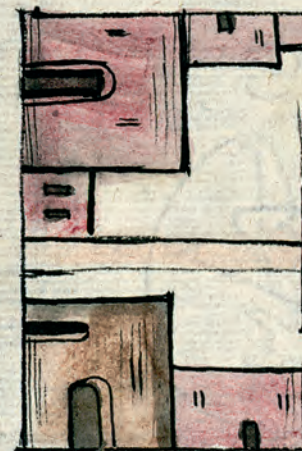
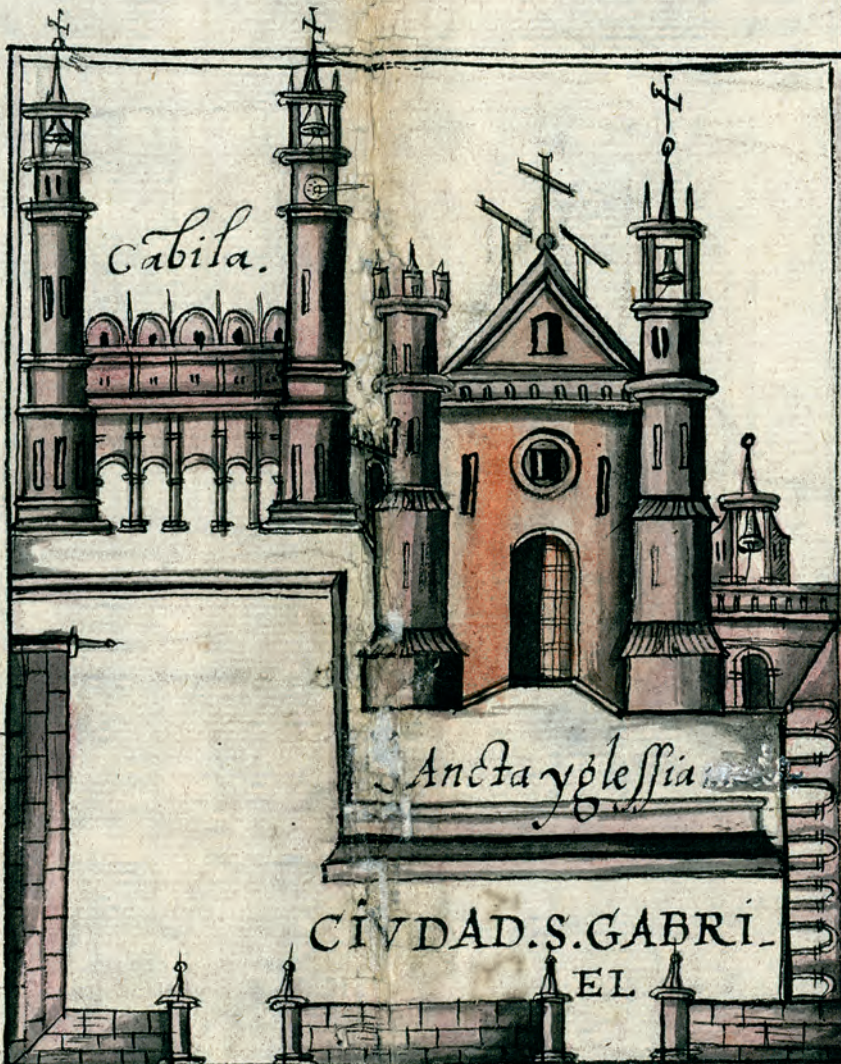
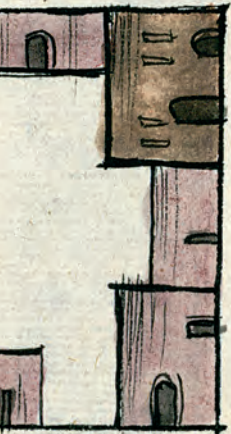
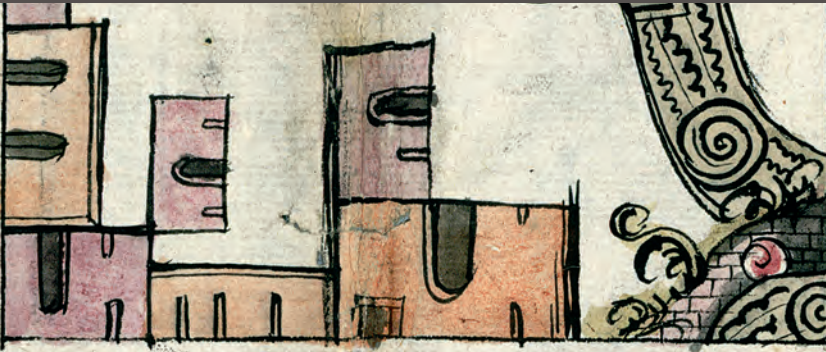


PORTAL

ANNUAL REVIEW 2015-2016 | LLILAS BENSON LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES AND COLLECTIONS



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SUSANNA SHARPE, EDITOR | TERESA WINGFIELD, ART DIRECTOR

LLILAS BENSON LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES AND COLLECTIONS | THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



The publication of this 11th edition of *Portal* signifies a time of reflection, transition, and excitement at LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections. At the end of the 2015–2016 academic year, we celebrate five years of our LLILAS Benson partnership. The collaborative work taking place between librarians, faculty, students, staff, and partner organizations has allowed LLILAS Benson to build upon our historic strengths and become international leaders in exciting areas

that push the boundaries of scholarship on multiple levels.

This edition of *Portal* is filled with examples of how our work is turning the field of Latin American studies and collections in new and exciting directions. We are pleased to announce the launch of *Portal* online at llilasonline.org. In addition to the articles contained in the current print edition, the online publication will feature stories from past issues, multimedia posts, and a new series of student contributions.

One of the most notable developments of the past year is the launch of the Black Diaspora Archive at the Benson Collection. We welcome Rachel Winston, our archivist building this collection, and in these pages celebrate the scholarship of our faculty and students focused on the Black diaspora with articles from Dr. Christen Smith and LLILAS MA students Jheison Romain and José Rubio-Zepeda.

We continue to be leaders in post-custodial archiving, preserving the cultural patrimony of historic and sensitive documents while digitizing and making them available to the world. This year saw the launch of the Mellon Foundation–funded Latin American Digital Initiatives (LADI) project, as detailed in the article written by our post-custodial archivist, Theresa Polk. We are also blazing new trails in the digital repatriation of historical documents, described by Dr. Kelly McDonough herein.

LLILAS Benson continues to deepen its focus on indigenous languages and issues. The 2015–2016 academic year brought the instruction of Nahuatl to campus for the first time, as well as the development of online, open-access K'iche' Maya curriculum. We also welcomed two Tinker visiting professors whose research focuses on indigenous issues. Dr. Irma Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj writes about her work in Guatemala to bring justice to indigenous women violated by war criminals, and Dr. Ruud van Akkeren is

interviewed about his work on ancient Maya texts and collaboration with Guatemalan Mayan communities. LLILAS alumnus and chair of the board of directors of the Avina Foundation Sean McKaughan writes on the work of Avina in Brazil and elsewhere, focusing on partnerships with indigenous peoples.

Our graduate and undergraduate programs encourage original scholarship and intellectual exchange among peers. The student-organized ILASSA conference celebrated its 36th year this spring, convening students from throughout the hemisphere. We proudly publish the conference paper on La Santa Muerte by recent LLILAS master's graduate Kathryn McDonald. Finally, doctoral candidate Ruth Elizabeth Velásquez Estrada contributes a fine article about this spring's Lozano Long Conference on refugees and migrant detention.

These are but a few examples of how LLILAS Benson embodies the motto of The University of Texas at Austin—what starts here changes the world. Of course, LLILAS Benson takes that motto one step further in promoting the idea that what starts in the world also changes us here. We have learned through our partnerships that we are stronger together: Together we preserve and more fully represent history. Together we document and fight injustices. Together we form and are formed by scholars and leaders whose work in academia and beyond is not only inspirational but transformative.

As we reflect upon and celebrate the accomplishments of these first five years, we congratulate, deeply thank, and bid a bitter-sweet farewell to Dr. Charles Hale, the inaugural director of our partnership. He has helped to re-chart the course of Latin American studies and collections on this campus and beyond, and we are forever grateful. We are also thrilled to welcome our new director, Dr. Virginia Garrard-Burnett, professor of history at UT Austin. We look forward to her leadership, to building upon the strong foundation laid during these first years of our partnership, and to all that awaits in the years to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Heather Gatlin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Heather Gatlin
Executive Director
LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections

Departing Reflections

by CHARLES R. HALE

I

I TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY—the last *Portal* produced under my directorship—to offer a few words of thanks, an expression of excitement for the future, and some reflections on the past seven years. By the time this *Portal* reaches your hands, Professor Virginia Garrard-Burnett will have begun

her four-year term as the second director of LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections. I am immensely pleased that Ginny has accepted the position, and deeply grateful to Dean Randy Diehl and Vice Provost Lorraine Haricombe for their constant, energetic support of LLILAS Benson, and for many sage decisions like naming her. Ginny developed strong affective and professional ties with LLILAS from her first days at our university. She brings to the job a distinguished career in history and religious studies, combined with passion for the interdisciplinary field of Latin American studies (LAS). Her leadership style, well proven in other settings, combines adamant pluralism with a quiet inner fortitude and a resounding clarity of vision. I know she will affirm what has been best and most successful about LLILAS Benson, while providing a strong impetus for innovation.

Difficult Beginnings

Within a year of my becoming LLILAS director, three distinct blows left us reeling. In mid-2010 we learned that we barely missed achieving renewal of our federal Title VI grant, on which centers like ours depend. We had to rethink our organization, without the 200,000-plus dollars annually that this grant had provided. Second, in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, university budgets shrank; in a first round of cuts mandated to address shortfalls, the university's College of Liberal Arts announced that our center would need to give back up to 30 percent of our budget. Third, the Benson Collection had gone without a director for at least four years and morale was beginning to suffer. Talk of major restructuring of the Benson raised the concern that this gem of the university might see its historic preeminence erode. Although both units had great reservoirs of resilience, on which we would draw amply to move forward, we felt embattled, fragmented, on the defensive.

Transformative Initiatives

The turnaround, and forging of an upward trajectory that has continued strongly to this day, began with initiatives intended both to seize opportunities and to address key problems. What started as a

pragmatic response to the budget crisis grew into a guiding principle: expansive, sustainable organization-building in public universities requires significant infusions of autonomously held endowment funds. Some will view this as an unwarranted concession to private power over public goods; while I do not completely reject this critique, I prefer compromised forward motion to principled paralysis. In the restructuring that followed, we hired a major gifts officer, a coordinator in charge of alumni relations, and a grants specialist; together these three help us generate a regular flow of increased revenue.

The second, and surely the most consequential, transformation is the LLILAS Benson partnership. Under the wise guidance of Fred Heath, then vice provost and director of University of Texas Libraries, we took a series of steps that eventually blossomed into a full-fledged partnership, bringing LLILAS and the Benson together under a single director. Although cost efficiencies did figure in the original rationale, the central impetus always was to reap benefits from transformed workflows and organizational structure; we soon began to reap these benefits amply, especially with the expansion of the “collaborative space”: where the dividing line between a library and a teaching-research unit fades, replaced by a task-oriented convergence of professional staff, faculty, and students, each with distinctive contributions. Whether the particular activity is digital scholarship, post-custodial archival projects, scholarly exchange, or exhibitions for public education, the collaborative space enriches our work and helps us meet our goals more fully.



Charles Hale, Teresa Lozano Long, and Joe R. Long at a reception celebrating the LLILAS Benson partnership.

Photo by Mari Correa

A few years after we launched the partnership, we began work on our student programs. We streamlined our undergraduate major in LAS; and in 2014, we rolled out an energized program for doctoral studies to complement the vibrant and growing MA and dual MA–professional degree options. Our goal in the PhD revitalization—to recruit and train three top-notch doctoral students per year—has been achieved and surpassed, with welcome unintended effects: a powerful injection of energy into the MA program, and an unprecedented dynamism in our graduate program. External grants, conference presentations, books published, and other honors are yielding a resounding verdict: interdisciplinary methods, diversity (both racial-ethnic and international), and education with social impact make for a winning combination. Our graduate program truly has become the best in the nation!

Finally, and most recently, we have shifted focus from a conventional publications program to a communications office, charged with making sure our many publics stay fully informed about all we do and the impact our work has. Digital communications and social media have taken on ever-greater importance in this strategy, and we are beginning to make inroads in other media as well. Never again will the nation’s premier locale for Latin American studies remain a well-kept secret.

Unexpected Pleasures

Especially in the last few years, my work as director has been a source of both satisfaction and unexpected pleasures. I found, for example, that I genuinely enjoy what we call “systems” work: that constant process of refinement and modification of organizational structures and routines, to help us meet our goals more effectively. Alongside systems are budgets. Especially given our wonderfully talented administrative personnel, I have enjoyed and taken great pride in our five-year quest to produce a comprehensive budget for the partnership (totaling more than \$3 million annually). This budget plays a vital role in representing our organization to others, and in helping us plan for the best use of scarce resources. Then there is social media. I entered LLILAS in 2009 a social media curmudgeon, and came out a convert—even if still a neophyte. Finally, I grew fascinated and fully engaged with development. Most academics spurn fund-raising as compromised or unpleasant; in contrast, I have found it an engaging challenge to find the “sweet spot” where donor interests and organizational mission meet. And it has been a source of inspiration to get acquainted with the individuals—starting with Joe Long and Teresa Lozano Long—who are our most important benefactors.

Some Lessons Learned

There were a few things I already knew how to do upon taking on this job, and a whole lot that I learned in the process. Here are four nuggets that I can confidently recommend to my successor. First is the art of the 55-minute meeting. With a few exceptions, we conducted nearly all LLILAS Benson business in 60-minute slots, and rarely suffered from inadequate discussion time. Second, I learned that staff empowerment is key to organizational success. While we deeply value longevity, the most important values we encourage in our staff consist of a combined ethos of collective solidarity and individual fulfillment. We want all staff members to realize their dreams and reach their full potential—inside the organization if



Students and guests attend the opening of the 36th annual ILASSA Student Conference, “Utopia and Reality: Latin America Confronting Globalization.”

possible—but always with this “realization” goal front and center. The third realm of learning for me is the power of libraries to remake and revitalize learning, communication, inquiry, and discovery—the core functions of any great university. Although as a scholar I always valued libraries and archives, the partnership has raised that appreciation to a new plane: from here forward my own research and teaching programs will always be infused with library-centered thinking about what I do, and how it gets done. Finally, I have gained a new appreciation for pluralism with a purpose. With 160 diverse, driven faculty affiliates, one can never expect to please everyone; but the LLILAS Benson director has the solemn responsibility to solicit and hear the views of all. At the same time, pluralism without a strong sense of purpose—a compass to forge the way forward—will not, in the long run, command anyone’s respect. Being able to strike the fine balance between these two somewhat contradictory affirmations will always be an important measure of success in achieving our mission.

Conclusions

The most succinct expression of this purpose over the past seven years has been to remake Latin American studies. The axes of this transformation are threefold: replace North-South hierarchies in resources and routines of knowledge production with horizontal relations; replace individual or unilateral advancement with a commitment to collaboration; conduct teaching and research that meet the highest standards of academic rigor, while also achieving impact with a social justice lens. These axes both affirm and redefine the central goal of excellence that our president has named as the cornerstone of university life. In so doing, they have allowed us to make LLILAS Benson into something more than a workplace. On my most exciting and fulfilling days I like to think of LLILAS Benson as one expression of a much larger project: putting into practice the core values of a different kind of society, one where we would want to live, one that we are each doing our part to build. ☀

Charles R. Hale is the outgoing director of LLILAS Benson. He is a professor in the departments of African & African Diaspora Studies and Anthropology at UT Austin.

Where History, Science, and Coral Reef Conservation Meet: A Case Study from St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands

by CARLOS E. RAMOS-SCHARRÓN

Landscape is . . . a land shape, in which the process of shaping is by no means thought of as simply physical.

—C. Sauer (*The Morphology of Landscape*, 1925)

FOR KARL

I

AM STILL relishing being a fashionable latecomer to the field of geography, particularly to historical geography. Many of its tenets seem, if not totally new, at least still “hip” to me. Like many before me, I wish to apply a variety of tools to consult archived information recorded by landscapes. This approach is not new to me. As a geomorphologist, I have learned to appreciate landforms—hillslopes, rivers, valleys, and so forth—as a product of both past and contemporary processes. However, this *landscape* that I write about here not only refers to the physical but also to human conceptions of space. This viewpoint calls for a transdisciplinary approach that challenges traditional scientific efforts. It also opens the door to self-reflective evaluation, as I recognize myself as a participant within the boundaries of my study area. Science, then, may be understood as having the potential to be both cause and effect: it generates its own impact but it also represents a social response to an awareness of the need for environmental conservation.

Throughout my career, my research has concentrated on physical phenomena. I study the effects of land-use conversion (for example, deforestation linked to urban expansion or agriculture) in the generation of surface runoff, sediments, and waterborne pollutants, and their consequential

effects on coral reef ecosystems. The utility of my research is geared toward the protection of soil and water resources, as well as the conservation of coral reefs on islands of the Caribbean. Coral reefs are essential to the well-being of many islands, as they serve to buffer coastlines from the damaging effects of storm surges and tsunamis. They also serve as the source of the white sands for which the region’s beaches are widely known, and are essential for the economic and cultural livelihoods of many people as they directly support the fishing and tourism industries. However, Caribbean coral reefs have suffered notable degradation since at least the late 1970s and the causes are multiple and diverse. Coral reefs are not only susceptible to the type of water pollution resulting from land-based human activities that I study, but they may also be affected by the physical destruction of coral into rubble that occurs during hurricanes, the bleaching and high incidence of disease that follow warmer-than-normal seawater temperatures, and overfishing, as population collapses of keystone fish species responsible for grooming reef surfaces can affect coral reproduction.

