

# PORTAL





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ISSUE NO. 17

**PORTAL**

2021-2022

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



# Contents

TO THE READER.....	3
EMBODIED GEOGRAPHIES: FEMINIST BODY-MAPPING WITH AMAZONIAN INDIGENOUS GIRLS, <i>CUERPO-TERRITORIO</i> , AND THE OUTLINING OF A NEW ACADEMIC GRAMMAR BY NOHELY GUZMÁN NARVÁEZ .....	4
STREET PROTESTS AND LAND USE: THEORIZING SPATIAL INEQUALITY IN BRAZIL BY FERNANDO LUIZ LARA .....	8
ESTAMPA: A WALK WITH MAURICIO TENORIO BY RODRIGO SALIDO MOULINIÉ.....	12
BLACK WOMEN WHO MOVE MOUNTAINS: RESPONDING TO CRISIS IN RIO DE JANEIRO'S COMPLEXO DO ALEMÃO BY ANA CAROLINA ASSUMPÇÃO .....	16
EXHIBITION HIGHLIGHT — MARTÍN FIERRO: FROM MARGINAL OUTLAW TO NATIONAL SYMBOL .....	20
A TOWN AMID THE WATERS: THE IMPACT OF A HYDROELECTRIC DAM IN EASTERN ANTIOQUIA, COLOMBIA BY CINDIA ARANGO LÓPEZ.....	24
SILKS AND SWORDS: SUMPTUARY LAWS AND GENDER IN COLONIAL MEXICO BY HALEY SCHROER.....	29
A CENTURY OF PERSPECTIVE: A CONVERSATION WITH PROFESSOR EMERITUS KARL M. SCHMITT BY ADELA PINEDA FRANCO .....	32
NORA C. ENGLAND, VISIONARY LINGUIST AND MENTOR BY SUSANNA SHARPE .....	34
FACULTY SPOTLIGHT — UT MAYA CLUSTER .....	40

LLILAS Benson Latin American Studies and Collections is a partnership of the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies (LLILAS) and the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection. Our mission is to deepen mutual understanding across the Americas through research, teaching, collections, outreach, and scholarly exchange. Find out more at [lilasbenson.utexas.edu](http://lilasbenson.utexas.edu).

Read *Portal* online at [lilasbensonmagazine.org](http://lilasbensonmagazine.org).





## TO THE READER

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to *Portal*, a window to Latin American Studies and Collections at UT Austin. We want to provide our readers with a forum for inspirational discussions on the interfaces of knowledge production and Latin America's social reality. At the heart of *Portal* lies our desire to tell Latin America's untold stories, reigniting the past on behalf of the present. *Portal* brings faculty, archivists, and students together to conceive multiple spatio-temporal constellations in the study of Latin America. With this issue, we offer several routes to navigate these constellations. Join Rodrigo Salido Moulinié and his mentor Mauricio Tenorio in their journey across a geography of texts that constitutes Mexico City's deep history; read Karl Schmitt's recollections of his life as a Latin Americanist for the past eight decades; learn about the history and significance of street protest in Brazil with Fernando Lara, as he ponders an upcoming contested presidential election. Think of grassroots forms of collective action as you engage with Ana Carolina Assumpção's inquiry into the relentless efforts of Afro-Brazilian women in Rio de Janeiro to defy the pernicious effects of Covid and other crises.

Envisioning ways in which time and space interact to provide for different human experiences is the doorway to reading Nohely Guzmán Narváez's defense of Amazonian Indigenous women's embodied conceptions of geography, as well as Cindia Arango López's call for environmental justice in Colombia through a study of hydroelectric projects.

*Portal* invites you to think of history "as a time filled by the presence of the now," in the words of philosopher Waler Benjamin. It is in this sense that we invite you to read Haley Schroer's revisionist study of sumptuary laws in colonial Mexico. Behind these laws, Schroer discovers a narrative of exclusion related to gendered and racialized identities.

In early 2022, LLILAS Benson lost a friend, colleague, and beloved member of the UT Latin Americanist community. Professor of Linguistics Nora England was a pioneer in the field of descriptive and documentary linguistics and collaborated closely

with LLILAS Benson as the director of the Center for Indigenous Languages of Latin America. Her extraordinary life is the topic of an article by *Portal* editor Susanna Sharpe.

