



Luis González

An Invitation to Micro-History

Francisco Miranda*

The death of Luis González, December 13, 2003, should be taken as an opportunity to think about the importance of his life and work for our country's cultural history. Devoted to academic life, he was a man of loyalties, first to his Mexico College (Colmex) and last to the Michoacán College (Colmich).

It is not enough to just know about the intellectual adventure of the father of Mexican micro-

history. We should also learn from his feelings and experiences, which made him a leading citizen of his time, replete with transformations (1925 to 2003): from the painful Cristera War, which brought exile to his family and the burning of his hometown, to the recent legal recognition of religious organizations.

The main body of his work was published in 17 volumes and a compact disc by Clío and the National College. In addition, he gave many lectures, informal talks and was always interested in

* Researcher at the Michoacán College (Colmich).

sharing his knowledge in courses. He also always encouraged people and breathed life into the most varied of academic projects.

His micro-historic work began by proposing a model in his *Pueblo en vilo* (San José de Gracia. Mexican Village in Transition). He theorized about it in *Invitación a la microhistoria* (Invitation to Micro-History), following this up with concrete histories, *Zamora* and *Sahuayo*. And he finally wrote a manual for writing specific histories in *El oficio de historiar* (The Craft of History).

Mexican Village in Transition had many editions in Spanish and was translated into English by John Upton and published by the University of Texas in 1972, and into French by Annie Meyer, published by Plon in their Terre Humaine Collection in 1977 (*Les barrières de la solitude. San José, village mexicain*).

But Don Luis not only wrote and theorized. He also invited other historians to join him in his task of promoting “motherland histories,” as he called the products of micro-history. I should mention here *Monografías municipales* (Municipal Monographs) in which a dozen authors write about 20 Michoacán towns; with more writers from all over, he also compiled the series *Monografías estatales* (State Monographs) for the Ministry of Public Education, which included them as texts for primary schools. Don Luis himself wrote the one about Michoacán, giving it the evocative title *Michoacán, lagos azules y fuertes montañas* (Michoacán, Blue Lakes and Strong Mountains).

He already had experience working on collective works, such as the *Historia Moderna de México* (Modern History of Mexico) by Don Daniel Cosío Villegas, in which he wrote a volume about life in society; as the editor of *Historia mexicana* (Mexican History); or as the compiler of *Historia de la Revolución Mexicana* (History of the Mexican Revolution), for Colmex, for which he wrote a couple of volumes about President Cárdenas. He was also part of Salvat’s *Historia de México* (History of Mexico) and Colmex’s *La historial general de Mexico* (General History of Mexico).

González was a convinced, radical promotor of decentralizing research and founded social science research centers outside Mexico City. On November 1, 1978, he launched the first of these, Colmich, in Zamora, Michoacán, and he lived to celebrate the institution’s 25th anniversary (though not the official one, which was on January 15, 2004).

He followed the Colmex model, calling on scholarship students with vocation to work in the field of the human sciences, while putting the accent on local topics. He was, then, the guide in creating other similar centers such as those founded in Sonora, León, the Northern Border, Toluca, Guadalajara and San Luis Potosí.

He promoted the founding of the National System of Researchers and was a permanent consultant for the Ministry of Public Education, the National Council for Science and Technology and the country’s main academic institutions.

A member of the Mexican Academy of History, he was inducted into the National College in 1978. He was given the National Prize for Science in 1983, the Belisario Domínguez Medal at the end of his life, and innumerable other distinctions in Mexico and abroad.

Don Luis also rendered outstanding service to his hometown, San José de Gracia, Michoacán, where he fostered the creation of junior high schools and high schools, making donations of his own property. He worked for the introduction of basic services like electricity and telephones, promoted municipal independence and the use of the original name of the town. He also procured the donation of buildings for a cultural center and a senior citizens’ home.

Historian Jean Meyer writes, “Luis González is simultaneously the most Mexican of Mexicans and the least chauvinistic of patriots. His love for his home state and national homeland nourishes his love for the great family of all men and is nourished by it.” And it would not be improper to add the voice of Don Luis to those of the chorus made up of Ramón López Velarde, Juan Rulfo, Agustín Yañez or Juan José Arreola. **MM**