If the causes of coral reef degradation are potentially so varied, how do I reassure myself that my specific research efforts are worthwhile and that they might result in effective environmental conservation efforts? Here, I briefly trace the history of land use and scientific endeavors in one of my study areas in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

My intention is to showcase a few of the advantages of following a transdisciplinary approach to scientific efforts—efforts that involve collaborations with historians, ethnographers, economists, marine ecologists, and others. For me personally, one of the benefits of this approach is being able to situate my work within the trajectory of a place and to position its relevance within a larger environmental conservation effort.

Like most other islands of the Caribbean, St. John, the smallest of the three main islands now composing the U.S. Virgin Islands Territory (USVI), has undergone severe changes since European colonization. With the exception of itinerant groups of Arawak indigenous populations, marauding bands of pirates, and occasional woodcutting squads, the island remained mostly uninhabited until the early eighteenth century. St. John became permanently colonized in 1718 by Denmark as it sought to expand its participation in the New World economic and political scene. In spite of the natural unsuitability of the island’s steep terrain, limited freshwater resources, and shallow soils for agricultural production, a predominantly sugar plantation-style economy dominated from the eighteenth until the mid-nineteenth century, and this meant the decimation of most of its forest cover. By 1800, cane fields covered almost one-third of the island’s landmass. At this time, only about half of the island was classified as woodland, although this was an already decimated forest that had served to supply



Coral Bay, St. John.

wood for construction materials and fuel for cooking and sugar boilers.¹ The hard labor of cutting the forest, tending the cane fields, and processing the sugar was carried out by an African slave population that fluctuated from 730 to 2,160 in the years between 1739 and 1800. The few references to corals and other marine resources of this period are limited to the reliance on fish and other organisms as a source of protein, the production of lime from coral rubble, and the use of coral as building blocks for estate houses and sugar factories.

The inevitable collapse of the sugar economy occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century. The main reasons for its demise were poor productivity due to loss of soil fertility, a drop in sugar prices, and the inability of the sugar estates to maintain a labor force following the abolition of

slavery by Denmark in 1848.² A peasant-based economy mostly devoted to cattle grazing, subsistence fishing/farming, and both charcoal and bay rum oil production followed, dominating the landscape for an entire century, even after the purchase of the Danish West Indies by the United States in 1917. The period saw a decline of human dominance over St. John, the result of a reduced human population and less demand for forest products and arable land. This restrained demand allowed for the growth of a secondary forest on the island. This continued up until the mid-twentieth century, as the importance of the USVI to the U.S. was mostly associated with its strategic military position. Disinterest was particularly accentuated in St. John, as described by a U.S.-based travel writer named Henry A. Phillips during a visit to the island in the mid-1930s: “In the main,

the jungle has reclaimed its own. There are only a few rough trails on island fit for horseback riding. . . . Nearly twenty years of American occupation, and no roads!”³

At this time the island still failed to show obvious signs of becoming the tourist attraction it is today, but its potential was already being recognized. In the words of Dr. Arthur I. Edison, St. John’s administrator at the time: “I wish to inform you that there is nothing available at the present time for the accommodation of tourists as there are two young men at the Moorehead Boarding house. . . . The numerous requests I have been receiving would indicate a real interest in vacationing in St. John.”⁴

Following the Second World War, local authorities and U.S. investors began speculating on St. John’s potential for high-end real-estate development and as a tourist destination. One of those men was

Laurance S. Rockefeller, who, embracing his father's model in Acadia and Grand Teton National Parks, allegedly envisioned that a luxury tourist experience combined with a well-preserved natural landscape would be of benefit to St. John and St. Johnians.⁵ Mr. Rockefeller was key in the establishment of the Virgin Islands National Park (VINP) on St. John in 1956 as the backdrop to his newly acquired hotel, Caneel Bay. The designation as a park allowed this land to "be administered and preserved . . . in its natural condition for the public benefit and inspiration, in accordance with the laws governing the administration of the national parks" (84 U.S.C. § 925). VINP came to occupy about two-thirds of the island's landmass, while the remaining third was left for private ownership.

Little formal knowledge of the island's marine resources existed until 1958, when the first inventory of the submerged lands surrounding St. John was conducted. Realization of the magnificence of those resources eventually led to the revision of the park boundaries in 1962 in an attempt to "preserve for the benefit of the public significant coral gardens, marine life, and seascapes" (87 U.S.C. § 750). At this stage, the marine, terrestrial, and human landscape became subjugated to a combination of "foreign" conservation regulations largely

imposed by the National Park Service with land development interests. For the most part, both of these excluded the participation of the local population. The accelerated development that ensued as a result of the postwar real-estate boom unequivocally led to "economic benefits derived from growth and development which include the highest per capita income in the Caribbean," but also to "the degradation of ecosystems, the depletion of natural resources, the ills of urbanization."⁶

One of the downsides of St. John's inclusion on the "world map" during the postwar years involved the unprecedented disruption of the physical landscape. Even though most of the soils of the island had been disrupted during the plantation era, the 1950s represent the first time these were disturbed by the products of the Industrial Revolution. Oil-fueled heavy machinery began establishing the style of human footprint that has typified land use during the twentieth century through road construction and excavation of home and commercial sites. The enhanced soil erosion that ensued provoked an abrupt change in the sedimentary records of some of St. John's bays, where an acute tenfold increase in the levels of sediment deposition was registered.⁷ This new landscape alteration method therefore severely enhanced the

level of human-related stress on St. John's coral reef ecosystems and is still considered a main cause of environmental degradation on the island.⁸

While the timing of the park's establishment coincides with accelerated environmental degradation, it is unequivocal that it also led to some positive environmentally oriented outcomes. Obviously, much land was declared off limits for development, and this promoted further reforestation. In addition, strict fishing and boating restrictions have led to the protection of fish populations and other marine resources. A less obvious positive outcome is that the fame associated with the establishment of the park also led to the creation of a unique knowledge base. Human conceptualization of a park is accompanied by the idea that the area merits study. In addition to tourists, developers, and others seeking a new lifestyle, VINP also attracted research and funding for it. As a consequence, many have described the island from their varied perspectives, and this includes historical documentation through archival and archaeological research, empirically derived anthropological insights into issues of resource governance and race relations, ecological monitoring of both marine and terrestrial settings, and geological descriptions based on sediment cores, field ex-



1780 Map of Danish St. Jan prepared by Lieutenant Peter L. Oxholm. Map shows in detail the location of military fortifications and sugar estates, as well as the extent of cultivated lands.



Dr. Erin Muller and Jeff Miller (National Park Service) conducting episodic monitoring of coral reefs at the Tektite site during the 2005–2007 bleaching and disease outbreak.

periments, and hydrological modeling. Formal documentation of the St. Johnian environment has a long tradition relative to most other islands, and this was initially facilitated after the VINP was named a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Program in 1976. Execution of the mandate associated with this declaration required assessing environmental baselines of terrestrial, marine, and human systems to be used as baselines for continued efforts to monitor and document environmental change.⁹ These monitoring efforts continue through a combination of both government- and academia-led efforts including the South Florida/Caribbean Inventory and Monitoring Network of the National Park Service and the USVI Territorial Coral Reef Monitoring Program.

The research that has been conducted on St. John is unmatched throughout the Caribbean, and I dare say it is exceptional relative to most other small island settings worldwide. The knowledge generated by the multiple research efforts executed on St. John shapes coral reef management both locally and elsewhere. In part due to the locally conducted research, St. John is home to successful science-fueled community-based coral reef conservation efforts meant to mitigate the effects of

land development on sediment delivery to coral-bearing waters. Examples are those executed by the Fish Bay Homeowners Association and the Coral Bay Community Council in collaboration with federal agencies such as the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency, in which science has guided the selection of watershed mitigation methods while also helping to evaluate their effectiveness. Some of the science generated on St. John has also served watershed management efforts in the nearby islands of Vieques and Culebra in Puerto Rico.

Has the combination of conservation and research efforts prevented the degradation of coral reef ecosystems surrounding St. John? Unfortunately, the answer to this question is “no,” as protected coral reefs appear to have suffered a similar degree of degradation to those in unprotected areas.¹⁰ Additional work is thus essential. One still-unexplored option is to evaluate the breadth of knowledge established for St. John through a transdisciplinary lens to advance a new breed of conservation solutions. This approach could not only aid in narrowing down the specific factors leading to coral reef degradation on St. John, but could also serve in developing new

landscape governance ideas that not only address the physical landscape through the use of sound scientific knowledge but also attend to human perceptions and help evolve our understanding of natural resource conservation. ☀

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“We Will All Look Like This Someday”

Santa Muerte in Mexico City

by KATHRYN McDONALD



OVER THE PAST decade, La Santa Muerte, an unofficial Mexican skeletal saint, has prompted the curiosity of journalists, law enforcement, and popular culture in the United States and Mexico. The dramatic cover of journalist Michael Deibert's book, *In the Shadow of Saint Death: The Gulf Cartel and the Price of America's Drug War in Mexico* (2014), features an image of Santa Muerte wearing the Virgen de Guadalupe's familiar *tilma*, or cloak, praying over a handgun. The image suggests a perversion of Mexico's patron saint, a conflation of Santa Muerte devotion with organized crime, and the reign of violence that has resulted from Mexico's War on Drugs. In March 2009, the Mexican army bulldozed approximately three dozen Santa Muerte shrines near the U.S. border as part of a psychological war on "narcoculture" (Campbell 2010). An opening scene on an episode of *Breaking Bad* ("The Cousins") portrays Mexican drug cartel members placing an iconic drawing of their meth-dealing rival, "Heisenberg," at a Santa Muerte shrine, presumably petitioning for revenge. In the midst of all of this sensationalism, it seemed to me that several aspects of Santa Muerte devotion were overlooked.

La Santa Muerte in Context

I first met Santa Muerte in 2011, through the tinted windows of a twelve-passenger van, as an undergraduate spending a semester in the Yucatán Peninsula with eleven other Millsaps College students. Our driver signaled toward a large, skeletal statue on the side of the road. "La Santa Muerte," he remarked, "she's very popular right now." The image of this tall, grim-reaper-esque statue cloaked in gold, nestled between Yucatecan hammocks and Chac Mool figurines, stuck with me for years. I spent the past summer researching Santa Muerte's presence in Mexico City, concentrating on shrines and commercial spaces in Tepito, Colonia Morelos, and el Mercado de Sonora. I chose this topic for my thesis because I was troubled by the popular narrative of Santa Muerte as merely a "narco saint," and by the fear that the figure inspires in people. The story I intend to tell is how Santa Muerte, a popular and controversial figure, has become a powerful survival tool for confronting the human realities of death, marginality (whether attributed to gender identity, sexual preference, class, race, or the intersections of all of these factors), and social mobility. If there is one take-away from this project, it is this: Santa Muerte is many things to many people—a sign of

peace, violence, motherhood, sexuality, wealth, empowerment, recovery, addiction, revenge, life, and death, to name a few. The figure's flexibility and its followers' attitude toward death, demonstrate Santa Muerte's appeal as a spiritual tool, particularly for marginalized segments of Mexican society. In this light, Santa Muerte transcends the traditional sense of *religion*, and is instead a highly adaptable tool for combatting the inevitable force of death.

Claudio Lomnitz-Adler (2005) writes in *Death and the Idea of Mexico* that the cult of death "could be thought of as the oldest, seminal, and most authentic element of Mexican popular culture" (23–23). While approaches to mortality are essential to any discussion of Santa Muerte, the figure is often conflated with traditions such as Day of the Dead and Posada's *calaveras* (most notably La Calavera Catrina). Given the vast commodification of Posada's work and Day of the Dead imagery in both Mexico and the United States, this confusion is not surprising. Desirée Martín notes that with increased urbanization and aspirations of social mobility, many in Mexico have abandoned the Día de los Muertos tradition. Many Santa Muerte devotees do not celebrate Day of the Dead, at least not in the traditional sense. Martín remarks:



Santa Muerte dressed as Catrina.

Santa Muerte and Day of the Dead celebrations are linked through the deep connection between death, migration, and identity on either side of the border, evoking migrant crossings and deaths along the U.S.–Mexico border, the femicides in Ciudad Juárez and other border towns, the casualties of the drug wars, and the deep-rooted presence of Mexican communities in the United States. (2014, 186)

Martín challenges her audience to look beyond the ubiquity of death imagery and more deeply at a national context saturated with death that makes a figure such as Santa Muerte possible. In addition to dangerous border crossings, drug war casualties, and femicides, the recent disappearance of 43 students from Ayotzinapa,

Guerrero, would make an important addition to Martín’s list of state-perpetuated violence. The summer I spent in Mexico City, I walked past countless images of the 43 missing students, pasted to the sides of buildings and columns, with the caption “*Fue el estado.*” The prevalence of death imagery in Mexican popular culture is much more than smiling neon skeletons—one must also look to the saturation of death and violence in the Mexican recent past to understand the significance of death in the contemporary Mexican landscape. This “saturation of death” that I refer to has provided fertile ground for the emergence of figures such as Santa Muerte.

El Santuario Nacional de la Santísima Muerte

El Santuario Nacional de la Santísima Muerte, located in Colonia



Mercado de Sonora.

Morelos, was my primary field site. The sanctuary houses a robust, multi-aged, mixed-gender congregation, many of whom are working-class. One Sunday afternoon, Juan Carlos, a priest with whom I spoke regularly, enthusiastically reminded the congregants of the upcoming festival honoring the fifteenth anniversary of La Santa Muerte's apparition at the Sanctuary, formerly known as "the Chapel of Mercy," on August 15. They would march from the Sanctuary to the Zócalo, where there would be drinking, dancing, weddings, and mariachis. "Don't worry," he reassured the congregants, "I know all the police." The apparent distrust of police in this part of town is not surprising—the stigma is well known. I could sense it as I emerged from the Tepito metro stop for the first time, asking a policeman for directions to a certain street, whose sign was obstructed by a sea of blue *mercado* tarps. "*Cuidado*," he insisted, and I thought of all of the stories I had heard about police destroying Santa Muerte shrines near the U.S.-Mexican border, hundreds of miles away.

"I want one of those," I told the shop-owner at the Sanctuary, pointing at a candle held by a man who was being spun around by a priest, getting his *alma* cleansed. She sold me a multicolored candle for 15 pesos, carved a star into the candle, sprinkled it with "the oil of Santa Muerte" as well as various seeds and herbs, then placed a Red Delicious apple on top of the candle. I placed the candle and the apple onto the altar. Some people brought the good stuff—tacos, chicharrones, Lucky Strikes. *Am I doing this right*, I wondered, and across the sanctuary I saw a middle-aged man with a ponytail puff his cigar smoke onto Santa Muerte's face. A shaman named Carlito introduced himself and gave me his business card.

He rubbed an unlit candle on my seven chakras and my lower back, which ached from spending several nights in \$12/night Airbnb accommodations. He spun me around, told me to open my eyes and look up at la Santa, and ask her for whatever I wanted. La Santa Muerte seemed to be a very accommodating figure, so long as I brought her a better offering next week—so I meditated on that as Carlito rubbed more Santa Muerte oil onto my palms from a filmy Coke bottle.

Juan Carlos told me that people are afraid of La Santa Muerte because they are afraid of death. "We will all look like this someday. All of us are going to meet La Santa Muerte," he insisted. Juan Carlos's comments acknowledge that resisting death is futile, and that the best way to combat this inevitable reality is to become familiar with it. Santa Muerte serves as an active reminder of death, and rather than encouraging followers to suffer on Earth and receive their reward in heaven, the focus is on the present—on being resourceful with regards to one's financial survival and enjoying the pleasures of life before it inevitably ends. As Lois Ann Lorentzen writes, "In a kind of homeopathic way, Santísima Muerte injects just enough death to ward away its coming" (2010, 27). To become familiar with Santa Muerte is to become familiar with death, to normalize it. For instance, a major way that devotees ease into a familiarity with death is through offering Santa Muerte objects that bring them joy, making the figure more approachable. In other words, these shrines assign human characteristics to the saint—un-ashed cigarettes dangle from her altars, vases of tequila quench her thirst, devotees take care to change her outfits. She



Santa Muerte as a bride in the Mercado de Sonora.



Main shrine at El Santuario Nacional de La Santísima Muerte in Colonia Morelos, Mexico City.

enjoys whatever they do, and they use her as their mirror image—because to be alive is to die. The figure blurs the line between life and death, the line between self and Santa Muerte.

With all of these discussions regarding death, the devotees I spoke to in the Sanctuary were overwhelmingly concerned with the present, and never referred to what they thought would occur in the afterlife. An older woman who sold and rubbed “*el aceite de la Santa*” on the palms of visitors every Sunday at the Sanctuary told me that she had been a devotee of Santa Muerte for more than a decade. “My husband and I have always struggled to find work,” she shared, “and Santa Muerte has always helped us.” Here, there was no focus on being “good” or “pure,” but rather on survival and reaping the fruits of what life has to offer in the present. In other words, Santa Muerte devotion highlights the ephemeral quality of life and enables a brand of faith in the here and now as one anticipates death.

One particularly slow afternoon in the Sanctuary, Juan Carlos asked if I believed in La Santa Muerte. I replied that I was not religious, but I certainly believe in Death as a powerful, motivational force. “What do you think La Santa Muerte expects of us?” I asked. Earlier, I had remarked that I was hung over, and now his response seemed directed at me: “La Santa Muerte wants you to live. Drink. Dance. You want to have sex with your boyfriend? Do it. She does not care.” Stating the obvious, I said: “Because life is short?” “Exactly,” he replied. The ephemerality of life resonates with Santa Muerte devotees, as many live precarious lives

in which death figures prominently. For instance, the figure has a sizable following among the marginalized LGBT community, for whom harassment and violence are a constant threat, particularly in the case of transgender individuals. The nature of the informal economies that many of my informants engaged in was precarious and uncertain, driving followers to cling to the ultimate certainty: Death. For, once they learn to confront death with striking physical images such as Santa Muerte, it makes life a bit easier. Death is viewed as a life-enhancing gift, rather than a punishment, as it calls us to assume that this life is the only one we have. According to this logic, Santa Muerte’s presence endorses pleasure-seeking behavior in response to a life that could end at any moment. It is a response to the structural circumstances of inequality that does not rely upon institutions like the Catholic Church or the Mexican state.

Conclusion

Ideas about death would affect me long after I departed Mexico. As Judith Butler writes in *The Precarious Life*, “all of us have some notion of what it is to have lost somebody. Loss has made a tenuous ‘we’ of us all” (2006). Many devotees and merchants whom I interviewed appeared to have been grappling with this in their views concerning Santa Muerte. For while it may appear that devotees are *worshipping* death, often they are clinging to a figure that mirrors their hopes and fears in life and provides them with the tools for *confronting* death.

I never made it back to Mexico City. The weekend of the Santa Muerte festival, my father passed away at the age of 54, and the “we” of loss, and of Saint Death, weighed heavily on my mind as I flew to Kentucky to make arrangements.

This research has reminded me that life is incredibly short. I have several things I hope to accomplish in the near future, and I look forward to the day when I can return to Mexico City and spend more time with devotees. But, as the saying goes, I would also like to “have a life.” As Juan Carlos once insisted, I should enjoy a cold beer, or maybe get off the couch and flail my arms about in an attempt to “dance”—Santa Muerte’s orders. ☀

Kathryn McDonald recently earned a master of arts from the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies and plans to apply for doctoral programs in the fall. This article is based on her master’s thesis research, which was presented at the 36th ILASSA student conference.

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The Canary in the Mine

Anti-Black Violence and the Paradox of Brazilian Democracy

by CHRISTEN A. SMITH

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THE BRAZILIAN political crisis of 2016 has sent shockwaves through the nation. Brazil's first female president, Dilma Rousseff, has been accused of corruption and is facing impeachment proceedings. Millions of Brazilians have demonstrated in the streets against the government, and millions have demon-

strated against impeachment, contending that the plot to remove Rousseff from office is in fact a coup. At the heart of it all is the question of democracy—what are its parameters in Brazil today, who has access to it, and why?

After more than two decades of military dictatorship that began with a coup in 1964, Brazil officially transitioned to a new democracy in 1985, ratifying a constitution in 1988 that afforded broad-sweeping rights. According to the Brazilian constitution, discrimination based on age, race, gender, disability, religion, sexuality, political affiliation, and national origin are all illegal. One of its fundamental principles is to “Promote the good of all, without prejudice as to origin, race, sex, color, age and any other forms of discrimination.” Yet the 1988 constitution's multicultural progressive discourse is in tension with vestiges of authoritarianism that still haunt the nation-state, specifically the repressive practices of the police. Brazil's rhetorical invocation of multicultural democracy is contradicted by its treatment of the most marginalized in society. The violent policing of working-class Black Brazilians is evidence of this fact.

Black Death and Policing

On the evening of Friday, April 8, 2016, Military Police invaded Jardim Paiva 2, a working-class neighborhood in the municipality of Ribeirão Preto, northeastern region of the state of São Paulo. There, they confronted Luana Barbosa dos Reis, age 34, who was taking her 14-year-old son to his computer class on her motorbike. They approached Luana and ordered her off her bike. Once she

complied, they aggressively demanded that she open her legs and stand with her hands behind her head against a wall—standard gendered protocol for stopping and frisking *men* in Brazil. Luana protested, insisting that she was a woman and should not be forced to submit to a search in this manner, as standard Brazilian police procedure does not require it for women. However, because Luana was a lesbian who preferred to dress in a masculine style, the officers refused to comply with her request. Instead, they responded violently, kicking and punching her brutally and repeatedly. After she was beaten, Luana was arrested and taken to the local police precinct. There, she was questioned. Although she was visibly debilitated and in great pain, the police officers required Luana to sign a sworn statement stating that her injuries had been her fault because she had attacked two police officers. Luana's family picked her up and took her home. She suffered a stroke and a brain contusion due to her injuries and died ten days later.



At the Third (Inter)national March Against Genocide of Black People, in Salvador, Bahia, August 24, 2015.

Photo by Lena Azevedo

There is a disconnect between the rights Brazil's democracy promises and the rights that Brazilians experience in their everyday lives. While all Brazilians have enjoyed political citizenship since 1985, the state, both directly and indirectly, has denied many citizens civil citizenship, better defined as social rights (Dagnino 1994; Holston and Caldeira 1998). However, this failure is more complex than a simple disconnect between citizenship rights and social actualities. Being Black and living at the margins of poverty, like Luana, puts you at constant risk of losing your life. Not only do Black Brazilians not enjoy full civil rights, one can argue that Black Brazilians are not even considered human by the practice of the law.

According to Amnesty International Brazil, approximately 82 youth are killed in Brazil every day, and 77 percent of those young people are Black (Roque 2014). The police are responsible for a significant portion of these killings. According to official records (kept reluctantly and inconsistently by police departments), between 2009 and 2014 the Brazilian police killed 11,197 people—approximately six per day (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública 2013). However, most police killings are not classified as homicides. Instead, they are classified as “suicides”—*autos de resistência*—death caused by resisting arrest. Like Luana, the victims are made to declare that they are responsible for their own assassination, leading us to conclude that many of the Black youth who die by homicide every day in Brazil, die at the hands of police.

Police violence is one of the many vestiges of authoritarianism that continue to haunt the Brazilian nation-state long after the end of the military regime. During the dictatorship, the military regime organized special operations police forces to fight “urban guerillas” and patrol poor urban neighborhoods—monitoring the “internal enemy” (Pinheiro 1991). This “enemy” included society’s “marginal” people (*marginais*)—criminals such as thieves, vagrants, and prostitutes. However, it also included the *povoão*, the poor, majority-Black masses. Brazil’s police forces were in fact created, in part, to patrol and control the enslaved African population during the colonial period (Araújo 1997). Some of

the earliest accounts of brutal police torture in Brazil tell of police officers raiding *quilombos* (runaway slave encampments) in the hills of Rio de Janeiro in the early nineteenth century (Holloway 1993). This culture of anti-Black policing continued through time, intensifying during the military dictatorship.

After the end of the dictatorship, Brazil was reorganized into a new democracy. Yet this new democracy continued to require the militarization of police forces in all states. Today, the same war strategies that defined policing under the military regime continue to inform the logic of racialized, gendered policing in Brazil—eliminating the “internal enemy.” The story of Luana Barbosa exemplifies this culture. A police massacre in the Bahia neighborhood of Cabula does as well.

In the early morning hours of February 6, 2015, police officers from the Rondas Especiais da Bahia (RONDESP), a special unit of the Bahian Military Police akin to a SWAT team, invaded the Vila Moisés community in the Cabula neighborhood of Salvador, Bahia, killing twelve young Black men ages 16 to 27, and wounding six others. The incident, which came to be known as the Cabula Massacre, was one of the most deadly and controversial police killings in Salvador’s recent history. But the perversity of the

killings extended beyond the immediate circumstances into the strange and twisted story that emerged with it. Shortly after the shootings, RONDESP released a statement claiming that their officers had been involved in a shootout with criminals hoarding arms and paraphernalia, who were planning to rob a bank. The governor of Bahia, Rui Costa (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT), praised RONDESP, likening the shootings to strategic offense in a soccer game. This incident was not a case of rogue cops using excessive force. Not only were the police actions excessive, they were also predatory, and the state was complicit in, if not responsible for, orchestrating RONDESP’s actions.

The governor’s deeply disconcerting defense of excessive police violence demonstrated the state’s complicity. Shortly after Costa made his remarks, more details of the Cabula Massacre came to light. Witnesses testified that the police did not get into a gunfight with criminals. Rather, they deliberately invaded the neighborhood before dawn, rounded up a group of approximately 18 young men, took them to a remote location, tortured them, killed 12, and wounded six. The subsequent coroner’s report confirmed that the 12 had been tortured and executed.

RONDESP is one of Bahia’s many special forces squads whose structure is a holdover



Hamilton Borges dos Santos of Reaja walks in the 2015 march against genocide in Salvador, Bahia.

from the military dictatorship. Its actions in Cabula are exemplary of the disjuncture between the radically progressive guarantees of the 1988 constitution and the state's explicit policies of anti-Black policing. Instead of protecting all citizens, the police often act as a death squad (Azevedo 2013a, b). Embedded within Brazil's democracy are remnants of slavery, colonialism, and authoritarianism that the nation does not seem to be able to shake.

The Fight Against Anti-Black Police Violence

In 2005, one year into President Luiz Inácio “Lula” da Silva’s (Workers’ Party, PT) first presidency, Black organizers in Salvador, Bahia, inaugurated *Campanha Reaja ou Será Mort@!* (React or Die!/React or Be Killed! Campaign). The explicit purpose of React or Die! was to speak out against the unchecked killing of Black people by the police, including police raids and death squad murders. The emergence of the campaign was evidence that anti-Black violence in Brazil had not abated significantly since the end of the authoritarian regime. React or Die! was inspired by an initiative of the 1970s Unified Black Movement (Movimento Negro Unificado) to “react against racial violence” (*Reaja à Violência Racial*), developed at the height of the military dictatorship in response to intense anti-Black police violence across the nation. In 2005, twenty years after the transition to democracy, Black organizers found themselves in a similar position, with the threat of police violence increasing.

Ten years after Reaja’s founding, on March 20, 2015, co-founder Hamilton Borges dos Santos testified against the Brazilian government at a hearing conducted by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (IAHRC) on the death rate of Black youth in Brazil. Cabula was the principal study he cited when he unequivocally accused the Brazilian state of anti-Black genocide, claiming that both the federal government and state governments were responsible for killing Black youth, and that state-sponsored programs like *Juventude Viva* (Youth Alive) were mere band-aids that masked the state’s role in the violence.

I have been collaborating with the React or Die! Campaign since its inception, through

my research on the impact of police violence on Black Brazilians and the Black community’s response to it. In my recent book, *Afro-Paradise: Blackness, Violence, and Performance in Brazil* (2016), I argue that there is a paradoxical relationship between Bahia’s international image as an exotic, Black, jovial playland where anyone, especially tourists, can enjoy Black culture and Black people, and the state’s use of terror against the very Black bodies that ostensibly produce this exotic space.

However, afro-paradise is a framework that we can employ beyond the state of Bahia. There is a paradoxical relationship between state-sponsored anti-Black, anti-woman, anti-LGBTQ police violence and Brazil’s projection of itself as a multicultural liberal democracy. The Brazilian state writ large violates the very bodies that it employs to define itself as progressive and inclusive. This disavowal undermines the structural integrity of the nation as a progressive state, leading to fissures and breaks. The tension between police violence and the multicultural democratic ideal has weakened Brazilian democracy, priming the nation for a swing back toward authoritarianism—the current political crisis.

Vestiges of Authoritarianism: Brazil’s Political Crisis and the Police State

In the past fourteen years under the Workers’ Party mandate, Brazil has, without question, dramatically reduced gender, racial, and class inequality. From the implementation of affirmative action policies in federal universities, to the establishment of the Secretariat of Racial Equality (SEPPIR), the creation of the Bolsa Família conditional cash transfer program, and the establishment and expansion of the Maria da Penha Law protecting women from domestic abuse, the Workers’ Party has made significant, undeniable advances in the fight against inequality. However, the nation has also witnessed an unprecedented rise in violent police repression and lethality during this same period, especially toward Black Brazilians. Corruption is not the only cancer undermining the structural integrity of Brazilian democracy.

As Brazil’s government swings back to the right with the impeachment hearings against Rousseff, the populations most vulnerable to these political changes continue

to be those at the margins. Black working-class Brazilians are the canaries in the mine, their deaths the harbinger of the political chaos that has come. ☀

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LLILAS Benson and the Repatriation of Indigenous Cultural Patrimony of Mexico

by KELLY McDONOUGH



ONE OF THE MAIN attractions among the rare books and manuscripts at the Benson Latin American Col-

lection is a group of late-sixteenth-century manuscripts and maps known as the Relaciones Geográficas (or RGs for short). As described in the Benson's web portal to the RGs, these manuscripts are responses to a fifty-question survey sent by the Spanish Crown in 1577. The survey requested information about Spanish-held territories in the Americas. Many of the questions focused on the population, cultural practices, physical terrain, vegetation, and other material resources. The Benson holds

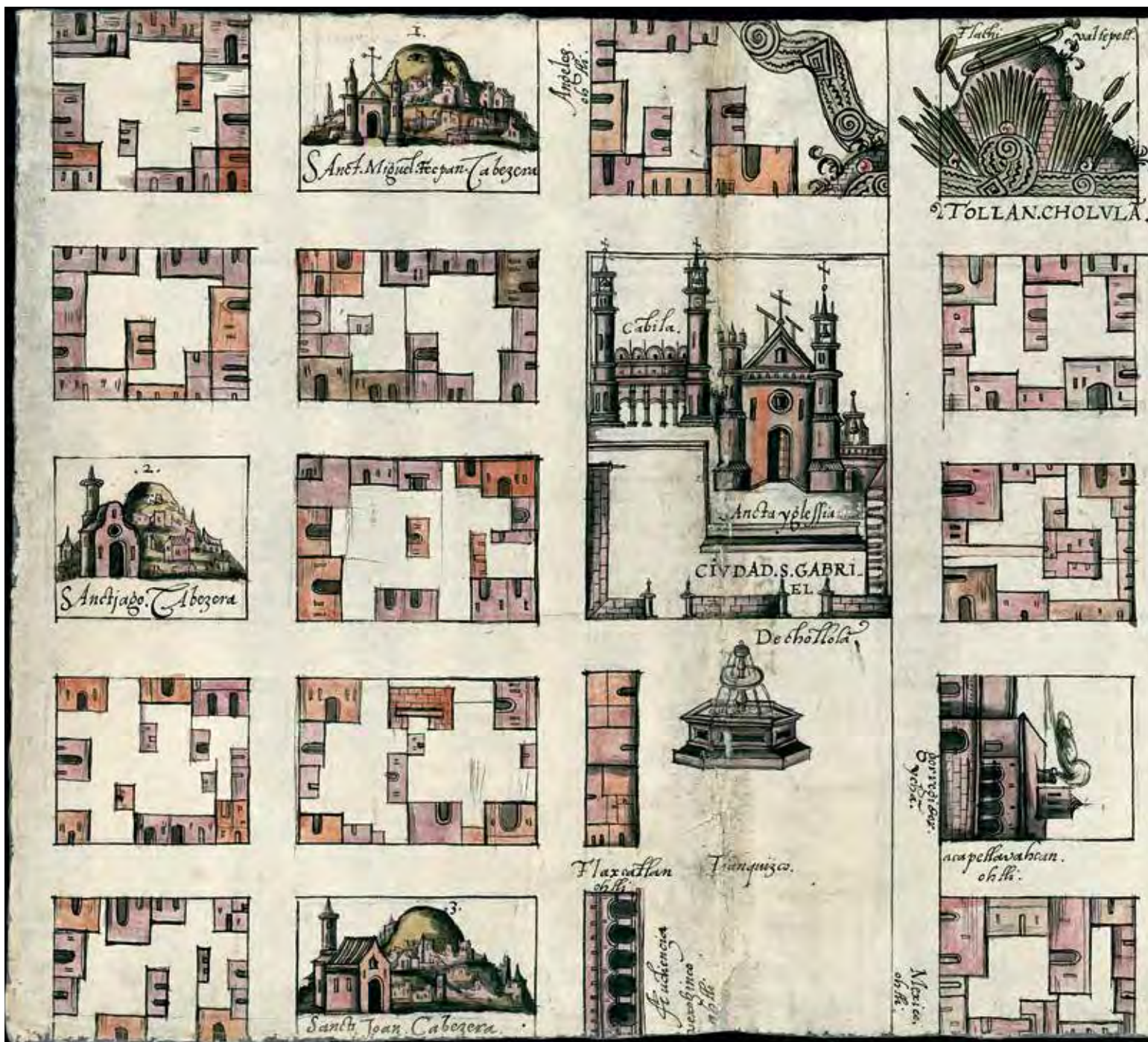
43 of the 167 extant responses and accompanying maps (the rest are in archives in Spain). Scholars travel from around the world to Austin every year to work with the RG maps. Recently, however, one of the RG maps did some traveling of its own. On October 5, 2015, as part of a tribute to Mexican indigenous studies scholar Dorothy Tanck de Estrada at the Teatro de la Ciudad in Puebla, Mexico, I had the honor of presenting a stunning reproduction of the 1581 RG map of Cholula to eighteen traditional indigenous authorities (*fiscales* and *mayordomos*) of San Pedro and San Andrés Cholula. The theater was standing-room-only as more than 200 attendees

witnessed this return of historical memory to the people of Cholula.

Question number ten of the survey requests a *pintura* or a painting—meaning a map—of the town(s) in question. The map was to include “the location and center of said towns, if the area is highlands or lowlands, or plains; with a sketch of the design, painted, of the streets and plazas and other places such as monasteries, however one might easily draw this up on paper, and that it identifies which part of the town faces north.” (“*El sitio y asiento donde los dichos pueblos estuvieren, si es en alto o en bajo, o llano; con la traza y designio, en pintura, de las calles y plazas y otros lugares*”



Mayordomos and *fiscales* (church-based community leaders) of San Pedro Cholula and San Andrés Cholula receive a reproduction of the 1581 map of Cholula held at the Benson Latin American Collection on October 5, 2015, at the Teatro de la Ciudad de Puebla.



Cholula, Tlaxcala, 1581. Benson Latin American Collection.

señalados de monasterios, comoquiera que se pueda rasguñar fácilmente en un papel, en que se declare qué parte del pueblo mira al mediodía o al norte.”)

The resulting maps were for the most part drawn and/or painted by anonymous indigenous men, providing rare insight into indigenous perspectives of cultures in contact during the first century of colonization in Mexico (for more information, and to see several of the digitized RG maps, visit lib.utexas.edu/benson/rg).

One of the things I like most about my research is that I don't just study indigenous sources from Mexico, but I try to ensure that

indigenous peoples have access to these sources as well. Since coming to UT Austin in 2012, it has been a goal of mine to return a reproduction of each of the 43 RG maps to their communities of origin. Knowing that I would be in Cholula for a conference this fall, I asked Julianne Gilland, director of the Benson Latin American Collection, if we might begin with the map of Cholula. She enthusiastically agreed and swiftly oversaw the beautiful reproduction and framing of the map. Gilland also wrote a generous letter in Spanish on behalf of the Benson. Her letter, also signed by the men and women who received the map with great reverence and emotion,



is being translated into English and Nahuatl as well, and will soon hang framed next to the map in Cholula.

Seven of the major *barrios* of Cholula are depicted on the 1581 map, each with its own Catholic Church and mountain, the latter representing the pre-Hispanic indigenous place of worship. It was common practice to build the churches directly on top of such places of worship. Whether the indigenous map-maker/painter meant to suggest that the churches were simply built at these already-sacred sites, or perhaps that the Catholic religion had not eliminated earlier forms of worship but instead joined them, we cannot know.

The Convento de San Gabriel presides in the center of the map, illustrating Spanish dominance in the region. In the upper right-hand corner, however, we see the Nahuatl-language place-name of *Tollan Cholula* in bold capital letters. *Tollan*, “among the reeds,” often signified a mytho-historical place of origin or an urban center. *Cholula* refers to *acholloyan*, “place where the water flows.” Above the place-name we see a depiction of a mountain with grasses and reeds, the *Tlachihualtepetl* (literally “man-made mountain”), the largest pyramid in the Americas. The mountain spills into the quadrant to its immediate left, and is connected to a snaking shape used in indigenous painting to represent water. This association between water and the pyramid evokes the Nahuatl term for a socio-political unit—*altepetl*—literally, water-mountain (*atl-tepetl*). With this in mind, even though it is not physically represented at the center of the map of Cholula, the great pyramid is the most important image on this

map in that it signals this socio-political unity, or the peoplehood of Cholultecas.

This reminder of the unity and interdependence of the major *barrios* comes at an important time in Cholula’s history. State and local government officials in Puebla have made steady inroads in the destruction of the platform of the pyramid of Cholula to make way for tourist attractions and commercial development. Traditional authorities and concerned citizens of Cholula have protested these activities vehemently over the past year, both in the streets and in the courts.



Grffiti art facing the platform of the pyramid in Cholula. Art by “Bloque,” Mexico, D.F.

Two Cholultecas, father and son Paul Xicale Coyópol and Adán Xicale, were imprisoned for over a year for their participation in protests aimed at protecting the sacred site from commercial development.* Whereas in earlier 2015 the courts had temporarily halted construction, as of May 2016 many of the flower fields that covered the pyramid’s platform have already been bulldozed and covered with concrete pavers. Planters with trees and other plants have been installed, although what ought to be green is either yellowing or already dead.

What does the gift of a reproduction of a map have to do with the crisis at this archeological site? It is the traditional indigenous authorities of Cholula who have spearheaded the movement to protect the pyramid and its environs from commercial development. At times, I am told, they feel as if they are unable to stop their culture from slipping away, or in this case being covered in concrete to make way for a coffeeshop. But the return of a forgotten map some 435 years after their anonymous ancestor sketched out the town and the people has given the *fiscales* a renewed sense of hope that their histories and ways of life can survive, even flourish. ☀

Kelly McDonough is assistant professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. She is author of *The Learned Ones: Nahua Intellectuals in Postconquest Mexico* (2014), a book that challenges the commonly held assumption that indigenous intellectual activities in Latin America ceased or decreased dramatically with the advent of European conquest and colonization.

Note

* Read more about the Xicale cases at www.jornada.unam.mx/2015/10/18/politica/005n1pol. Watch “Luz bajo la tierra: la destrucción de Cholula,” a 20-minute documentary on the destruction of the Cholula archaeological site, at www.youtube.com/watch?v=HpgAXnH7mCY.

Rethinking Maya Studies

A Conversation with Ruud van Akkeren

by SUSANNA SHARPE

I

IT IS HARD not to feel moved when talking to Ruud van Akkeren about his research. In such a conversation, it quickly becomes clear that Van Akkeren has his own nuanced, and possibly revolutionary, way of understanding Maya past and present in Guatemala, and that

he doesn't always see eye to eye with other Maya scholars.

Van Akkeren is an ethno-historian who has published extensively on indigenous documents such as the three best-known Highland Maya texts, *Popol Wuj*, *Rabinal Achi*, and *Memorial de Sololá*. (The first two were written in K'iche' and the third in Kaqchikel, both of which Van Akkeren is able to translate himself.) As a preface to our conversation, he explains a few basics about Maya studies. Most Mayanists study the well-known Classic Lowland Maya sites and their history—sites such as Tikal. By comparison, there is much less funding available for the study of Highland Maya sites; as a consequence, their ancient inhabitants are far less understood. Furthermore, many Maya scholars deny the connection between Lowland and Highland Maya. While Van Akkeren acknowledges that Lowland development took place on a larger scale than in contemporary Highland sites, his work has shown that there was nevertheless an ongoing connection among Maya through shared lineages. “The Lowland Maya went shopping in the Highlands,” he says, noting that obsidian, the material used in weaponry, was mined in the Highlands. Other luxury items used by ruling elites, such as jade and quetzal feathers, were also sought in the Highlands.

As a teacher in Guatemala, Van Akkeren passionately shares his knowledge about the ancient Maya with present-day Maya, and

further his own education by learning from contemporary Maya descendants as he continues to try to understand their ancestors. His twenty years of working with present-day Mayas in the field informs certain of his scholarly concerns: “We need to be careful not to end up with a Mayanist view, rather than a Maya view, of Maya history and religion,” he warns.

Rabinal Achi, Past and Present

Van Akkeren's background is in both anthropology and theater. Through his love of spectacle and performance, he was drawn to the *Rabinal Achi*, a Maya dance-drama based on the creation myth. Its yearly enactment, which was the subject of his doctoral dissertation, takes place in the Guatemalan Highland town of Rabinal and dates to pre-Hispanic times. (The K'iche' text of *Rabinal*

Achi was recorded on paper in the sixteenth century by colonial scribes, but its existence in the oral tradition predates any written document.) Although the performance date coincides with the Catholic celebration of San Pablo, on January 25, the *Rabinal Achi* has deep roots in the Maya past. Van Akkeren says it was originally performed at the end of important 13-year and 52-year calendrical cycles.

Still performed in the original K'iche', the *Rabinal Achi* is acted out today in the small town of Rabinal by native speakers of the Achi Maya language, dressed in elaborate masks and

costumes. However, Van Akkeren says he realized that many of the spectators barely understand what is being said, or the context and history of the performance. In fact, in the course of living in Rabinal, Van Akkeren realized that “many people in Guatemala don't know much about their own history.” He describes a national disconnect,



Scene from Rabinal Achi, Rabinal, Baja Verapaz, Guatemala.



Procession with San Cristóbal, who carries an infant on his shoulders. San Cristóbal Verapaz.

whereby many of the country's non-Maya elites have little interest in the rich Highland Maya history, while simultaneously disparaging actual living Maya people, who, he strongly believes, still carry a connection to their forebears.

This disconnect, and the lack of historical knowledge among present-day Maya, led Van Akkeren to his current work: "to reconstruct Maya history with Maya people in Maya towns." He works with adults—among them local educators, university students, NGO officials, catechists, and spiritual guides—giving courses, conducting fieldwork, and, most recently, co-authoring written materials on ancient Maya culture.

Teaching and Learning from Present-Day Maya

Through a collaboration with the NGO Verdad y Vida over the last six years, Van Akkeren offers a multi-week course that includes classroom teaching, visits to historic sites and museums, and visits to sites where recent and ancient history coincide. The purpose of Verdad y Vida is to restore the self-esteem of people who suffered

during Guatemala's civil war (1960–1996) by supporting the recovery of historical memory and reconstructing a connection with ancient roots. This is where Van Akkeren's role as a teacher comes in: his most important task is "giving back the history to the people," he says. "Knowing the ancient history gives pride, a counterbalance to the more recent tragedies that allows people to heal."

But Van Akkeren's work goes two ways, as he also receives from the many Maya with whom he collaborates. Talking to present-day Maya about the past is, to him, "probably one of the best ways to study Mayas." He continues, "It is essential to study and understand present-day Maya culture in order to be able to reconstruct the ancient culture and history of the Mayas."

His recent work focuses on the pre-Hispanic history of the Highland municipality of San Cristóbal Verapaz and collaboration with Poq'omchi'-speaking people, one of more than a dozen Highland Maya groups. In 2013–2014, Van Akkeren led a series of workshops for local residents that produced *El rojizo amanecer del puma:*

sucinta historia prehispánica de San Cristóbal Verapaz, a multi-authored compilation of essays on the pre-Hispanic history of San Cristóbal. The title of this book owes itself to the fact that during colonial times, San Cristóbal was known as San Cristóbal Kaqkoj, or "Puma." The Kaqkoj/Puma was the founding lineage of the town.

The short book is a precursor to a lengthier forthcoming volume on the subject of San Cristóbal's ancient past. It is also the first in which Van Akkeren has asked local participants and collaborators, adults from all walks of life, to write the chapters themselves. It represents "a new jump in the way I'm working," he says.

In the introduction to *El rojizo amanecer*, Van Akkeren explains that during his workshops in San Cristóbal, "people's longing to learn about their own roots was apparent." As a lesser-known language group in comparison with the K'iche', Kaqchikel, and Q'eqchi', what place could the Poq'omchi' claim in the history of Guatemala? The introduction laments the scant presence of Maya history in the Guatemalan school curriculum, and notes that when this history

is taught, the focus is almost exclusively on the Lowland Maya of the Classic period (A.D. 200–900) in El Petén. Highland Maya groups and their past are mostly neglected.

Teaching and learning about their history represents a first step in righting this wrong. Participating in its telling represents another. “After a first workshop on the ancient history of the Poq’omchi’ people, participants were anxious to gather this material in a publication, a serious book about the pre-Hispanic history of the Poq’om, useful for future generations and educational institutions,” says Van Akkeren. The novelty of *El rojizo amanecer* “is the proposal that the participants are also the researchers of their own past and that they should write this part of the book. Thus, not only is history returned to people, so are the tools for investigating that history” (*El rojizo amanecer del puma*, 5).

Central to the text of *El rojizo amanecer* and the forthcoming longer book is Van Akkeren’s own research on the origin of the Poq’om people—present-day Poq’omchi’ and Poq’omam people who share a common ancestry and speak related languages. This line of inquiry led him to the ancient Maya city of Kaminal Juyu, an expansive archaeological site located beneath and around Guatemala City, in the Valley of Guatemala. His thesis about the origins of Kaminal Juyu and its inhabitants contrasts with much of the accepted wisdom about this site. Based on archaeological and anthropological evidence, Van Akkeren posits that Poq’om people were the founders of Kaminal Juyu.

As Van Akkeren began to address themes of ancient Maya imagery in Kaminal Juyu era in his workshops, he said, “it was fascinating to find that a city that had its heyday 2,000 years ago left traces of knowledge that are still present in today’s Poq’omchi’ people in Verapaz.” An obvious example is the patron saint of San Cristóbal Verapaz, who is depicted as carrying the baby Jesus while crossing a river. “This is conceptually linked with an ancient Maya patron deity who is depicted in statuary and murals as saving the baby maize god from a river,” claims Van Akkeren.

A Semester in Austin Comes to a Close
Ruud van Akkeren taught the graduate

seminar Exploring Maya Thought at LLILAS Benson. The course examined indigenous documents and introduced Guatemalan Highland history, connecting it with the rest of Mesoamerica.

A large part of the course focused on the Popol Wuj, a mythical-historical K’iche’ text transcribed in colonial times. One of the main points about the readings in the seminar was this: “You need to know who wrote the text in order to understand it.” The first classes were about the authors of the Popol Wuj and Van Akkeren’s finding that they are descendants of a Classic-period Lowland Maya lineage.



Lord of Rabinal and Princess “Precious Stone” in Rabinal Achi.

The seminar then turned to the text’s content: “We explored one of the most important myths of the Popol Wuj, which takes place in the Maya underworld, or Xibalba. This leads to the discovery of the two principal paradigms in Maya and Mesoamerican creation, which center on food (corn) and light (sun). These are viewed as complementary by Mesoamericans, with maize being connected to the feminine domain and sun being the primordial warrior in the masculine domain. Most of the mythology, iconography, and oral traditions center around these two concepts—solar god and maize god.”

The course also focused on the dissemination of these concepts throughout Mesoamerica along trade routes, which connected the Highlands with Teotihuacan. The prevalence of these concepts prompts an essential question for Van Akkeren: “I want to know the people who brought these common paradigms from one place to another in Mesoamerica. The prime

movers in ancient times were long-distance merchants, and there are specific lineages organized in the merchant guilds that disseminated these concepts. It’s fascinating, for example, to find that Maya people from Kaminal Juyu were buried in the Pyramid of the Moon, one of Teotihuacan’s principal sanctuaries.”

Archaeologist Adriana Linares, a Guatemalan doctoral student at LLILAS, took Van Akkeren’s graduate seminar. What she appreciated most was Van Akkeren’s interdisciplinary approach, and the fact that ethno-historical documents were brought into the study of Maya archaeology: “It was

an integrated study, talking about ancient history that flows, about people, family, and lineages—communicating that there is a constant interaction that involves all of these factors.” Linares’s view of ancient history emphasizes processes involving people instead of merely objects and places of grandeur. But she says that archaeologists who wish to work differently in their field, introducing alternative interpretations that sometimes imply more continuity with the present, face the fundamental challenge of finding enough credible evidence to back up their theories.

Ruud van Akkeren returns to his home in Guatemala to continue facing such challenges and to pursue his collaboration with present-day Maya in order to understand the past. ☀

Ruud van Akkeren is an associate researcher affiliated with La Universidad del Valle in Guatemala. He is the author of numerous scholarly articles and books, and of the historical novel La danza del tambor. He is currently completing a book on the ethno-history of Kaminal Juyu. He lives in Cobán, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala.

Susanna Sharpe is the communications coordinator at LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections, and the editor of Portal.

EDITOR’S NOTE: Despite a general trend among Mayanists to write Poqomchi’, Poqomam, and Poqom without a glottal stop (apostrophe) after the letter q, Van Akkeren argues differently. The spelling in this article reflects his preference.

Struggles and Obstacles in Indigenous Women's Fight for Justice in Guatemala

by IRMA ALICIA VELÁSQUEZ NIMATUJ

T

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE refers to measures both judicial and non-judicial that are intended to redress large-scale human rights abuses. In this article, I

focus on two recent cases of transitional justice in Guatemala. The first is the 2013 trial against General and Former President Efraín Ríos Montt and General Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity against the Ixil people. The second is the 2016 trial against retired colonel Esteelmer Reyes Girón and former military commissioner Heriberto Asij, who were charged with crimes against humanity for sexual violence against fifteen Q'eqchi' women from the community of Sepur Zarco, Izabal. Both cases reflect the struggles and obstacles faced by indigenous people of Guatemala, especially indigenous women, when demanding justice and confronting members of the state's security apparatus.¹

My aim is to highlight how these demands for justice, and diligent, decades-long efforts in the courts, are complicated by the poverty of most of the indigenous and mestizo communities who are fighting for justice, but also by the fact that the justice system is unequal and foreign to them.² Reaching the trial stage requires an intense effort against defense lawyers who are experts in sabotage, and who rely on the passage of time as a deterrent to witnesses. It also requires standing up to a justice system that is racist, sexist, often politicized, and easily corrupted. Furthermore, in recent years this struggle has become more complex since economic and military powers have joined forces to discredit survivor

testimonies, especially those of women who were victims of sexual violence.

Context

Guatemala is a small but highly unequal country where over 60 percent of the population lives in conditions of poverty or extreme poverty, the numbers higher for indigenous communities. The country is run by eight families who control just over 250 companies, arable land, banks, and almost the entire economy. This small, historical elite, known as the G8, also controls the state for its own benefit.

Guatemala is an indigenous country, a fact that is often hidden by government officials and census data. It is also a country with acute ideological conflicts

stemming from a 36-year armed conflict that lasted from 1960 to 1996 and cost the lives of an estimated 200,000 people. The United Nations Truth Commission Report published in 1999 estimated that 626 massacres took place during the war and that over 90 percent of these were committed by state security forces. Within this conflict, indigenous people and women bore the weight of the violence: an estimated 83 percent of the victims were indigenous. Indeed, the UN report concluded that acts of genocide were committed by the state against the indigenous population. Since the end of the war in 1996, survivors from all around the country have organized to demand justice for themselves and their communities.



Former chief of state Efraín Ríos Montt with his lawyers, seconds after he was pronounced guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity by Judge Yasmin Barrios. Supreme Court of Justice, Guatemala, May 10, 2013. Photo by Daniel Hernández-Salazar ©2013.

Two Cases

The first case I will discuss is the trial of Ríos Montt and Rodríguez Sánchez, which took place from February to May 2013, more than a decade after the judicial process first began.³ Both men faced charges of genocide and crimes against humanity for scorched-earth campaigns carried out between 1982 and 1983 against the Ixil people of Santa María Nebaj, San Gaspar Chajul, and San Juan Cotzal. It is estimated that half of the war's deaths occurred during Ríos Montt's regime (March 1982–August 1983), which means that in 17 months, an estimated 100,000 people were killed.

One of the most important aspects of the trial was that, for the first time, the voices and the testimony of survivors of the genocide were given national press coverage. Additionally, international coverage made it impossible for the Guatemalan media, which tends to be racist, to avoid publishing fragments of the testimonies, especially those of women, who reported acts of cruelty committed by troops against their families and their worldview, against their bodies and those of their daughters, mothers, and sisters. In one of the most heartbreaking days, one witness, whose identity was protected, revealed that a seven-year-old Ixil girl had died after being gang raped by soldiers and civil patrollers. Until that point, the subject of sexual violence was seldom discussed publicly. Two reports published in 1998 and 1999 made mention of this crime, but due to limited time and obstacles of the postwar era, they were unable to show the extent to which the security forces used sexual violence as part of their counterinsurgency strategy to destroy an imagined “internal enemy,” embodied largely by indigenous communities. In the context of counterinsurgency, the state saw indigenous women as the mothers of future guerrillas and thus a necessary foe.

During the trial, the voices of the survivors were captured in legal documents, pushing back against the official discourse that called them “lying Indians,” and claimed that “Indians exaggerated and twisted reality . . . they could not be raped since they were ugly and dirty.” The women's testimonies of their suffering also exposed the effects of state-sponsored racism.⁴

The second noteworthy case is a very recent one. In a trial that took place in February 2016, fifteen Q'eqchi' women from the community of Sepur Zarco, department of Izabal, were called as witnesses against Colonel Esteelmer Reyes Girón and former military commissioner Heriberto Asij, both charged with crimes against humanity. From 1982 to 1988, the military set up a camp in Sepur Zarco on the orders of landowning families who wanted to take control of lands that the indigenous community was trying to legalize as its own. Soon after their arrival, the security forces murdered the husbands of fifteen women, who were then raped and forced into sexual and domestic servitude for six years.

IN THE CONTEXT OF COUNTERINSURGENCY, THE STATE SAW INDIGENOUS WOMEN AS THE MOTHERS OF FUTURE GUERRILLAS AND THUS A NECESSARY FOE.

I served as an expert witness for this case, an experience that allowed me to learn and spend time with the women from 2011 to 2013. During those years, and through several trips to Sepur Zarco, I heard their stories and observed their surroundings. It was painful to see the extreme poverty in which they lived because it meant that to this day they are being subjected to a form of state violence. All of the women are poorer now than they were before the military set up camp in their community. One of them has since passed away, at a relatively young age, but this is not surprising given that most of the women suffer from long-term illnesses due to the rape and other abuses to which they were subjected. The Sepur Zarco case set a precedent nationwide with the courts accepting sexual violence against indigenous women as a weapon of war in the Guatemalan context. Internationally, it marked the first time that such a trial took place in the country where the abuses occurred.

During the trial, the fifteen Q'eqchi' women sat in open court with their faces covered, the stigma of sexual violence still too much to bear. Some agreed to testify in this setting, and with the help of a translator told the judges and the country of the abuses they endured. Others found public testimony too painful, and only their recorded testimonies were presented. Hours and hours of video were played in which, weeping, the women spoke about the horrific way in which the army violated them while destroying their family structure and overall way of life. The violence was such that even the interpreters had a hard time translating these testimonies. In spite of the pain, with their presence and their voice, these women spoke for the thousands of others who have remained silent or who have died without obtaining justice.

These judicial processes are often celebrated due to their implications for transitional justice worldwide, yet the victories do not always translate into concrete changes for the victims and their families. This by no means diminishes the value of the justice or the potential of reparations (as yet unrealized), but it is something to keep in mind. The Ixil and Q'eqchi' women who testified, most of whom are illiterate, achieved with their courage what indigenous professionals or academics have been unable to do—they reclaimed their dignity. This has implications not only for indigenous peoples of Guatemala but also for the more than 5 million indigenous peoples worldwide, who in different moments of history have faced genocide and other crimes against humanity.

The annulment of the Ríos Montt and Rodríguez Sánchez genocide sentences on May 20, 2013, put a stop to court-ordered reparations. At the time of this writing, a special trial is under way against Ríos Montt. However, these proceedings are taking place behind closed doors, without press access or international observers, preventing accountability and leaving the reparations ordered in 2013 in a legal limbo. In the case of Sepur Zarco, the accused have appealed their sentence and time will tell if court-ordered reparations are instituted.⁵

When we talk about reparations in the Guatemalan context, these often include commitments that should already be the re-



Together with hundreds of human rights activists and representatives from foreign institutions, the author (center-right) holds hands with her daughter as the guilty verdict is read in the Ríos Montt trial. Supreme Court of Justice, Guatemala, May 10, 2013. Photo by Daniel Hernández-Salazar ©2013.

sponsibility of the state. In the Sepur Zarco case, for example, some of the measures included the construction of a health center and housing for the women, as well as scholarships for youth in the community to attend middle school and high school. Yet providing access to education and health services should not constitute reparations. These are basic obligations of the Guatemalan state to guarantee the life of its citizens, especially those most affected by poverty who live in remote regions and permanent exclusion.

Obstacles

While these cases have provided hope in matters of justice and human rights, the political, military, and economic sectors in Guatemala are to this day campaigning forcefully against these proceedings, using strategies aimed at criminalizing the survivors, family members, and witnesses who are seeking justice.⁶ Similarly, as the lack of reparations shows, the Guatemalan state has done very little for the victims of state-sponsored crimes committed during the civil war.

Since 2013, diverse sectors in Guatemala have waged a battle to shape the historical memory of the country. With the start of the genocide trial, sections of the army and the national elite began a campaign to discredit witnesses, survivors, and human

rights activists. That same year saw the creation of the Foundation Against Terrorism, an extreme right-wing organization with secret financing, composed of former military. The foundation uses propaganda, paid ads, and media manipulation to defame members of civil society, academics, diplomats, judges, and anyone else, national or foreign, who works on human rights-related topics. Under the banner of freedom of expression, it promotes hate speech in television programs and opinion columns, facing no legal consequences to date. It has even gone so far as to bring charges against human rights activists.

Similarly, the Association of Military Veterans of Guatemala, AVEMILGUA, has focused on creating rural and urban support bases. In rural areas and communities affected by war, the association has tapped into community divisions created by the civil defense patrols to generate support.⁷ In Guatemala City, members of AVEMILGUA founded the political party of the current president of Guatemala, Jimmy Morales, and its members now serve as senior advisers and congressmen. During the Sepur Zarco trial, members of the association and their recruits installed themselves outside the courthouse with banners and megaphones, defending the accused while denouncing the Q'eqchi' women as

prostitutes. This argument was even used by the defense lawyer, who in his closing statements claimed that due to their poverty, the fifteen indigenous women had resorted to prostitution in the military barracks. Thus, went the argument, no crime was committed against them.

To this day, the military maintains control over the state and the public sphere. The narrative of the security forces and army as national heroes is undefeated in the popular discourse and has now found its way into academic history books. Additionally, the military has mobilized indigenous populations to protest against the trials and to deny genocide.

The economic elite of Guatemala has joined the efforts of the military associations, fearing that the trials will reveal their direct involvement in the genocide as financiers of scorched-earth campaigns. In 2013, it was the country's chamber of commerce, CACIF, that forced the Constitutional Court to annul the Ríos Montt genocide conviction. During the Sepur Zarco trial, evidence and survivor testimony made it clear that the military detachment had been placed in the region to defend the interests of area landowners against the land claims of Q'eqchi' peasants.

The actions of the state do not differ from those of the extreme right-wing associations. Through institutions created to focus on the "peace process," the Guatemalan state has blocked access to files related to the armed conflict, spreading a culture of silence about the past that denies genocide. At the same time, many communities that are still fighting to protect their land and natural resources are being remilitarized.

One official who has pushed to promote impunity and silence is Antonio Arenales Forno, who served as Secretary of Peace during the government of General Otto Pérez Molina (2012–2015), heading an institution created to ensure compliance with the peace agreements. In testimony before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in Costa Rica and at a meeting on the Convention against Torture in Geneva, Arenales Forno not only denied Guatemalan genocide but attempted to minimize the severity of human rights violations, emphasizing instead the army's civil security functions. In April 2016, he penned an op-ed in the national newspapers arguing against the ongoing fight for justice. As a



Indigenous women witnesses cover their faces at a hearing during the Sepur Zarco war crimes trial. Supreme Court of Justice, Guatemala, February 9, 2016. Photo by Daniel Hernández-Salazar ©2016.

general, Pérez Molina was stationed in the Ixil region during the genocide campaigns, yet he has publicly denied that genocide took place in Guatemala. Eyewitness testimony says otherwise.⁸ Pérez Molina is currently serving a sentence for corruption.

Conclusion

I would like to highlight three points on the courageous struggle of Ixil and Q'eqchi' women survivors of the armed conflict in Guatemala. First, we must be careful to not idealize the legal proceedings. These are not just legal precedents, but cases that directly affect the lives of people, many of whom live in conditions of extreme poverty and for whom justice is long overdue. It is important to remember that the struggle does not end when the trial does; survivors still face a society and a state that continue to criminalize them with accusations that they are communists, guerrillas, terrorists, and freeloaders.

Second, the cases mentioned in this article dealt with topics that are taboo in Guatemala. To speak about and denounce sexual violence is not only difficult, but dangerous. Guatemala is still a patriarchal society and indigenous communities are not immune; these crimes affect the internal dynamics in the victimized communities. Fear and shame have forced many indigenous women to remain silent and keep these crimes hidden, even from their own husbands and families.

To this day, the majority of indigenous women who were victims of sexual violence have not come forward and many have died. Denouncing these crimes requires work and awareness within indigenous communities, and will necessitate an even more tenacious fight against the patriarchy that plagues the country.

Finally, I stress once again that reparations, while difficult to achieve, are necessary for a country as unequal as Guatemala. Judicial processes are required so that one day, the official narrative will change, and Guatemala will once and for all force its citizens to accept difficult truths: that the state, its security forces, and the economic and cultural elites, guided by racism and economic greed, committed inhumane acts against indigenous people. The struggle of this group of Ixil and Q'eqchi' women is an inspiring example of hope for the future. That these survivors and their descendants might reclaim their dignity is a small step toward repairing the damage and brutality of the armed conflict. ☀

Irma Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj is a journalist, social anthropologist, and international spokeswoman who has been at the forefront of struggles for respect for indigenous cultures. A LLILAS alumna, she is the first Maya-K'iche' woman to earn a doctorate in social anthropology. She was a Tinker visiting professor during spring 2016.

Notes

1. The 1998 report *Guatemala: Never Again!* prepared by the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese of Guatemala (Spanish acronym, ODHA) contains detailed information on activities of the army, national police, civil defense patrols, commissioned officers, and death squads during the armed conflict. A 1999 report by the Historical Clarification Commission, "Guatemala: Memory of Silence," details disparate levels of suffering among indigenous peoples. It lists 626 massacres attributed to state forces as part of a campaign of extermination.
2. In December 2015, the National Institute of Statistics released the results of the "2014 Survey of Living Conditions" (Spanish acronym, ENCOVI), which shows that poverty and extreme poverty have increased considerably. The national poverty rate reached 59.3%, an increase of 8.1 percentage points over levels found in a 2006 survey, while extreme poverty increased from the 2006 level of 15.3% to 23.4% in 2014. It is estimated that poverty affects 9.6 million people out of a total of 16 million (that is, nearly 60% of the total national population), with 3.7 million living in extreme poverty, most of whom are indigenous.
3. The film *Dictator in the Dock* (October 2013) documents the trial of Ríos Montt on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity. See <http://skylight.is/films/dictator-in-the-dock/>.
4. Audio available at <https://soundcloud.com/bea-gallardo-shaul/sets/dra-irma-alicia-vel-quez>.
5. Audio of Sepur Zarco sentence available at <https://soundcloud.com/juicio-sepur-zarco/sentencia-sepur-zarco>.
6. Attempts to discredit the victims and their families have included accusations that they are guerrillas, that they are parasites taking advantage of the system, that charges were brought for economic gain and revenge, and that foreign governments have bankrolled their lawyers and stand to gain from convictions.
7. These paramilitary-style patrols, strengthened during the war years, are composed of rural men forced to monitor their own communities.
8. Otto Pérez Molina has been linked to human rights violations during the time he was stationed at the military base in Nebaj, one of the regions hardest hit by the counterinsurgency, where he was known as Major Tito. It has also long been thought that he was involved in the 1998 plot to murder Bishop Juan Gerardi, a theory documented by the Guatemalan-American writer Francisco Goldman in his book *The Art of Political Murder* (2007).

Unsettling Ideas about Africa and Blackness: Contemplating Race and Belonging in the Dominican Republic

by JHEISON ROMAIN

A

AS I NEARED the end of my field research in the Dominican Republic, while in a *batey*¹ in the north of the country, I had a conversation with a 28-year-old black man who was born and raised in the Dominican Republic by Haitian parents. He and his two sisters are very ingenious entrepreneurs who have managed to pool limited resources to start a small business. Together, they sell delicious, freshly made passion-fruit juice and grilled ham-and-cheese sandwiches out of their small house.

I shared with him that I was born in Colombia and he responded with delight that Colombia was one of three countries he had always wanted to visit. The other two, he said, were France and Africa. I corrected him, saying that Africa is not a country. He did not understand what I meant. I proceeded to explain to him that Africa is a large continent with 55 different countries and a vast diversity of cultures and languages. In his mind, he confessed, Africa had always existed as a single country. I could not fault him for this misconception. Despite having been born in the Dominican Republic, during a time when the constitution stated that anyone born in the country would have the right to citizenship, with the exception of the children of diplomats and people “in transit,” he was not able to obtain the papers that would grant him normative citizenship in the Dominican Republic, and, thus, he was not allowed to pursue much education.²

After the exchange, I wondered about how he had received this faulty information. How is it that he knew about Colombia and France as countries, but was not aware that, in his mind, Africa, the second-largest continent in the world, had been diminished to a single nation? How is it that a black man who is proud to be Haitian, and proud to be black, can have such a limited perspective of the continent from which his ancestors arrived?

While thinking about this, I recalled the first reference to Africa that I heard upon my arrival in the Dominican Republic. I presented my passport to an immigration officer, who, after inquiring about the purpose for my trip, proceeded to ask me if I had traveled to Africa within the past month. Puzzled, I asked him why he wanted to know. He said it was because of the outbreak of Ebola virus in Africa. This, despite the fact that the outbreak had



Sugarcane cutters protest outside the Haitian embassy in Santo Domingo on July 14, 2015, claiming they have been forgotten by Haiti. After living most of their lives in the Dominican Republic, many are now fighting to gain permanent residency there.

only affected three countries in the west of the continent.³ I wondered, did he also imagine Africa as a single country? This was not a question that the immigration officer had conceived on his own. Instead, it had likely been formulated by government officials who are in charge of policies regarding travel and migration. How might this institutionalized question also contribute to the minimization of Africa in the collective unconscious?

Distancing Blackness

In 1983, former longtime Dominican president Joaquín Balaguer (1966–1978, 1988–1996) called for the implementation of measures to stop “the Africanization of the Dominican people” in order for the population to “gradually improve its anthropological traits.”⁴ He wrote of the Haitian population as a “biological threat.” And, concerning black Haitian sugarcane workers, he asserted that “during the time they remain in Dominican territory, many of those individuals procreate children who increase the black population of the country and contribute to the corruption of its ethnic physiognomy.”⁵ Thus, negative ideas and misconceptions about Africa and blackness have been promoted from the highest echelons of Dominican society.

It is important to recognize, however, that these views do not represent the perspective of all Dominicans. Rather, they are part of the hegemonic position that has been expressed through recent legal and constitutional changes by the Dominican government. In a letter written in 1943, during the Rafael Trujillo dictatorship, Dominican intellectual Juan Bosch—an opponent of the dictatorship, who would briefly rise to the presidency—wrote: “Our duty as Dominicans who form part of humanity is to defend the Haitian people from their oppressors, with the same passion as we defend the Dominican people from theirs.”⁶

Controversially, through ruling 168-13 in 2013, the Dominican national Constitutional Tribunal retroactively invalidated the right to citizenship for people born to undocumented parents. This measure disproportionately affected the offspring of black, impoverished Haitian sugarcane workers who, as late as

the 1980s, according to scholar Lauren Derby, “were imported directly by the sugar concerns as an indentured labor force.”⁷ A separate “national regularization plan” was also set in motion, through presidential decree 327 of 2013, with the express purpose of regulating the presence of undocumented foreign immigrants. This process also primarily impacted black Haitian immigrants. As was documented by local press, foreign immigrants who were not Haitian and black were given priority in the process and were allowed to skip the otherwise long lines to present their documents.⁸ Although both measures were colorblind on the surface, their application and impact was racialized. In other words, it is likely that the intent of these measures was to exclude people who are seen as black, people who, because of their blackness and their African heritage, are marked as undesirable for the nation.



Mass exodus of Haitian migrants in Dajabon, at the northern border of the Dominican Republic and Haiti. In a matter of weeks, over 40,000 Haitian migrants left the Dominican Republic to avoid facing sudden deportation.

Photos by Jheison Romain



Boys play baseball in the street beside the *batey* in which they live. Children of Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic face a very uncertain future, and many now live in a legal limbo.

Marginalizing Haitians, Excluding the Diaspora

The way in which Africa as a continent is diminished is also emblematic of the way in which the lives of black people are marked as less significant. In the Americas, no other country is considered to be as African and as black as Haiti. In fact, it was recently announced that in June 2016, Haiti would be joining the African Union, further affirming the nation's affinity with the African continent.⁹ Thus, as long as misconceptions and negative ideas about Africa and blackness persist, black Haitian people and people of Haitian descent will continue to struggle against a normalizing of their marginalization and their continued exclusion from society—in their own country and abroad. However, it is also important to recognize that the recent citizenship and migration crisis that has disproportionately affected black people in the Dominican Republic is not unique to this nation. Rather, it is symptomatic of global inequality and anti-blackness. The condition of being excluded because of blackness is viewed by many scholars as one of

the elements common to black people as members of the African Diaspora, a legacy of the colonization of the Americas and of Africa.¹⁰ Furthermore, scholars Carole Boyce Davies and Babacar M'Bow assert that “nation-state citizenship for black people anywhere in the diaspora is a fragile and mutable condition.”¹¹

In response to international uproar following the 2013 Constitutional Tribunal ruling, the Dominican congress approved a law that would allow some Dominicans of Haitian descent to regain their citizenship. However, their rights were not fully restored. Instead, as activist Ana Maria Belique noted, the government created a new, separate ledger in which the birth certificates of Dominicans born to parents who are not Dominican citizens were transcribed. Within two years, the people who were able to register under this law will have to apply for naturalization. Juan Telemín, a Dominican activist of Haitian descent who was affected by the 2013 constitutional ruling but has since been able to fight to have his citizenship restored, said he believes the primary, long-term concern for Dominicans of Haitian descent is that because they have been set aside, their rights could continue to be limited and their citizenship could once again be compromised at any given moment.

The persistent monolithic view of Africa is evidence of pervasive anti-blackness. Given the long history of exploitation and marginalization of black people, by failing to acknowledge that anti-blackness still exists, we continue to tacitly accept the normalization of ideas and policies that exclude black people from full and equal social integration. A change in course is long overdue, and given the growth of global inequality and the worldwide migration crisis to which it has led, it is critical that we question and decolonize (“unsettle”) the ideas that continue to promote the devaluation of black lives, as well as the lives of other people who are racialized and deemed as less valuable. ☀

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Haitian immigrants and their descendants in the Dominican Republic from May through July of 2015. Portions of his thesis were adapted for this article.

Notes

1. A *batey* is a community built specifically for sugarcane cutters beside large plantations in the Dominican Republic.
2. Law No. 285-04 on Migration would affirm that migrant workers be considered to be “in transit” and their children, thus, ineligible for citizenship. This was later contested by the Inter-American Court on Human Rights in 2005, which urged the Dominican government to uphold the right to citizenship as stipulated by the Dominican constitution prior to 2010.
3. Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.
4. Joaquín Balaguer, *La isla al revés: Haití y el destino dominicano* (Santo Domingo: Dominicana: Fundación José Antonio Caro, 1983), 45.
5. Joaquín Balaguer and Jorge Tena Reyes, *Joaquín Balaguer: Premio Nacional de Literatura 1990*, Colección Premio Nacional de Literatura (Santo Domingo: Ediciones de la Fundación Corripio, 2001), 99–100.
6. Juan Bosch, ed., *República Dominicana y Haití: El derecho a vivir*, primera edición, Colección Bosch Vive, no. 9 (Santo Domingo: Fundación Juan Bosch, 2014), 39.
7. Lauren Derby, “Haitians in the Dominican Republic: Race, Politics, and Neoliberalism,” in *Afro-Descendants, Identity, and the Struggle for Development in the Americas*, ed. Bernd Reiter and Kimberly Eison Simmons, Ruth Simms Hamilton African Diaspora Series (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2012), 53.
8. Noticias SIN, “Extranjeros Que No Son Haitianos Entran a Oficina de Regularización Sin Hacer Fila,” June 17, 2015. Available at www.noticiassin.com/2015/06/extranjeros-que-no-son-haitianos-entran-a-oficina-de-regularizacion-sin-hacer-fila/#comments.
9. Jason Margolis, “Haiti, a Caribbean Country, Is Joining the African Union,” Public Radio International, May 13, 2016. Available at www.pri.org/stories/2016-05-13/haiti-caribbean-country-joining-african-union.
10. Scholars include St. Claire Drake (1993), W.E.B. Du Bois (1994), Edmund Gordon and Marc Anderson (1999), Christen A. Smith (2016), among others.
11. Carole Boyce Davies and Babacar M'Bow, “Towards African Diaspora Citizenship,” in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, ed. Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods (Toronto and Cambridge: South End Press, 2007), 21.

Transitory Ghosts

Haitians and Dominico-Haitians in Santo Domingo

by JOSÉ RUBIO-ZEPEDA

I

“I’M A NOBODY in my own country.” These are the words spoken by Juliana Deguis Pierre, a Dominican woman who made national headlines in the Dominican Republic after being denied Dominican citizenship despite having been born in the country. Deguis and other plaintiffs sued the government, with her case ascending to the Constitutional Tribunal, the Dominican Republic’s highest court. The case backfired, however. As of September 2013 the Tribunal (as documented extensively) retroactively stripped thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent of their citizenship through ruling TC/0168/13, or “the Sentence,” as it became known throughout the world. Deguis’s citizenship was revoked by the decision, which

claimed that her parents were in “in transit” when she was born. The new law applies to all Dominicans whose parents were not born in the Dominican Republic, and is retroactive for anyone born in 1929 or after. The law has left more than 210,000 individuals either stateless or in limbo. Many are like Deguis—with no family in Haiti, speaking little to no Haitian Creole, and ineligible for Haitian citizenship.

Statelessness is the inability of an individual to be considered a citizen by any state through its nationality legislation or constitution. Stateless individuals face the overwhelming challenge of “existing without an acknowledged identity.” Those who are stateless or in limbo, as thousands of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent continue to be, are not legally able to marry, work, have a bank



Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent at Haitian embassy, Santo Domingo, D.R., June 2015.

Photos by José Rubio-Zepeda



Gagá dancers celebrate and praise Afro-Haitian deities, or *Iwa*, in the Dominican Republic. Lenten *gagá* festivities, similar to Haitian *rara*, are one example of the cultural heritage shared by Afro-Dominicans and Haitians.

account, obtain a driver's license, vote, register for high school or university, or even buy a cell phone through one of the major cell phone carriers, as these all require a *cédula* or national ID. Without proper documentation, their lives become perilous. In the short story "Ghost," Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat explores the dangers of statelessness through the protagonist, Pascal, whose quest to become a radio journalist leads to confusion over his involvement in a shooting, followed by questioning and treatment as a criminal for his reporting on police corruption. Danticat metaphorically represents Pascal as a ghost, similar to the Haitians who navigate their way through Santo Domingo and the Dominican Republic as transitory ghosts. This transitory status could also be described as a liminal one. As defined by Maurice L. Hall and Homi Bhaba, liminality is an "in-between," transitional space that may affect individuals' identities—whether race, ethnicity, class, gender, or sexuality—a space neither here nor there. In the case

of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent, their physical presence and the space they occupy, whether in the capital city or elsewhere throughout the Dominican Republic, becomes contested, or liminal. Liminality can also affect how these individuals navigate public versus private spaces, and the ways in which they're included in the Dominican Republic, but also excluded. What aspect of these individuals becomes valued?

As with many other immigrant groups, what becomes valued are the bodies of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent, specifically, the labor they provide to the Dominican economy. They occupy a vulnerable socio-economic position within the economy, working in the informal sector as street vendors (harvesting and selling fruits and vegetables, or candy), as market vendors (selling clothes or an array of household items), and most often at construction sites (written about extensively by Petrozziello 2013 and Wooding et al. 2004). Because of the jobs they are able to obtain,

and the lack of protections they have, their labor becomes commodified. This commodification of labor, however, is not unique to Haitians or Dominicans of Haitian descent, as it is reproduced in other countries, particularly those of the Global North.

An Island Divided

The Dominican Republic's economy is eight times the size of Haiti's. This wasn't always the case, however. Until the turn of the twentieth century, Haiti was wealthier than the D.R. Under colonial rule for centuries, the island of Hispaniola was a possession divided between the French and the Spanish. Haiti, proudly the first slave society to overthrow its overlords in 1791, became the second republic in the Western Hemisphere, after the United States. Two decades afterwards, in 1825, France surrounded the country with gunboats and extorted it, demanding 150 million gold francs in compensation for "lost property": slaves. Haiti was then forced to borrow money from French banks in order to

meet deadlines to pay off this “debt,” which it wasn’t able to do until 1947, after 122 years.¹ This is one of the reasons for Haiti’s status as the “poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.”

Haiti ruled the Dominican Republic—at the time known as Santo Domingo—from 1822 until 1844. These years have left an indelible mark on Dominicans as one of the most humiliating episodes in their country’s history. Dominican Independence Day is, in fact, not celebrated on the day the D.R. obtained its freedom from Spain, but on the date of independence from Haiti. Into the twentieth century, the border between the Dominican Republic and Haiti remained porous. In 1937, a massacre of Haitians ordered by Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo decisively marked the differences between a black Haiti and a Hispanic Dominican Republic. Upwards of 20,000 Haitians died in the Parsley Massacre along the Dominican-Haitian border on the Artibonite River, also known as the Massacre River, a site of conflict between the two nations. The massacre realized the anti-Haitian project of many Dominican nationalists, who regarded the country’s black heritage as detrimental to national development. Dominicans instead evolved a national culture that denied or deemphasized their African roots. This racial ideology, *dominicanidad* (Dominicanness), celebrated European roots and rejected the African, taking pride in Hispanic heritage and Catholicism. Thus, by virtue of their early independence and rebellion against slaveholders, Haitians created a national culture based on race, while in contrast Dominicans created a national identity based on culture, rejecting the role of race. Dominican racial mythology built a silence around blackness, reaching back to pre-Columbian indigenous cultures and developing a rich vocabulary of color hues to describe phenotypes that were ascribed to Native Americans.

Factors Contributing to Migration

The driving force behind the exodus of Haitians to the Dominican Republic is poverty. The first large-scale migration dates back to the 1920s, but migration to the D.R. is just as prevalent now. Haiti remains the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and one of the poorest in the world, with considerable need for basic services and

resources. Annual income per head of household is around US\$820,² yet according to the World Bank, Haitians subsist on incomes far below that (an estimated 80 percent) and many live in abject poverty. The latest household survey was conducted in 2012, with more than 6 million out of 10.4 million (59 percent) Haitians living below the poverty line on the equivalent of US\$2.42/day, and over 2.5 million (24 percent) living on US\$1.23/day. Ecological disasters since the 1970s, including most recently the 2010 earthquake, have fueled the rise in poverty. Unemployment and a stagnant economy have been linked to chronic political instability characterized by “troubled relations” with international financial institutions. Successive dictatorships that lasted until 1986, along with periods of coups (1991 and 2004), have contributed to the political upheaval that also drives mass migration of Haitians across the Dominican border.

June 2015 marked the deadline for Dominicans of Haitian descent to register and attempt to establish legal residency. As of this writing, fewer than one-third of the estimated 210,000 who were left stateless by TC/0168/13 have been able to successfully reclaim their citizenship. A common problem is that children of Haitian migrants or Dominicans of Haitian descent had not had their births recorded in the civil registry. Will these children and others continue to become “transitory ghosts”? The recent reelection of President Danilo Medina in the D.R., although still contested, means that the ruling PLD (Dominican Liberation Party) will extend its twelve-year rule until 2020, with current citizenship policies likely to endure. What will become of those who remain undocumented or were not able to register? Will Haiti, with its current political unrest and uncertainty, continue to exacerbate the migration of Haitians to the Dominican Republic and other countries? The answers remain to be seen. However, if neoliberal policies and discriminatory laws continue to favor a select few—namely, Dominican and Haitian elites—the island of Hispaniola will remain divided and the tensions between the two countries will live on for years to come. ☀

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Derechos en Crisis

A Conference at the Frontier of Activism and Scholarship

by RUTH ELIZABETH VELÁSQUEZ ESTRADA

We became conscious of the right to have rights and of the right to belong to an organized community only when millions of people had lost their rights, and could no longer recuperate them.

—Agustín Estrada Negrete, political asylee and immigrant rights activist

F

FOR SEVEN YEARS, the annual Lozano Long Conference of the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies (LLILAS) has sought to create long-standing relations of collaboration and dialogue, intertwined with calls to action, across universities and communities throughout the Americas. UT Austin faculty members Rebecca Torres (Geography) and Alfonso Gonzales (LLILAS, Mexican American and Latino/a Studies) did an outstanding job advancing that commitment this year. The timely conference “Derechos en Crisis: Refugees, Migrant Detention, and Authoritarian Neoliberalism” brought together a stellar multinational group of faculty, lawyers, graduate students, community organizers, and activists who are working on an increasingly important topic: Mexican and Central American refugees.

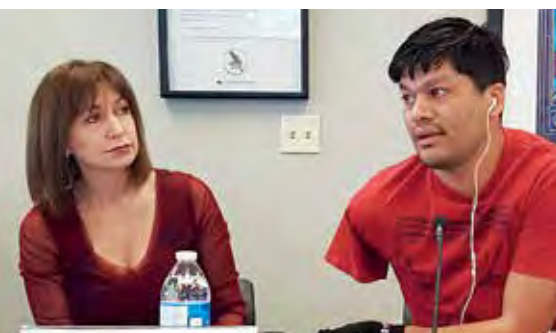
In 2014, the Obama administration saw the highest rate in a decade of child asylum seekers, children without parents or legal guardians, restrained in detention centers, a phenomenon that later came to be known as the crisis of unaccompanied minors. Unaccompanied minors left their homes in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras to escape gender violence, organized crime, and gang violence. This context forced me, a PhD candidate in anthropology and a presenter on the panel Violence, Forced Migrations, and Central American Refugees, to ask the following questions: How did people’s right to seek asylum result in the state’s practice of imprisoning asylum seekers in the United States? What can we do to transform the underlying logics of this immigrant-refugee system?

The Crisis of Rights: A Brief Background

In planning and conceiving the conference, Gonzales argued that rather than a refugee crisis, what we have is a crisis of rights under

neoliberalism, a term referring to the strengthening of the repressive branch of the state amid reduction of the social arm. The right of asylum emerged with the United Nations 1951 Refugee Convention, and is grounded in Article 14 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The convention in its Article 1 states in part that a refugee is a person who, “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside of the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, . . . unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”¹ The convention also acknowledges that seekers of asylum might breach immigration rules to make themselves safe. Thus, it is prohibited to penalize people “with immigration or criminal offences in relation to the seeking of asylum, or [to keep them] arbitrarily detained purely on the basis of seeking asylum.”² In the aftermath of War World II, the right to seek asylum was limited to people fleeing events occurring before 1951 in Europe. In 1967, a UN protocol removed this limitation, making the right universal.³

In the aftermath of the Cold War, reasons for asylum seekers’ fears of persecution came to include gender and threats from organized crime and youth gangs. Today’s asylum requests by Mexican and Central American people thus go beyond the 1951 refugee category. These refugees’ asylum requests appear to have fallen into a “bureaucratic gray zone”—they do not clearly fit the established refugee categories. In the United States, a country with a historically racialized anti-immigration policy, one outcome of this “gray zone” has been the detention of asylum seekers, including charges of immigration offenses. Thus, for Gonzales, the thousands of asylum-seeking detainees at the U.S.–Mexico border are “the outcome of a migration-detention regime that has been reconfigured precisely to prevent people from entering the United States through the process of asylum.”⁴



At the Lozano Long Conference, from top: (1) Shannon Speed (1) and José Luis Hernández Cruz; (2) author Dawn Paley addresses the audience; (3) May-ek Querales, anthropology doctoral student, CIESAS D.F.; (4) (l-r) Agustín Estrada Negrete, Cecilia Menjívar, and Néstor Rodríguez.

Conference presenter Dawn Paley, renowned author of the book *Drug War Capitalism* and a graduate student at the University of Veracruz in Mexico, spoke of the current crisis of rights in connection with historical socio-political processes in Central America. She pointed to extreme inequality, elites' refusal to pay taxes, and high levels of state corruption as the root causes of the current crisis of rights in the region. Paley also pointed to the \$9 billion of military aid given by the U.S. government to repressive regimes in Central America in the 1980s, and U.S. support of the United Fruit Company, which owned large amounts of land in the region but refused to pay taxes. For Paley, these processes created the political and economic exclusion leading to the Central American civil wars of the 1980s, which resulted in thousands of people disappeared, killed, or seeking asylum. In the post-Cold War era, Paley argues that U.S. deportation of gang members, the War on Drugs, and austerity policies embedded in the Central American Peace Accords created a context of violence in the region.

Similarly to Paley, Alex Sánchez of the organization Homies Unidos, who presented in the keynote panel, pointed to the implementation of contemporary policies, like the U.S. deportation of gang members and the Alliance for Prosperity Plan, as underlying causes escalating the number of asylum seekers. He explained that to reduce the gang problem in Los Angeles, the U.S. government deported gang members to Central America in the 1990s. In El Salvador, youth gang members found themselves without jobs and with scarce opportunities to work because of their criminal label. Many of these gang member deportees organized the already constituted Salvadoran youth gangs. The renewed youth gangs, and other common criminals posing as gang members, began extorting people in order to make a living. More recently, Sánchez points out, the development and security components of the Alliance for Prosperity policy have resulted in gentrification of impoverished communities, as well as further state repression and criminalization of youth gang members, who are already marginalized and criminalized within the youth sectors and poor barrios of the U.S. and Central America. For Sánchez, youth gangs seem to have no other option than to remain in the Central American countries,

while countless people from this region flee their countries as a result, because an effective and just vision of violence reduction has yet to emerge.

Related to Paley's and Sánchez's assertions, my doctoral research on grassroots peacemaking led by youth gangs in El Salvador has revealed that the 1992 Salvadoran Peace Accords, which ended twelve years of civil war, have sustained socioeconomic inequities. Former right-wing president Alfredo Cristiani inscribed in the accords that for the reunification of Salvadoran society "the policy of privatization shall increase society's share of ownership by affording workers access to ownership of privatized companies."⁵ In the 1990s, under the auspices of the accords, a wave of privatization took place that increased the ranks of the economically disenfranchised in the name of peace.

In contrast to Paley and Sánchez, my research found that in order to survive the state's repressive measures, youth gangs have engaged in grassroots peacemaking efforts. These efforts are a survival tactic that reflects a critique of the state's approaches to peace. Since the 1992 Peace Accords, El Salvador has become the most violent country in the world, with 102 homicides per 100,000 people in 2015.⁶ Despite other forms of violence, such as gender, common crime, and organized crime, the Salvadoran state holds youth gangs responsible for this homicidal violence and to date has implemented mostly punitive measures (e.g., Iron Fist, the militarization of public security) to end it, without success. In March 2012, with the support of the leftist Mauricio Funes administration, the leadership of opposing youth gangs agreed to a national truce, stating: "For the good of the country, our families, and ourselves, we ask you [state officials] to allow us to contribute to the pacification of El Salvador, which is not just yours, but ours as well." During the two years the truce endured (from 2012 to 2014), the national homicide rate dropped from 13.5 to 8.5 per day. Yet the truce was short-lived. Leading up to the presidential elections of February 2014, the right-wing political parties accused the Funes administration of negotiating with criminals. After much political critique, former president Funes retracted his support for the gang truce.

Youth gangs' peacemaking efforts re-



Protesters against family detention gather outside the White House in February 2015.

vealed yet another aspect of the crisis of rights: the discourse of youth gangs as criminals has come to be more politically expedient than grappling with the multiple constituted causes of violence producing the Central American refugees of today.

Criminalization of Asylum Seekers

Immigrant rights activist Agustín Estrada Negrete, a political asylee and self-identified transgender person, argues that immigrant asylum seekers are treated as criminals because in practice the right to asylum is no longer a universal right. “It is very sad when you are fleeing torture in your home country to come to another country to ask for help, and they treat you as a criminal,” he exclaimed. As a conference panelist, Estrada Negrete asserted that the goal of the neoliberal immigration-refugee system is to modify the very understanding of universal human and refugee rights so that the lack of access to those rights by the poor and marginalized becomes a well-accepted norm within civil society. In this sense, he emphasizes that we are not seeing a crisis of rights, but instead we are witnessing how the logic of neoliberalism operates in relation to refugees—normalizing the securitization of the right of asylum and the criminalization of Mexican and Central American refugee seekers. He concluded by asserting, “We became conscious of the right to have rights and of the right to belong to an organized community, only when millions of people had lost their rights and could no longer recuperate them.”

In contrast to Estrada Negrete, José Luis Hernández Cruz, president of the Asociación de Migrantes Retornados con Discapacidades (Association of Returned Migrants with Disabilities), spoke in an emotionless voice about his own frustrating experience seeking asylum. In 2004, at age 18, like many Honduran youth, he had fled

his country seeking to escape poverty and gang violence. To evade Mexican authorities, he traveled on the roof of a cargo train, popularly known as *la bestia* (the beast), from Tapachula, Mexico, to the United States. Exhausted after twenty days of travel, he fell onto the railroad tracks while asleep. The train cut off one of his legs and one of his arms. Since then, Hernández Cruz has dedicated his life to demanding that Mexican authorities provide Central American migrants with a permit to freely travel to the U.S. border. Over 400,000 migrant asylum seekers cross Mexico annually on their way to the United States.⁷

The testimonies of Estrada Negrete, Hernández Cruz, and others expanded participants’ legal and geopolitical understanding of the rights regime that was ostensibly designed to protect refugees. The testimonies also revealed that the right to seek asylum does not start at the U.S.–Mexico border but in the countries through which asylum seekers travel to reach their destination. This dialogue invites us to think creatively about a socially just asylum and human rights system.

The Role of Academics in the Current Crisis

The earnest sharing of knowledge at the Lozano Long Conference inevitably raised a critical question as to the role of academics at universities where we teach, and in society at large, in the crisis-of-rights era. As LLILAS Benson director Charles Hale pointed out, “these dialogues of knowledge invite us to imagine a university that is consistent with the kind of societies we would like to build.” Sociologist Cecilia Menjívar, faculty at the University of Kansas, emphasized, “our scholarly work should enable us to change the conditions in which the populations we study live—in this case, through legal strategies that can help the women and children in



A Mara Salvatrucha gang member hits a piñata during a Children's Day celebration in a poor urban neighborhood in El Salvador, October 2013. The local MS-13 *clica* (loosely formed gang) organized the event for local children.

detention centers." Building on the work of Michael Burawoy, Menjívar called upon academics to consider becoming public intellectuals by writing op-eds or working closely with a visible organization, such as a faith-based community, labor movement, or one that advocates for immigrant rights. She encouraged academics to produce historically specific knowledge of the contexts that generate the fear of persecution forcing people out of their countries, for example gender-based violence and state-complicit participation (i.e., lack of action). This kind of rigorous work enables academics to serve as expert witnesses in asylum cases, as Menjívar does. Menjívar also encouraged academics to raise awareness in their universities by helping students to understand how structural and historical forces have shaped their own lives and place in the world.

Final Notes on Cross-Pollination of Knowledges and Actions

Professors Rebecca Torres and Alfonso Gonzales brought together an impressive group of organizers, activists, scholars, graduate students, and attorneys to debate an important topic. Gonzales's analysis of the so-called "refugee crisis" brought to light the fact that state practices around refugees have created an immigration-asylum regime that actively prevents people from winning their asylum claims, specifically Mexicans and Central Americans. Activist Agustín Estrada Negrete revealed a key contradiction of the universal human rights era, which is the normalization of the idea that human rights are only for certain groups of people. Those who are excluded, in this case asylum seekers, are criminalized. Author Dawn Paley provided broad strokes about the underlying histories of U.S. involvement in the region and elites' roles in the root causes of today's crisis of rights. Velásquez Estrada revealed difficult-to-conceive grassroots peacemaking efforts led

by youth gangs in El Salvador. Interventions by people like Estrada Negrete, Paley, and Velásquez Estrada steered us away from easily agreed-upon conclusions. In this regard, Esther Portillo Gonzales, a co-founder of the Human Rights Alliance for Child Refugees and Families, which supports Central American and Mexican refugees, remarked that the conference was "the first time Central American and Mexican refugees directly affected by U.S. foreign policies and immigration policy and scholars came together to discuss more deeply what could be done around the crisis created by backwards U.S. policies that have directly impacted them." These discussions encourage scholars and activists to collaborate across borders.

Torres and Gonzales plan to produce a follow-up document on the conference for publication. In it, the two scholars aim to grapple with underlying economic, social, and political root causes producing asylum seekers from Mexico and Central America. In addition, two conferences following up on the themes covered at the 2016 Lozano Long Conference are being organized by

professors Ursula Roldán of Rafael Landívar University in Guatemala and Julieta Castellanos from the National Autonomous University in Honduras. LLILAS students and faculty will likely participate. The scholarly and grassroots dialogues and collaborations that emerged from the Derechos en Crisis conference are an indication of the paradoxes of the era of human and asylum rights—a crisis that is not a crisis, people seeking rights that are vanishing before our very eyes, violent people who are also peacemakers. These conversations allowed the envisioning of a hopeful, collaborative path to transform society—the production of knowledge that helps us to better understand pressing social issues, and grassroots actions aimed at defending the universal character of human rights. Participants in the conference felt a sense of optimism as a result of having been part of a cutting-edge conference on the frontier of activism and scholarship at The University of Texas at Austin. ☀

Ruth Elizabeth Velásquez Estrada is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Anthropology at The University of Texas at Austin. She completed her master's degree at UT Austin's Activist Anthropology Program in 2011. Velásquez is the author of Grassroots Peacemaking: The Paradox of Reconciliation in El Salvador (Social Justice, 2015). Her dissertation examines the paradoxes of grassroots peacemaking in El Salvador.

Notes

1. United Nations Refugee Convention and Protocol (December 2010), 14. Retrieved from www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html.
2. Ibid., 3.
3. Ibid., 2.
4. Alfonso Gonzales, "Derechos en Crisis: Mexican and Central American Asylum in the Age of Authoritarian Neoliberalism" (2016), unpublished manuscript.
5. United Nations, *El Salvador Agreements: The Path to Peace* (New York: UNO, 1992), 77, 82.
6. "El Salvador, el país más violento en el continente," *El diario de hoy*, December 30, 2015. Retrieved from www.elsalvador.com/articulo/sucesos/salvador-pais-mas-violento-continente-97394.
7. Miranda León, "Pasan por México cada año 400 mil migrantes," *El universal*, June 8, 2012. Retrieved from <http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/notas/852374.html>.

Archiving Human Rights Documentation

The Promise of the Post-Custodial Approach in Latin America

by THERESA E. POLK

G

GUATEMALA'S INTERNAL armed conflict was brutal by all accounts, and justice for human rights violations has been notoriously difficult to attain in its wake. Yet there have also been some critical milestones, including convictions in 2010 for the forced disappearance

of labor and student leader Edgar Fernando García, in 2011 for the massacre at Dos Erres, and earlier this year for sexual slavery in the Sepur Zarco trial. Archival documents have played an often quiet but critical role, as background research in preparation for trial and evidence in the courtroom, as a source of information for families of victims, and as critical threads in the construction of narratives about the recent past. Yet, despite this critical role, archives, and particularly human rights documentation, remain vulnerable due to lack of infrastructure, as well as political threat.

Traditional acquisitions practices have been based on taking physical custody of archival collections in order to preserve and provide access to them, yet this is a problematic solution for human rights documentation. Record holders are reluctant to relinquish custody of their materials, even temporarily. In fact, removing archival records can be disruptive to immediate programming and operational needs, let alone larger societal processes concerning transition, recuperation of historic memory, and reconciliation. At the same time, given historical relations and imbalances of power between the U.S. and Latin America, and the perceived plundering of cultural patrimony and appropriation of cultural heritage, archival institutions are understandably reluctant to hand their records over to a large U.S. institution.

These considerations are particularly sensitive in the case of human rights documentation. For instance, records such as those contained in the Guatemalan National Police Historical Archive (AHPN) are the product of a massive state surveillance apparatus turned against its own citizens. On the one hand, such records can support struggles for justice and the full realization of rights, but on the other they can also feed the mechanisms of state repression. Our archival partners are justly careful about what information they are willing to share, with what potential audiences, and via what means of distribution.

As an alternative, over the last two years, LLILAS Benson, through a pilot project funded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, has been working to develop a different approach to preserving and providing access to vulnerable human rights documentation in the Latin America region based in post-custodial archival theory. Rather than physically taking custody of partners' collections, project staff from the Benson Latin American Collection provided consultation, digitization equipment, and archival training in preservation, arrangement, description, and digitization of vulnerable archives. Partner institutions prioritized the collections to be included in the project, conducted the digitization work, and provided descriptive information about the materials. This approach allowed our partners to retain both physical and intellectual control over their collections.

We also explicitly adopted an emphasis on human rights, with race, ethnicity, and social exclusion as a lens for our work. This refocused our attention on communities marginalized not only in social, political, and economic processes, but also in the historical



The Colección Conflicto Armado from the Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen contains political posters from the period of the Salvadoran armed conflict (1980–1992).

record. Indigenous and African diasporic communities and organizations are the most underrepresented in cultural heritage institutions at local, national, and international levels, and when they are portrayed, it is even more rarely with their input or consent. A post-custodial model offers these communities and organizations greater control over selection, description, and access to their

documentation, and helps build local capacity to preserve vulnerable collections.

In close consultation with scholars at The University of Texas at Austin, three archives were selected for the initial phase of the project: the Centro de Investigación y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica—CIDCA in Bluefields, Nicaragua; the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica—CIRMA in Antigua, Guatemala; and the Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen—MUPI in San Salvador, El Salvador. Project staff from UT sourced appropriate digitization equipment and conducted training locally onsite, working with our partners to develop workflows that made sense for them.

The collections were chosen based on the convergence of collection priorities articulated by our partners, input from scholars with an expertise in contemporary Central America, and LLILAS Benson's interest in collections documenting human rights. CIDCA digitized an estimated 900 issues (1920–1998) of *La Información*, a local newspaper that covered the economic, social, and political life of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast, offering a unique historical window to the lives and experiences of indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. CIRMA digitized approximately 4,700 news clippings from the Inforpress Centroamericana archive that capture how violence and repression transformed and intensified during the height of Guatemala's internal armed conflict. MUPI digitized its holdings of clandestine publications of the Salvadoran civil war, portraying voices and experiences from the frontlines of the conflict from 1979 to 1992, as well as a closely related, visually compelling collection of solidarity and propaganda political posters.

The collections complement each other, and existing holdings



Inforpress Centroamericana archive at the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (CIRMA).

- LA INFORMACION -

Periódico al servicio de los intereses generales de la Costa Atlántica de Nicaragua

Director y Ádmo.
HUMBERTO M. TABLADA Z.

Jefe de Redacción y Anuncios
Rupert Linton Whitaker

Fundado el 14 de Septiembre de 1917

Impreso en la
Imprenta "LA SALLE."

Año LVI

Bluefields, Nic. G.A. 6 de JULIO de 1974

Número 2680

Pronto será Inaugurada una Biblioteca en Bluefields

En vista de la apremiante necesidad que hay en esta ciudad cabecera de una

buenha Biblioteca, en la cual podrían enriquecer sus conocimientos tanto los jóvenes como los mayores de ambos sexos, un selecto y bien intencionado grupo de ciudadanos costeños se reunió hace varios días con el primordial objeto de realizar tan noble propósito cultural.

Y después de las deliberaciones y planteamiento de ideas pertinentes, formaron una Directiva con las personas siguientes: Coordinador, Ing. don Russell Bowman; Presidente, Br. Raúl Mens; Vice Presidente, Br. Donald Hamilton; Secretario, Br. Alonso Guido; Tesorero, don Roy Gallopp; Vocales: Profesora doña Gioconda Mairena de Chea y Profesor don Francisco López Urbina.

La biblioteca en referencia se denominará "Asociación Bibliotecaria de Bluefields". Será inaugurada tentativamente el mes próximo, según priva en el ánimo de los activos directivos. Se instalará en el magnífico edificio donde antes

fue la Oficina principal de la Cukra Development Co., edificio perteneciente hoy al caballero don Octavio Bustamante Cortés, quien gentilmente la ha cedido de manera gratuita por varios meses, por tratarse, desde luego, de una gestión cultural tan noble y hermosa.

Según sabemos, ya llegaron para la nueva Biblioteca varios lotes de libros y se espera que instituciones del país ubicadas en la capital y las Embajadas acreditadas en Nicaragua y personas de esta localidad, cooperen también para el funcionamiento y mantenimiento de la Biblioteca bluefiense.

El Tesorero señor Gallopp está ya en disposición para recibir la contribución voluntaria de los ciudadanos para dicha obra, y también brindará toda la información respectiva que se desee.

Todo éxito le deseamos a la Asociación Bibliotecaria de Bluefields.

A Bluefields y sus Chicas

Poema del recuerdo y el sentimentalismo

Cuántos años ha mi eterna tierra amada que mis cansados pies no sienten tu calor ni mis ojos contemplan tu lindo esplendor ni beber puedo tus limpidas aguas azucaradas?

¡Cómo recuerdo aquella mañana de marzo de veinte y nueve años atrás angustiosos, que me despedí de ti triste y pesaroso dejando por el búreo aventurero tu regazo!

En mi mente columbro la blonda de tus tules, el reir hsonjero y lírico de nuestras mujeres, la algarabía amistosa de los alegres placeres y el bello celaje de tus cerdeos Campos Azules!

Siempre habrá en mi alma un tierno cántico, un Poema de Amor o una romántica balada

Creando la Música Recordatorio Luchero

La Información, published in Bluefields, Nicaragua, covered local news and society reporting, as well as national and international political events.

and research strengths at LLILAS Benson, opening exciting new avenues for scholarship. Articles in *La Información* offer a Nicaraguan perspective on Guatemala's 1954 coup. The Salvadoran and Guatemalan collections provide a glimpse into how both repression and resistance were internationalized during the height of the Central American conflicts by documenting the movement of key actors between the countries. MUP's posters present an engaging complement to the Benson's previously digitized recordings of Radio Venceremos, clandestine radio broadcasts from the Salvadoran conflict. And we have started to identify connections between Inforpress news clippings and records in the digital AHPN.

An online repository—Latin American Digital Initiatives (LADI, at ladi.lib.utexas.edu)—was created in collaboration with the University of Texas Libraries to provide access to the digitized collections, utilizing the open source Fedora/Islandora repository framework. For UT Libraries, the project served as a test case for in-house development with Islandora, helping to identify requirements for bringing additional UT collections online. The site was jointly launched during a powerful symposium in November 2015, which brought together the technical staff who had created LADI with scholars from the UT community, representatives from each of the participating archives, and potential future project partners. Together, we had a rich conversation not only about the content, but also about the skills and technology necessary to provide online

access to that content, making visible the often hidden back-end work involved.

Overall, the project laid a strong foundation for the institutionalization of post-custodial archival practice at LLILAS Benson, and opened exciting new opportunities for collaboration to preserve vulnerable human rights documentation in the Latin American region. It has also created new opportunities for research and teaching on the UT campus. During the spring semester of 2016, history professor and incoming LLILAS Benson director Dr. Virginia Garrard-Burnett, with the support of project staff, taught a graduate history seminar based on the LADI collections. The course integrated traditional modes of research along with digital scholarship methodologies for critically interacting with, interpreting, and contextualizing the digital collections. As we look to the future of post-custodial archiving at LLILAS Benson, we embrace the hope of building strong, multifaceted relationships with our partner organizations, and with the scholarly community on campus that will nourish this vibrant initiative. ✨

Theresa E. Polk is the post-custodial archivist at LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections at The University of Texas at Austin. She has a BA in Latin American studies, and master's degrees in library science and international peace studies. Prior to becoming an archivist, she worked on international human rights and development policy.

Bridging the Gap: Finding Common Ground Across Cultures in the Amazon

by SEAN MCKAUGHAN

T

THE OFFICE WAS SMALL and unassuming, piled with papers and folders, a few desks, old posters on the walls. Ivar Busatto, the coordinator, received me with a cautious smile. He did not know what to make of this gringo. His organization, OPAN, worked directly with half a dozen indigenous tribes in Brazil and, on their behalf, interacted with the relevant departments of the Brazilian government. It was not often that a representative of international philanthropy arrived on his doorstep. Today Cuiabá is still somewhat off the beaten path in Brazil, but in 1998, it was more so.

I introduced myself and the organization I had recently begun working for, the Avina Foundation, a nonprofit organization created to promote sustainable development in the Americas, supporting collective social, economic, and environmental benefits. Avina was only four years old at that time, and not much known outside of international development circles. Certainly, no one had heard of Avina in Cuiabá, capital of the state of Mato Grosso, and Ivar was no exception.

Ivar and OPAN would eventually become one of Avina's first funded partners in Brazil. OPAN, Operação Amazônia Nativa, or Native Amazon Operation, is a Brazilian civil society organization,

the first to work with indigenous groups, having begun its mission in 1969. One of the many initiatives that fascinated me at the time was a service whereby OPAN would meet with isolated indigenous groups when they first established contact with the rest of Brazilian society.

I found that concept amazing. Imagine a group of people living in the forest over generations, interacting in a limited way with other groups, in peace and at war, but slowly aware that their neighbors are disappearing, or being absorbed, as an unknown civilization spreads around them like an invading sea. Brazil is one of those places where there are still groups of human beings who have chosen not to join the vast, messy assemblage of interacting civilizations that we like to call "the world." Every few years you hear of an uncharted ethnic group that wanders out of the forest or shakes a spear at a low-flying plane. The limitless green maze of the Amazon also attracts outlaws. Often it is illegal mining and



At the conference "Indigenous Rights and National Politics: Analyzing the Case of Yanomami in Venezuela and Brazil," Amazonas State, Venezuela, October 2013.

Photo by Jesús Sosa

drug trafficking that push such groups out of their deep forest hiding places. Brazilians, overwhelmingly urbanized with some of the largest cities in the world, for the most part watch these images on television with the same incredulity as any American or European.

Indigenous groups have protections in Brazil, and many have federally recognized land rights. Organizations like OPAN often work in tandem with the pertinent government departments, meeting with indigenous groups in the early stages of contact to advise and council them regarding the absurdly complex world they have just become a part of, and to elucidate the opportunities and dangers associated with membership. The prospect is simply stupefying. How does one explain the impossible dimensions and contradictions of modern Brazil, much less the networked chaos of global dysfunction that stretches across the planet? Following that initial conversation, I wonder, how many tribes decide, after careful reflection, to simply slip back into the forest and forget the exchange ever happened?

A speaker of a number of Amazonian indigenous languages, Ivar was a veteran of such missions. I was suitably impressed with the existentially profound nature of OPAN's work: smoothing the assimilation process, protecting indigenous culture from the onslaught of modern media, and helping ancient communities navigate the intricacies of a perplexing new reality with its countless snares and pitfalls.

That day in Cuiabá, I was in the middle of a professional assessment of OPAN and its finances with Ivar when an adolescent wandered into the office wearing soccer shorts and plastic sandals. Bowl cut bangs in the front, long black hair in the back, a bright wide smile and a ring of feathers on his head, his energy was contagious. Our conversation paused as Ivar and his associate greeted and joked with the young man, who spoke only halting Portuguese. I never learned his name, but I have often had cause to remember him. He immediately took a liking to me, or at least was curious. I looked different in my slacks, button-down, and tie, not a frequent sight for him. I had a similar impression. Having worked at that time mainly in Latin American capitals like Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Lima,

and Asunción, my contact with indigenous groups had been scant and distant.

The meeting halted as he asked about me, and we began a mediated conversation, him telling me stories and peppering me with questions. At one point, he asked



Indigenous Paiteer-Suruí man and child, Brazil.

about my tie, which I promptly gave him to put on. He handed me his feathers, which I donned with amused pride. That made him (and everyone else) laugh long and hard.

At one point, he told a story of his first ride on an escalator at a local shopping mall, and I was taken aback. Surely he had ridden or at least seen escalators before. No, explained Ivar, his small ethnic group had only made contact two years before, when he was 12. Until that time, he had not only never seen an escalator, but every other modern convenience was utterly unknown to him. Dusty tropical Cuiabá was for him a land of endless marvels.

I have since met people who tell similar stories, but the first time is always enchanting. The young man recounted his first entry into a tall building, his first ride on an elevator, his first impression of cars and traffic. He was now learning Portuguese and beginning to interact with computers, televisions, cell phones, and cinema.

Certainly, the sharp contrast between his first twelve years and the last two years could not have been more jarring, I thought. His smile said otherwise. This kid had one foot in an ancient culture grounded in nature that I could never understand, yet here he was already beginning to make sense of the perplexing reality of his Brazilian compatriots. The symbolic and philosophical implications flooded over me, but he just grinned and described the wonder of looking out the window of a ten-story building for the first time and seeing the sweep of Cuiabá below him. How did he not fall?, he wondered.

Over the next eighteen years with Avina, I would meet a number of indigenous groups, from many different geographies and ethnicities, mostly from the Brazilian Amazon but not all. Memorably, I was at a binational Yanomami meeting in Venezuela in 2013 in the small town of Puerto Ayacucho near the border with Colombia, where leaders of the Yanomami people from both Venezuela and Brazil were discussing shared concerns of illegal mining in their vast territory, with the support of a number of Venezuelan and Brazilian civil society organizations.

It is always a tremendous privilege for me to be a fly on the wall in these exchanges. They tend to be time-consuming, as a steady sequence of thoughtful declarations and purposeful testimonies are offered and patiently discussed and translated. Time begins to move at a different pace. While I listen quietly to the proceedings, I remember fondly that first exchange in the office of OPAN, the effect it had on me as a newly minted development professional, fresh from my master's program in community and regional planning and Latin American studies at UT. It was a moment of humility, a lesson about our human ability to bridge the yawning gaps that separate us, to find joy in what we discover each day, and not take ourselves too seriously. Surely that is ancient forest wisdom we can all apply. I know I try to. 🌞

Sean McKaughan is a LLILAS alumnus with a dual degree in community and regional planning (master's, 1996). He chairs the board of directors of Fundación Avina, a Latin American philanthropic organization dedicated to sustainable development activities with 18 countries in the region. He is a member of the LLILAS Advisory Council.

Focus on Our Faculty

by SUSANNA SHARPE

Sarah Lopez

Migration and home, history and the built environment. The work of Sarah Lopez sits at the confluence of these themes. An assistant professor in the School of Architecture, Lopez studies cultural landscapes, exploring how the history of the built environment also tells the stories of people and their movements across the globe.

She is the author of *The Remittance Landscape: Spaces of Migration in Rural Mexico and Urban USA* (2015), in which she examines how the flow of remittances from Mexican migrants in the United States has influenced the recent building boom in rural Mexico. Part ethnography, part architectural history, the book is informed by Lopez's fieldwork on both sides of the border. In it, she proposes that the construction boom leaves its mark in U.S. cities as well.

The theme of migration is central to Lopez's work, and has been central in her life since childhood. The daughter and granddaughter of immigrants from different hemispheres, Lopez grew up "reflecting on how processes of migration, with the necessary adjustment to radically new and different contexts, shape one's experience of everyday life." As a child in Los Angeles, she observed that people who migrate bring not only languages and cultural practices as they make their new homes; they also tend to recreate the physical environments that are familiar to them.

In her current research, Lopez has begun to look more closely at informal Mexican construction industries on both sides of



the U.S.–Mexico border. "Albañiles [vernacular builders] bring their own ideas of construction when they migrate," she says. Migrants have also started small-scale businesses transporting materials unique to Mexico to U.S. cities. "The transfer of specific construction techniques and the migration of materials such as *cantera* limestone are transforming what are currently understood as 'immigrant' or 'Latino' neighborhoods in Los Angeles, such as Bell, into dynamic places remade by transnational and bi-national networks," says Lopez.

Lopez explains some of the implications of different approaches to building: In the United States, construction is a very compartmentalized field, with different

specialists engaged in different aspects of the building process (the roofers, for example, do not also frame the house or install the floors). The Mexican construction workers who come to the United States bring with them a holistic approach to building—they are accustomed to building the whole structure from start to finish.

Migration stories are also central to Lopez's inquiries about building techniques: "I think that migration is one of the most prescient issues—it shouldn't be a marginal part of how we tell the stories." The excitement happens "in putting together migration histories with histories of the built environment."

Since writing her book, Lopez's primary focus has been on the classroom. She teaches the graduate-level Migratory Urbanism as well as U.S. Cultural Landscapes, a class to which she hopes to add Mexico. She also worked on an important project with graduate students called "Mapping Migrant Detention," focusing on the history of immigrant detention centers in Texas. The project is part of a twenty-state investigation titled *States of Incarceration*, which encompasses a website, a podcast, and a traveling exhibition that will visit the UT School of Architecture from October 5 to 26, 2016. The Texas portion of *States of Incarceration* is called "Spatial Stories of Migration and Detention," and asks the question "How does architecture shape punishment?"

The history of immigrant detention has never been written from this perspective, says Lopez. In fact, immigrant detention

centers tend to be “purposely kept invisible.” The traveling exhibition specifically explores “how the history of building these places can tell us the history of detention.” To Lopez, this knowledge should be a catalyst for action in the face of a humanitarian crisis: “Recording the history of how detention centers develop gives us information to act,” she says.

Lopez has been named a Princeton-Mellon Fellow in Architecture, Urbanism, and the Humanities for the 2016–2017 academic year. This leave from her teaching duties will allow her to further explore remittance landscapes, migration, and the built environment, and to pursue new projects that invite comparative perspectives through collaboration with other scholars.

Visit the online States of Incarceration exhibit at statesofincarceration.org. The UT School of Architecture page can be found by clicking on the map of Texas at statesofincarceration.org/state-by-state.

Paola Canova

In her fascinating work with the indigenous Ayoreo of Paraguay’s Chaco region, anthropologist Paola Canova explores a topic generally regarded as uncomfortable: women and girls trading sex for money, gifts, and status. Her dissertation, “Intimate Encounters: Ayoreo Sex Work in the Mennonite Colonies of Western Paraguay” (2014), looks at the ethical system surrounding Ayoreo women’s and girls’ sexuality, and how aspects of their sexual behavior have changed in the presence non-Ayoreo values and culture.

The Ayoreo were first contacted by non-indigenous people in the 1960s. Traditionally, young Ayoreo women, including adolescent girls of about 15 and up, have had great freedom to enact their sexuality. On hunting trips with Ayoreo men, for example, they exchanged sexual favors for items of value. Now, given the proximity of Mennonite missions, the growth of the non-indigenous population, and the presence of seasonal workers, Ayoreo young women’s sexuality is being expressed in the urban setting of Filadelfia, the center of Paraguay’s western Mennonite colonies.



For the many Ayoreo women and adolescent girls who venture outside of their communities, sex partners are white men, and sexual favors are generally exchanged for money. This is looked upon unfavorably by the dominant Mennonite culture, which, says Canova, views Ayoreo girls and young women “as a moral stain on the city and a major social problem.” For their own part, most Ayoreo today self-identify as Christians. So there is an inherent “convergence and collision of ethical systems” surrounding Ayoreo women’s sexual behavior, according to Canova.

Canova argues that in seeking out white partners, young Ayoreo women “are crafting a space for themselves to construct their identities in a place that discriminates against them. Girls who go to the city are building constructive capital, earning money. They are not ashamed of what they are doing.” Other money-making options for adolescent girls are limited in an environment that has historically discriminated against Ayoreo women. Despite some advances of the educational system in Paraguay introduced through the multicultural reforms of the 1990s, says Canova, dropout and illiteracy rates among Ayoreo are still high.

The money they earn allows them to engage in conspicuous consumption, a

way of seeking inclusion in a society that generally rejects them. Canova points out, however, that while earning money this way represents agency and opportunity, it also entails discrimination and exposure to risk. Aside from pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, the young women are sometimes victims of violence in the alcohol-fueled urban environment, where their partners are often seasonal workers. There is little to no access to birth control methods, so young women carry unwanted pregnancies to term and the babies are adopted and raised by the extended family.

“Ayoreo sex work does not fit conventional academic models, which reduce such activity to proof of economic necessity or women’s stigmatization of women. Rather than being a form of feminine submission or exploitation,” argues Canova, “it is a unique cultural phenomenon constructed in a web of social relations forged through processes of cultural change, religious hegemony, and economic shifts experienced by the Ayoreo over the twentieth century.”

Canova grew up in an agricultural region of Paraguay and was taught basic Guaraní, the country’s second language. She deepened her knowledge of Guaraní in college, conducting research for her BA thesis among a group of Guaraní indigenous people. Later, her pursuit of a human ecology master’s degree morphed into social work with agrarian communities.

She began her work with the Ayoreo in 2000 as an independent consultant, her interest then turning to the effects of missions and economic development on the group. She would spend a total of 49 months with the Ayoreo conducting long-term fieldwork for her dissertation, completed at the University of Arizona.

Canova joined The University of Texas at Austin in fall 2015 as a shared faculty member between LLILAS and the Department of Anthropology. Through her courses, she continues to explore indigenous and gender issues in Latin America. She teaches the graduate seminar Gender in Latin America: Contemporary Issues, and the undergraduate-level Global Indigenous Issues class.

Canova says her own research is currently shifting to think about the role of the

state in El Chaco—its historical absence, and how it is reasserting its presence via economic development. The Chaco has the highest rate of deforestation in the region. In her future work, Canova plans to explore how this environmental dilemma shapes indigenous politics and claims to citizenship.

Marcelo Paixão

Associate Professor Marcelo Paixão works at the nexus of economics, public policy, and sociology, studying the effects of racial and ethnic discrimination in Brazil and other Latin American countries, and pursuing policy solutions to inequalities that have long been part of the social, political, and economic system. He joined The University of Texas at Austin as a joint faculty member at LLILAS and the Department of African and African Diaspora Studies in fall 2015.

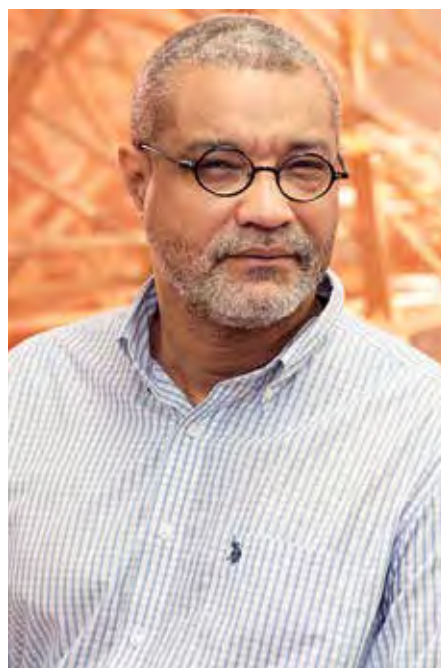
Brazil is often touted as a racial democracy. This has made it more difficult for scholars and activists to emphasize the country's deep inequalities and speak of them in terms of race. As Paixão wrote in the *New York Times*, "In Brazil, we need to overcome an ideology that not only assumes racial privilege is a right, but also implies that everyone who is critical of this reality is committing a crime against the national identity" (Opinion Pages: Room for Debate, March 29, 2012).

Prior to his arrival in Austin, Paixão was an associate professor at the Institute of Economics of the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), where he also served as coordinator for LAESER, the Laboratory for the Economic, Historic, Social and Statistical Analysis of Race Relations. He argues that the lens of race and ethnicity is essential in explaining inequalities, and differentiates LAESER's approach from that of earlier organizations, such as the United Nations' 1950s-era Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), which has traditionally viewed Latin America through a white, middle-class male lens.

Followers of the ECLAC model sought to understand Latin American underdevelopment, says Paixão, "but they forgot to examine racial and ethnic inequality in explaining

inequalities in general." In his 2013 book *The Legend of Enchanted Modernity: Toward a Critique of Brazilian Thought on Race Relations and the Project of the Nation-State*,* Paixão reflects on the development model as "a narrative that hides race," arguing that "in Brazil, modernization itself was achieved through a specific process based on racial and ethnic inequality."

In a conversation about shifting approaches to understanding Latin America and Brazil in particular, Paixão describes the evolution of historical narratives that have come to hide race. The positivism of the early 1900s contributed to notions of white superiority. This was followed by the narrative of *mestizaje*, which emphasized Latin



America's "mixed" roots. Yet Paixão says the embrace of mestizo identity erased the concept of racial/ethnic discrimination, functioning as an "escape valve"—a catchall term for racial and ethnic self-identity for people who aren't white.

Bringing race back into the conversation in a productive way is not always easy: Paixão notes that reliable data on inequality can be difficult to collect in Brazil because of people's resistance to self-identifying as minorities. There have been public campaigns to encourage Afro-descendant Brazilians to self-report as black on the census. For example, the 1991 census campaign featured the slogan "Não deixe sua cor

passar em branco"—"Don't leave your color blank [white]."

Paixão believes that people should have the right to self-identify as they see fit. If the state decides who belongs in which category, he says, it is a way of exerting demographic control. His hope is that Brazilians will reflect on race and be conscious of its implications in society. Through the conduct of his research and the policy recommendations it engenders, he says, "we are trying to empower the population to guarantee them visibility."

There is resistance to Paixão's theories in mainstream economics, which emphasizes market forces, not race and ethnicity. Nonetheless, he has seen the translation of some of his work into actual policy. He has seen the stamp of LAESER research on Brazilian affirmative action policies and labor market reports.

While Paixão's work has been focused on Brazil, he has been learning about and contacting other Afro-Latino communities in Latin America over the last decade, saying this was an important change in his work. "When I visit another country or population, I go to teach, but also to learn." As for his new home at UT Austin, "I will be receiving my daily lesson from students and colleagues here," he affirms.

Paixão teaches the undergraduate course Racism and Inequality in Latin America, as well as the graduate seminar Race and Ethnicity in Latin America. He has also brought LAESER to Austin. In its University of Texas version, the laboratory will broaden its scope to include a more comprehensive agenda: student researchers will collect data on indigenous populations in Latin America, as well as information on all Afro-descendant populations in the region. Paixão hopes it will become a benchmark for data on Latin America: "I wish to create a center where students can conduct studies to reflect, produce empowerment, and generate strategies for public policy. I will encourage international students to use this information to lobby or produce policy proposals for their own countries." 🌟

Note

* *A lenda da modernidade encantada: por uma crítica ao pensamento social brasileiro sobre relações raciais e projeto de Estado-Nação* (Curitiba-PR: Ed. CRV, 2013).