Because the images in this magazine are often as important as the words, we invite you to pause and enjoy exhibition highlights related to Argentina's foremost foundational poem, *El gaucho Martín Fierro* by José Hernández. The Benson Latin American Collection holds over 380 copies of the book and its sequel, including numerous versions in translation. Like all foundational fictions, *Martín Fierro* has triggered an infinite number of interpretations, from lettered ruminations to popular narratives; it has been appropriated for political aims by all sorts of ideologies. Indeed, the story of a law-abiding gaucho wronged by state authorities has been taken as a powerful allegory of Argentina's national origins.

Finally, we are pleased to include brief interviews with two new faculty members, Assistant Professors Mallory Matsumoto (Religious Studies) and Amy E. Thompson (Anthropology), who joined the campus community in fall 2021 as part of the Maya cluster of hires. All four members of the Maya cluster bring distinguished interdisciplinary approaches to their work. It is exciting to think of the many ways in which their students and colleagues will benefit from their presence.

Just as we at LLILAS Benson value the diversity of disciplines, collections, people, and ideas we encounter in our work, we are aware that each reader represents a unique perspective. It is our hope that each of you finds something inspiring, moving, engaging in the pages that follow. Please let us know if you do!

Nuestros afectuosos saludos,

Adela Pineda Franco

Director, Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies

Melissa Guy

Director, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection





# Embodied Geographies

## Feminist Body-Mapping with Amazonian Indigenous Girls, *Cuerpo-Territorio*, and the Outlining of a New Academic Grammar

by NOHELY GUZMÁN NARVÁEZ

**I**n March 2019, I had one of the most nurturing, delicate, and vulnerable experiences of my professional career. After years of having worked with Indigenous women from the Bolivian Amazon in whose territories Chinese capital has settled, I learned that the body knows, feels, and speaks in ways that cannot always be named. That month, the women and girls of Santa Ana de Museruna in Beni, Bolivia, where the Chinese CCCC Second Highway Engineering Co., Ltd., is building the San Ignacio de Moxos–San Borja highway, showed me that many paths in the heart of the Amazon are made of feelings. Feeling, and walking their territories with them, was the only way for me to comprehend what the deforestation

charts or the figures on Bolivian foreign debt with China hid about life in the Amazon.

This piece is a reflection on the politics of care in-and-as research that were part of my master's thesis in Latin American Studies at The University of Texas at Austin. In what follows, I examine the methodological proposal I have developed in collaboration with Santa Ana's Indigenous women and girls to make sense of the geographies traced by their bodies and emotions in their encounter with transnational capitalism. Body-mapping is based on the premise that the body is the main geographical site where our experiences of, with, and in the world converge. As such, I argue that by mapping the body and how

Artwork by Angie Vanessita





policy makers, few have been the cases in which the local communities and their experiences have been at the center of these studies. In the time I spent between Rurrenabaque and Puerto Varador in Beni since late 2016, however, I was able to observe those dynamics at play and on different scales. In the midst of Indigenous territories where Chinese flags and signs written in Mandarin were raised, I realized that the majority of China’s financed projects take root in Indigenous territories, national parks, and protected areas (Ray, Gallagher, and Sanborn 2019). It was in this puzzling context that I developed the methodological proposal of the body-mapping that I discuss here.

### The Body as Territory

In the last few years, I have spent time with Indigenous communities, and particularly Indigenous women and girls, who have shown me that methods such as the semi-structured interviews I was conducting were not enough to fully comprehend their experiences. Long before the deployment of the body-mapping idea, “I had spent time observing, walking, listening, and feeling the territory about which I had heard a lot and very little at once” (Guzmán 2021: 56). “Wildlife trafficking, pollution, complaints of violations of labor rights, and silent cases of sexual violence against indigenous women had led me there. But what was really happening?” (56).

“*Se le nota en los ojos*” (“It shows in her eyes”) were words I often heard when talking about women’s experiences with the recently settled Chinese company in their territories (Guzmán 2021: 56). “*De solo verlos se me eriza la piel*” (Just seeing [the workers] gives me goosebumps), among other comments of a similar nature, pointed to

it feels (in) certain places, we gain a privileged spatial perspective. Body-mapping, in this sense, consists of locating in the body the places *where* we feel specific places, and *how* we feel them.

Examining the body-mapping methodology itself, however, calls for situating my research with Santa Ana’s Indigenous women and girls along this highway in the context that led me to this project. The San Ignacio–San Borja highway crosses Indigenous territories of Moxeño, Moxeño-trinitario, Yurakares, Tsimanes, and Movimas peoples (Díez 2011; Guzmán 2021). This area, in which the Territorio Indígena Multiétnico I (Multiethnic Indigenous Territory I, TIM I for its initials in Spanish), the Territorio Indígena Moxeño Ignaciano (Moxeño Ignaciano Indigenous Territory, TIMI for its initials in Spanish), and the Territorio Indígena Chimán (Chimán Indigenous Territory, TICH for its initials in Spanish) collide, is one of the regions most densely populated by Indigenous communities in Bolivia (Figure 1). But what do geopolitical processes and transnational capital mean for these communities?

The San Ignacio–San Borja highway, as one of the only routes that connects Western and Eastern Bolivia in that area, has operated as a strategic window for me to observe the local, national, and transnational dynamics of capital currently led by China in the region. Although the economic and geopolitical aspect of this process has piqued the interest of an increasing number of academics and

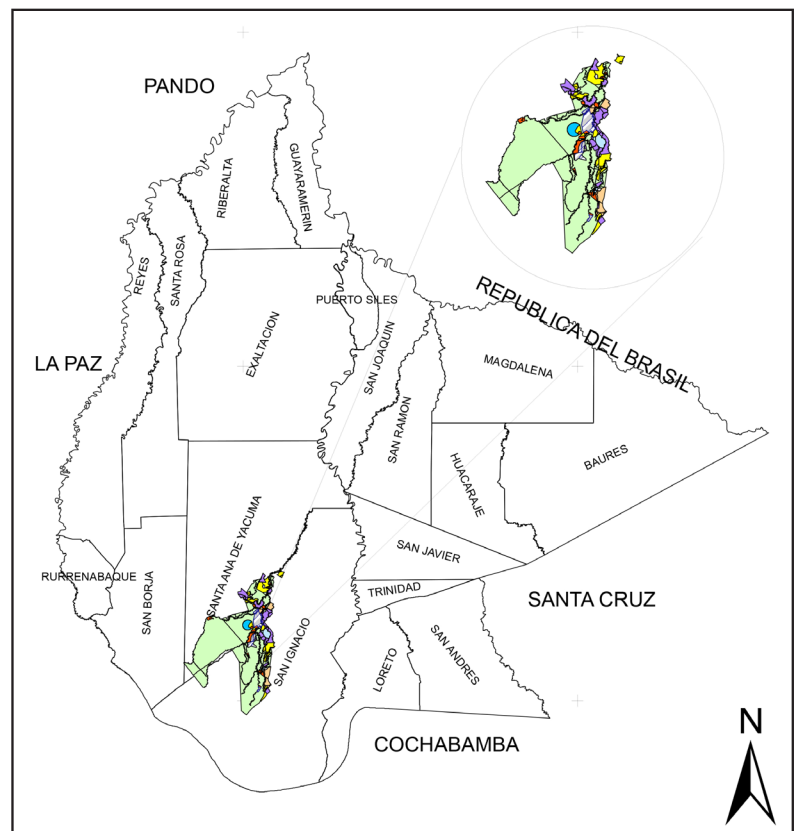


Figure 1. Location of the Territorio Indígena Multiétnico I (TIM-I) in Beni, Bolivia. Instituto Nacional de Reforma Agraria.

a joint, amalgamated, and indivisible experience of what in the eyes of everyone else was external, material, and disembodied *stuff*. In other words, it was not always possible to find words to describe the feelings that existed on a corporal level.

Trying to make sense of these experiences, I found Maya-Xinka author Lorena Cabnal’s (2010) theorization of *cuero-territorio* (body-territory). Along with Cabnal, Aymara feminist Adriana Guzmán (2014) and Seneca theorist Mishuana Goeman (2013) have taught me that capitalist processes are never race-, gender-, or ethnicity-neutral (Guzmán 2021: 46). Stemming from this, and adding age to the conversations on this body of knowledge, I revisit Cabnal’s proposal of *cuero-territorio* as a single term expressing unity. Understanding the body as a territory, and the territory as a body, Cabnal asserts: “The historical and oppressive violence exists for both my first territory-body, as well as for my historical territory, the land” (23). Through this framework, and in conversation with Goeman’s insistence on Indigenous women’s “spatial embodiment of knowledge” (16) I understood that it was within the body that the physicality of the land, the marks of the colonial, capitalist, patriarchal practice of empires, and the body’s most sensitive fibers were tied (Guzmán 2021: 6). As such, I proposed mapping to Santa Ana’s Indigenous women and girls. But how does one map feelings?

None of the mapping techniques I had heard of up to that point were useful to answer the questions I could not even articulate. Traditional geographical and mapping methods have historically made many assumptions about the subjects, spaces, places, scales, and meanings in which territories are organized. Reflecting on the importance of not only flipping the script but rather engaging with the act of listening seriously, I started reimagining the scales, terms, meanings, and logics of what gave rise to a feminist, community-centered, and liberating academic grammar. In this context, I asked: *Which methodological approach, sensitive to the emotional and independent of words, would allow the expression of the feelings, emotions, and place-making experiences that were structuring the body and territory of Santa Ana’s women and girls as they undergo capitalist-driven transformations?* (Guzmán 2021). This question, along with my observations and conversations in the field, evoked anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes’s words to guide me through little-explored terrain: “Seeing, listening, touching, recording, can be, if done with care and sensitivity, acts of fraternity and sisterhood, acts of solidarity. Above all, they are the work of recognition. Not to look, not to touch, not to record, can be the hostile act, the act of indifference and of turning away” (2005: 43).

With these words in mind, and after having discussed the prompts and protocols guiding the workshop with some of the Indigenous women leaders, the community’s women and girls began to draw their body maps. In them, we can observe, for example, the sites where they feel joy both bodily and with regards to the “external” physical places that evoke those emotions, sensations, and feelings. At home with their families, the girls affirm they feel happy and safe. Similar emotions are present with regards to the school, the field, and the church. On their maps, we can also see the sites of, and in, pain. Nature is particularly highlighted. The pollution that is caused mostly by the company, the dead animals along the highway, the band-aids on the hurt rivers and trees—these are some of the places marked as suffering and painful. Furthermore, the maps display the places where the girls feel fear: in the stomach when walking alone

around the highway, or in the chest when the company’s trucks and cars drive by with people they do not know.

Maps like the one in Figure 2 were drawn by a group of Indigenous girls who participated in a four-hour body-mapping workshop I organized in March 2019. Both during the process of crafting the questionnaire and drawing the maps, it was inevitable to think of Katherine McKittrick (2006: 46) and her incisive proposal that merges the material geographies in “the scale of the body” as a “location of politization.” It is precisely with that politization in mind that I think of research as a space of contention and of negotiation. In the body-mapping of *cuero-territorio*, I was able to see this in motion.

The image in Figure 3, from a Bolivian newspaper, is the result of one of those negotiations, as toward the end of the body-mapping workshop, one of the girls who participated raised her hand to ask me where the maps were going to be displayed. Surprised, I answered that no one but us was going to see the maps. She responded that this was sad and disappointing. Pointing at her map, she said, “but our maps are so pretty and we’ve worked so hard on them” (Guzmán 2021: 77). After a few months, along with

