but meaning very sexy or desirable), like several others, many of which are still in current use, may well have links to what we know today as “*albur*” or the game/competition of double entendre.
- 7 León-Portilla, op. cit., pp. 93-95.
- 8 Victoria Reifler Bricker, *Humor ritual en la altiplanicie de Chiapas*, Jaime Sabines, trans. (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986), p. 42.
- 9 Mario Humberto Ruz, *Copanaguastla en un espejo. Un pueblo tzeltal en el Virreinato* (Mexico City: Conacyt, 1992), p. 171.
- 10 León-Portilla, op. cit., p. 49.
- 11 Ibid., pp. 53-77.
- 12 Jacques Galinier, *La mitad del mundo. Cuerpo y cosmos en los rituales otomíes* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1990), pp. 635-655.
- 13 Ibid., pp. 189 and on.
- 14 Alfredo López Austin, *Cuerpo humano e ideología. Las concepciones de los antiguos nahuas* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1980), I, p. 276.
- 15 Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia verdadera de las cosas de la Nueva España* (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1979).
- 16 López Austin, op. cit., p. 447ss.
- 17 López Austin, op. cit., p. 346ss. Another example of the domination of values understood as virile is that polygamy was allowed for distinguished warriors who had relations with women participating in the festival of Tlaxochimaco. Women, however, were considered the carriers of noxious forces tending toward imbalance.
- 18 Alfredo López Austin, “La sexualidad entre los antiguos nahuas,” Pilar Gonzalbo Aispuru, comp., *Historia de la familia* (Mexico City: Instituto Mora/UAM, 1993), pp. 88 and on. In López Austin’s view, the pre-Hispanic Nahuas thought, “All the sexual sins and excesses caused harm to the body: the illness of sin led to madness; the sinner caused damage with noxious emanations around his innocent fellows; girls who had lost their virginity would suffer the rotting of their genitals; sexual excess led to physical ruin, to consumption; the use of aphrodisiacs caused uninterrupted ejaculation and, with that, death.”
- 19 Ibid., p. 88ss.
- 20 Friar Alonso de Molina, *Confesionario mayor en la lengua mexicana y castellana* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1972), pp. 30-31. And when writing of the fifth commandment, he mentions that the female penitent should be asked if she had hurt the male during coitus “with harmful intent,” causing him to become ill or die.
- 21 Ramón Arzápalo, trans. and ed., *El ritual de los Bacabes* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, UNAM, 1984).
- 22 Martha Ilia Nájera Coronado, *Libro de los Cantares de Dzitbalché en la tradición religiosa mesoamericana*, Alfredo Barrera Vázquez, trans. (Mexico City: UNAM, 2007), p. 149.
- 23 Ibid., pp. 156-159.

María Cristina Hernández Escobar\*

# Miguel León-Portilla

## Victorious Writing

The great *tlamatini* (wise man in Náhuatl), historian, anthropologist, ethnographer, translator, philosopher, and humanist Miguel León-Portilla died the night of October 1 at the age of 93. León-Portilla (Mexico City, 1926-2019) was one of the wisest and most affable and generous men of contemporary Mexico. A committed defender of our country's first people's cultures, a prolific researcher, the recipient of honorary doctorates from many institutions worldwide, he was, above all, a good person and one of the most widely read authors by students in Mexico and abroad.

His life was fueled by an unceasing quest for knowledge and he drank from that fountain equally in Náhuatl, Latin, Greek, Spanish, English, French, German, Italian, and Portuguese. His work directly continued that begun by Ángel María Garibay Kintana (1892-1967), who he considered his mentor in his vocation and task of recovering and disseminating the ancient words of the Nahua peoples.

He studied at Los Angeles's Loyola University, where he graduated in art in 1951, and at the UNAM, where he received his doctorate in philosophy in 1956.

Between 1955 and 1963, he was deputy director and then director of the Inter-American Indigenist Institute (INII). Beginning in 1963, he was the director of the UNAM's Institute for Historical Research for a decade and was appointed the chronicler of Mexico City between 1975 and 1976. In 1995, he was inducted into the United States National Academy of Sciences in the special area of anthropology and history. He was also a member of the Mexican Academies of Language and of History, the National College, and the Cuban Academy of Language.

\*Literary translator, critic, and editor at *Voices of Mexico*, CISAN, UNAM; lilith@unam.com.



DGCs, UNAM

Among his most important and best-known works are, undoubtedly, *La filosofía náhuatl* (Nahua Philosophy) (1956); *La visión de los vencidos* (The Vision of the Vanquished) (1959)—the most widely circulated of all UNAM publications, which has been translated into more than 15 languages—; *Los antiguos mexicanos a través de sus crónicas y cantares* (Ancient Mexicans through Their Chronicles and Songs) (1961); *El reverso de la Conquista* (The Reverse Side of the Conquest) (1964); *Trece poetas del mundo azteca* (Thirteen Poets from the Aztec World) (1967); *Literaturas indígenas de México* (Indigenous Literatures of Mexico) (1992); *Quince poetas del mundo náhuatl* (Fifteen Poets of the Nahua World) (1994); and *La tinta negra y roja. Antología de poesía náhuatl* (Red and Black Ink. Anthology of Náhuatl Poetry) (2008).

Fortunately, he received many honors. Among the most memorable may be the honorary doctorates given by the San Andrés Greater University of Bolivia (1994) and by his alma mater, the UNAM (1998), as well as the honor bestowed on him in his hospital bed last September 12 when the Ministry of Public Education gave him the first Nezhualcóyotl Prize.

During a 2016 honors ceremony at UNAM, he said with characteristic humor that he wasn't afraid of death because, "We don't know when I'll die. I have worked and helped; I think I haven't been much of a bastard. If there is a God, my fate won't be bad."

Another trait that identified Don Miguel León-Portilla was his constant defense of the humanities. He thought that they allowed people to overcome their natural fragility, build imposing works, make great discoveries and inventions, and create beauty and have the ability to enjoy it; all of this at the same time that past technocratic, neo-liberal governments waged a ferocious siege against them, questioning the importance of studying, teaching, and funding them.

Outstanding among the multiple teachings he leaves as a legacy to current and coming generations are his love for the cultures and linguistic heritage of the first peoples, as well as the collective responsibility for preserving and disseminating them. From his perspective, in the twenty-first century, we are facing in more than one sense a clear,

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decisive dilemma: many languages either die or are saved. "Some linguists say that of the more than 5 000 existing languages in the world, only 100 will survive. I say that there could be many more; it depends on us, we who are teachers and to a certain extent, linguists, those of us who are interested in the history of our country and recognize it as a treasure." He concluded —and quite rightly so— that, "When a language dies, it is a tragedy for humanity."<sup>1</sup> **MM**

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**Notes**


- <sup>1</sup> Merry MacMasters, "León-Portilla urge al gobierno aumentar apoyo a la educación," *La Jornada*, October 12, 2016, p. 4, <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2016/10/12/cultura/a04n1cul>.

You can listen to the course "La riqueza de la literatura náhuatl" (The Wealth of Nahuatl Literature), given by León-Portilla in August 2014 at the Carlos Chávez Room, at the following web site: <https://descargacultura.unam.mx/autor/León-Portilla,%20Miguel>.

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This video was produced to ensure that the beautiful words our ancestors used to describe their surroundings are not forgotten. They had to be recovered for the twenty-first century, but they are also updated, sung, and provided with modern musical arrangements, with the pride of disseminating an intangible heritage framed in its original landscapes.

*Teresita Cortés Díaz*



“Little Flower” (*Pirekua*).  
Pre-Columbian Purépecha song.  
To listen to the song, scan this code:

