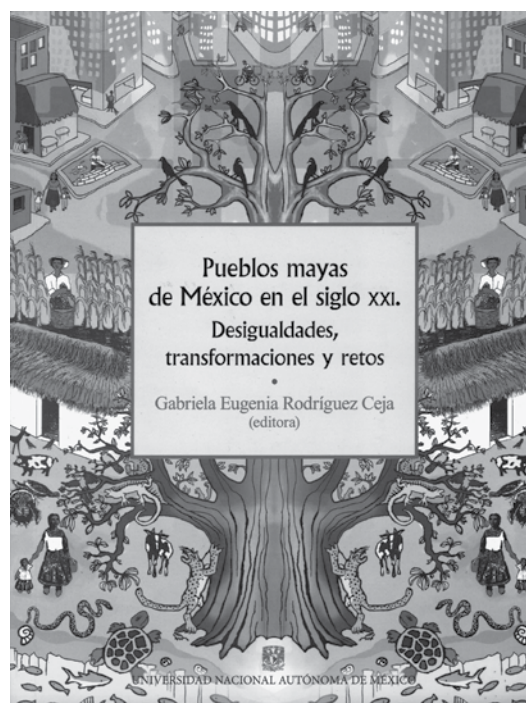


**Pueblos mayas de México en el siglo xxi.  
Desigualdades, transformaciones y retos**  
(The Maya Peoples of Mexico in the Twenty-first  
Century. Inequalities, Transformations,  
And Challenges)  
Gabriela Eugenia Rodríguez Ceja, ed.  
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Analyzing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

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