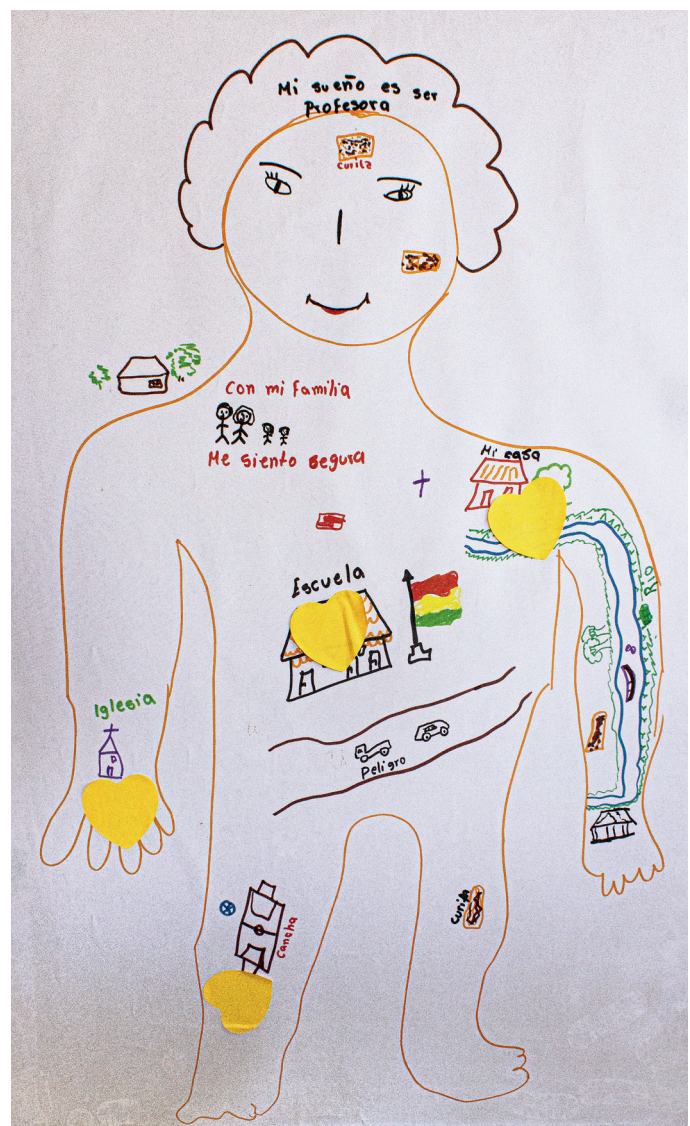


Figure 2. Body-map C. Santa Ana de Museruna, Beni, Bolivia. Published in Guzmán (2021).



Jasy Renyhè, the feminist organization of which I am a co-founder, I was able to stage and exhibit the girls' maps for a few weeks in an art gallery in La Paz, Bolivia. Although the girls could not attend the exhibition opening themselves due to travel constraints at their young ages, my colleagues Paola S., Adriana R., Laura A., and I made sure to address the comments that they had pointed out and highlighted for the presentation.

### Final Thoughts: Politics of Care in-and-as Research

As I hope to have shared in this brief piece, I have learned that body-mapping, when done with-and-as care, can allow us to reinvent an academic grammar that accounts for the body as “our most immediate and intimate geography” (Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, and Edmunds 1994: 90). This experience, echoing David Hodge (1995: 426), confirms that “methods are powerful extensions of epistemological and ontological positions.” My experience with body-mapping, furthermore, displays the ways in which the material “extends into the body as a site of material reproduction” of what is traditionally seen as exclusively external (Nightingale 2011: 154–155). Methodologies centered on the body, and similar logics of body-maps, have also been extensively examined by Latin American grassroots organizations such as the Colectivo Miradas Críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo, Colectivo Geobrujas, and Colectivo de Geografía Crítica de Ecuador. Undoubtedly, the work I present here has been inspired by and derives from the Latin American tradition of popular education of which these organizations are an example. As such, I like to think of them as mentors and *cómplices* of my thought and praxis. Finally, with the hope that this piece raises curiosities that impact our thought and praxis in and beyond academia, I want to bring to the fore Anna Tsing’s words (2011: 5) to think of research and knowledge production more broadly:

A wheel turns because of its encounter with the surface of the road; spinning in the air it goes nowhere. Rubbing two sticks together produces heat and light; one stick alone is just a stick. In both cases, it is friction that produces movement, action, effect. 🌟

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*Angie Vanessita is a visual artist and activist based in Quito, Ecuador. View her work at [www.angievanessita.com](http://www.angievanessita.com) and follow her on social media at @angie.vanessita.*

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Figure 3. Feature in *La Razón* newspaper. “Niñas de la Amazonía exponen ‘Intimidaciones.’” June 17, 2019, A15. La Paz, Bolivia.

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Photo by Valtter Campanato, Agência Brasil



# Street Protests and Land Use

## Theorizing Spatial Inequality in Brazil

by FERNANDO LUIZ LARA

In June of 2013, over forty UT Austin faculty members and a similar number of Brazilian officials met in the halls of Congress in Brasília, celebrating the signing of agreements and research partnerships. The future looked so bright then, and I remember stressing the importance of that moment that I shared with colleagues from six different UT colleges, joined by then-President Bill Powers, representatives of Brazil's Senate, Supreme Court, and Ministry of Education, all of us coming together to fund research collaborations. One week later, Brazilian cities exploded in protest, and we are still trying to understand June 2013 and its aftermaths: the legislative coup against Dilma Rousseff in 2016 and the election of Jair Bolsonaro in 2018. The photograph that opens this short essay shows protesters on the roof of the Brazilian Congress, exactly above the room where we had met a week before.

It has only been nine years since that visit, but it feels like half a century has passed. In October 2022, the Brazilian people will have a chance to vote and maybe start on the long path toward healing the damage inflicted on Brazil during the last six years. This time, there will be no Sergio Moro breaking all kinds of laws and procedures to jail frontrunner candidate Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva, only to be rewarded with the Ministry of Justice (Attorney General) in the Bolsonaro government for helping to put it in office. This time, too, the unthinkable Jair Bolsonaro will have government machinery to support his reelection, and a continued strategy of denial and deflection that has proven successful for those long three-and-a-half years. This time, there will be protests; the streets will be full again. This time, the chances of violence are significant, for the wounds of 2013, 2016, and 2018 are still bleeding and Brazil is as polarized as the United States, if not more so.

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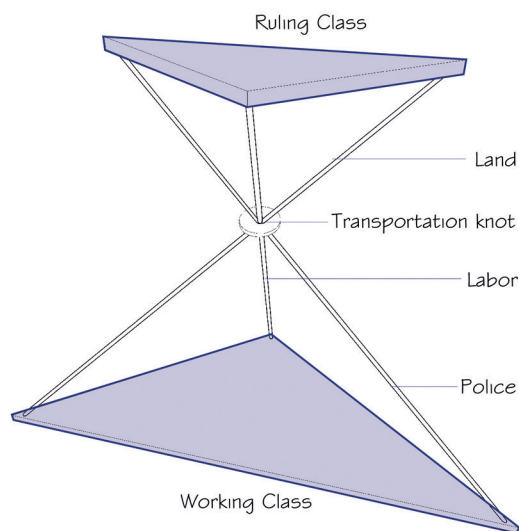
Opposite: Protest at the Brazilian National Congress, Brasília, June 17, 2013.

### A Fruitful Collaboration Focused on Urban Policy in Brazil

If the past decade feels like half a century, it is also because we have been busy working. The research agreement signed in 2013 between UT and the São Paulo state research foundation, FAPESP, brought architecture and urbanism professor Ana Paula Koury to the Forty Acres in 2015 and 2016. The project on which we collaborated looked into conceptually reconciling the scholarly literatures on state planning and community participation, using the periphery of São Paulo as a case study. In October 2015, students from the UT Austin School of Architecture spent a week in São Paulo; later that year, students from São Judas University came to UT. Two seminars were organized the following year, one here and one in São Paulo. The discussions we had in those two intense years of research collaboration became a book proposal. Written between 2016 and 2019, *Street Matters: A Critical History of Urban Policy in Brazil* was published in May 2022 by the University of Pittsburgh Press.

The book explores the idea that we can interpret Brazilian inequality through the lens of the relationship between street protests and urban policy, making explicit the conflict between popular democracy and economic interests in the production of the space on the periphery of Western capitalism. Having space as the main variable of analysis allows us to discuss the production of the Brazilian city as both an instrument and the consequence of an unequal society. The tension of street protests is the foundation on which conflicts of Brazilian democracy have been based. By analyzing the historical changes brought about at such moments, we can derive important lessons for urban policy in Brazil. The narrative seeks to uncover different historical moments and evaluate the political agenda of the Brazilian state versus its popular movements, demonstrating that the struggles for the construction of a more just society are inscribed in the spatial arrangements of the main Brazilian cities, for better and for worse.

To try to understand the relationship between space, social movements, and the extreme inequality of Brazilian society, Koury and I introduce a conceptual diagram to theorize those relationships. Following Manuel Castells's suggestion that "we need a theoretical perspective flexible enough to account for the production and performance of urban functions and forms in a variety of contexts" (1983: 336), we propose a theoretical tripod formed by the columns (rods) of work, land, and security, and joined by the transportation knot. The rods form two pyramids—one at the base, symbolizing the working classes holding up the system, and one at the top, inverted, representing the elites.



The theoretical tripod diagram used to explain spatial inequalities in Brazil. From Lara and Koury (2022).

Another inspiration for our theoretical tripod comes from Arturo Escobar. His *Encountering Development* (1995) is the key to our diagram. Escobar was the first to demonstrate that there is no modernization without colonization. The very process of modernizing implies the colonial practice of imposing values and beliefs of ruling elites onto large swaths of the population.

Our tripod diagram encompasses the modernization/colonization mirror in its very structure. Every action taken by the ruling elites from the top down in the name of modernization has an effect on the working classes below. The opposite is also true: social movements' political pressure and protests (their more radical form) push for changes in societal structure that impact the stability of those at the top of the social strata.

The tripod structure guarantees comfort for those who live at the top (good jobs, land tenure, and a protective police force) while submitting the majority at the bottom to precariousness at work, informality in housing, and police repression. Regressive policies enacted by the ruling elite have the effect of augmenting the distance between those above and those below. Progressive change pushed by social movements has the effect of shortening the distance between the classes, making life less privileged for the ones

above. Protests, both by the working class and by the affluent classes, take place when the rods expand (more inequality) or contract (less inequality). If the rods grow, it means that life becomes more unbearable for those below. If the rods shorten, this threatens the privileges of those above.

Starting from this diagram, and stitching together 120 years of intense correlation between urban policies and social movements, *Street Matters* seeks to contribute to the reassessment of the meaning of popular participation in the Brazilian historical process, considering the strategic defense of the democratic state and its redistributive role through urban public policies. For instance, we discuss the fact that Emperor Pedro II (r. April 1831–November 1889) signed a budgetary supplement to finance a land survey in October of 1889 and suffered a military soft-coup a few weeks later. Was that a coincidence, or an early reminder that land conflicts are at the root of Brazilian problems? Less than two decades later, in 1906, the city of Rio de Janeiro exploded in a revolt that was blamed on mandatory vaccination (interesting how little we have evolved in 116 years), but how much of that instability was created by the demolition—without compensation—of thousands of housing units in the central areas of Rio since 1903?

We also discuss at length how Getúlio Vargas (president 1930–45, 1951–54) understood the relationship between housing and labor policy, anchoring his sectorial institutes of retirement and pension on much-needed real-estate investment. That anchor generated thousands of housing units made available to an educated middle class that had unionized jobs, but did almost nothing for the majority of uneducated Brazilians who labored in informal arrangements. After the Vargas strategy proved insufficient in the 1950s, Jânio Quadros (president January–August 1961) was the first politician to understand the demands of residents of substandard housing at the periphery, moving from the São Paulo city council to the presidency in fifteen years. In our tripod diagram, Vargas pushed part of the middle class to the upper pyramid of privilege, keeping all rural workers and most of the urban periphery on the bottom. Quadros, for his part, promised benefits for the urban periphery but could not deliver, resigning after he realized that the tripod structure of inequality (which he called "occult forces") was stronger than his presidential powers.

More recently, the military government investment in metropolitan planning collapsed once the slow process of redemocratization shifted power back to municipal governments. With mayors competing for federal money and Congress happy to intermedicate the delivery, the idea of central regional planning was never able to bypass the funding mechanism. The Estatuto das Cidades, signed into law thirteen years after the 1988 Constitution, cemented this decentralization in the hopes that cities would have autonomy to take care of their own spaces. The reality is that the budget to build infrastructure and to implement housing policy had always been concentrated in the hands of the federal government, with members of Congress as intermediaries. This state of affairs, as inefficient and personalized as it had been, yielded results for the working class. Most areas on the peripheries of Brazilian cities improved their infrastructure in recent decades, with electricity and clean water leading the way and sewage connections lagging behind. The dissemination of participatory processes in the 1990s also



strengthened the political clout of the working class, with very good results.

Interestingly enough, none of those improvements changed, or even threatened, the inequality structure theorized in our tripod. Water and electricity, along with more educational opportunities and a public health system (Sistema Único de Saúde, SUS), improved people's lives but kept constant the distance between the rich and the poor. The election of Lula da Silva in 2003 looked like more of the same at first, but it did enact change in the theoretical tripod by raising the minimum wage above inflation and promoting economic expansion (via consumption), shortening the labor rod as a result. It bears remembering that police repression did not change during the Lula years, nor was there enough of an effort to give land rights to the inhabitants of the periphery. Much to the contrary, the poor improved their lives during the Lula years by consuming more, a move that made the rich even richer.

When the growth by internal consumption model started to sputter during the first term of Dilma Rousseff (2011–14), both the elites and the working class took to the streets to protest in June of 2013. The poor saw their lives worsened by longer commutes (the transportation knot) and decaying infrastructure, and they shouted that they wanted schools and hospitals raised to the standards of the Padrão FIFA, the luxurious specifications imposed by the international football association for the stadiums and hotels built for the 2014 World Cup.

The elites were also protesting that they could not get by as comfortably as before. After Rousseff was reelected in 2014, a more conservative Congress led by runner-up candidate Aécio Neves and House Speaker Eduardo Cunha created all kinds of legislative problems to derail Rousseff's response to the economic crisis. At that point, in 2015, the streets filled with protesters again, but now there was nobody clamoring for better hospitals and better schools. Alongside the crowds protesting corruption, cleverly presented by the mainstream media as a problem solely on the left, there were people calling for the return of the military dictatorship in order to "get their country back."

### Implications for the Future

Looking at 2022 through the lenses of our theoretical tripod, we clearly see the rods working to maintain the distance between the rich and the poor. The police are happy to take selfies with wealthy protestors on one side of the street and brutalize low-income youth on the opposite sidewalk. The labor gains of the Lula years were



Protest against the government of Dilma Rousseff (Workers' Party, PT) on Avenida Paulista, São Paulo, March 15, 2015.

dismantled fast, and young people from the periphery who were the first in their families to go to college found only menial jobs.

And what about the land rod, one might ask. This has been the slowest to change since João III of Portugal (r. 1521–57) created the Hereditary Captaincies in 1534. In summary, the improvements of the Lula years (mostly labor gains) evaporated quickly, and the problems, such as police repression and land concentration, remained unchanged. Worse yet, the long and slow political process required to rebuild Brazilian institutions dilapidated by the 2016 coup and the Bolsonaro years seems to be poisoned beyond repair. Isolated and lagging in the polls, Bolsonaro is radicalizing his discourse and normalizing talk of another coup if the election does not go his way. Lula, on the other hand, is trying to create a broad alliance, inviting right-of-center politician Geraldo Alckmin to run as vice president on his ticket, all but guaranteeing that he will not tackle inequality and push for labor gains as he did twenty years ago.

The Brazilian streets will once again hold the keys to the future, either full of protesters or emptied by the military/police apparatus. My guess is that we will see both, and it will not be pretty. ☀

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*Fernando Luiz Lara is R.G. Roessner Centennial Professor of Architecture at The University of Texas at Austin. Most recently, he is author, with Ana Paula Koury, of Street Matters: A Critical History of Urban Policy in Brazil (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2022).*

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# Estampa

## *A Walk with Mauricio Tenorio*

by RODRIGO SALIDO MOULINIÉ



“Entrevista con Mauricio Tenorio”

The Benson at 100 podcast

[podcasts.la.utexas.edu/biblioteca-benson-primeros-100-anos/](https://podcasts.la.utexas.edu/biblioteca-benson-primeros-100-anos/)

Historian Mauricio Tenorio Trillo was the opening keynote speaker at the 2022 Lozano Long Conference, “Archiving Objects of Knowledge with Latin American Perspectives,” an interdisciplinary online conference organized by Associate Professor Lina Del Castillo and hosted by LILAS Benson in honor of the centennial of the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection. This reflection on Tenorio’s work and thought was originally published in *Not Even Past*, a digital magazine of the Department of History at The University of Texas at Austin.

**M**auricio Tenorio thinks with his feet. As his soles touch the asphalt, he feels a piece of one of his dearest obsessions: the city. Not Mexico City specifically, although it might be the one he feels closest to, but the idea of the city. Cities have so much to say. A street in Barcelona, an old building in Chicago, an awkward monument in Washington, DC, a park in Berlin: they all have stories and a history. And Tenorio, a professor of history at the University of Chicago and *profesor asociado* at the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, Mexico City, tells these stories through his work.

I like to repeat one about a hidden monument in Mexico City. Inside the column of the Independence monument, the capital’s famous postcard-ready landmark with angel’s wings, the white statue of an obscure figure guards the ashes of Mexico’s founding fathers—a monument of a seventeenth-century Irishman. Tenorio tells the story of Guillermo de Lampart, the “Irish Zorro” who



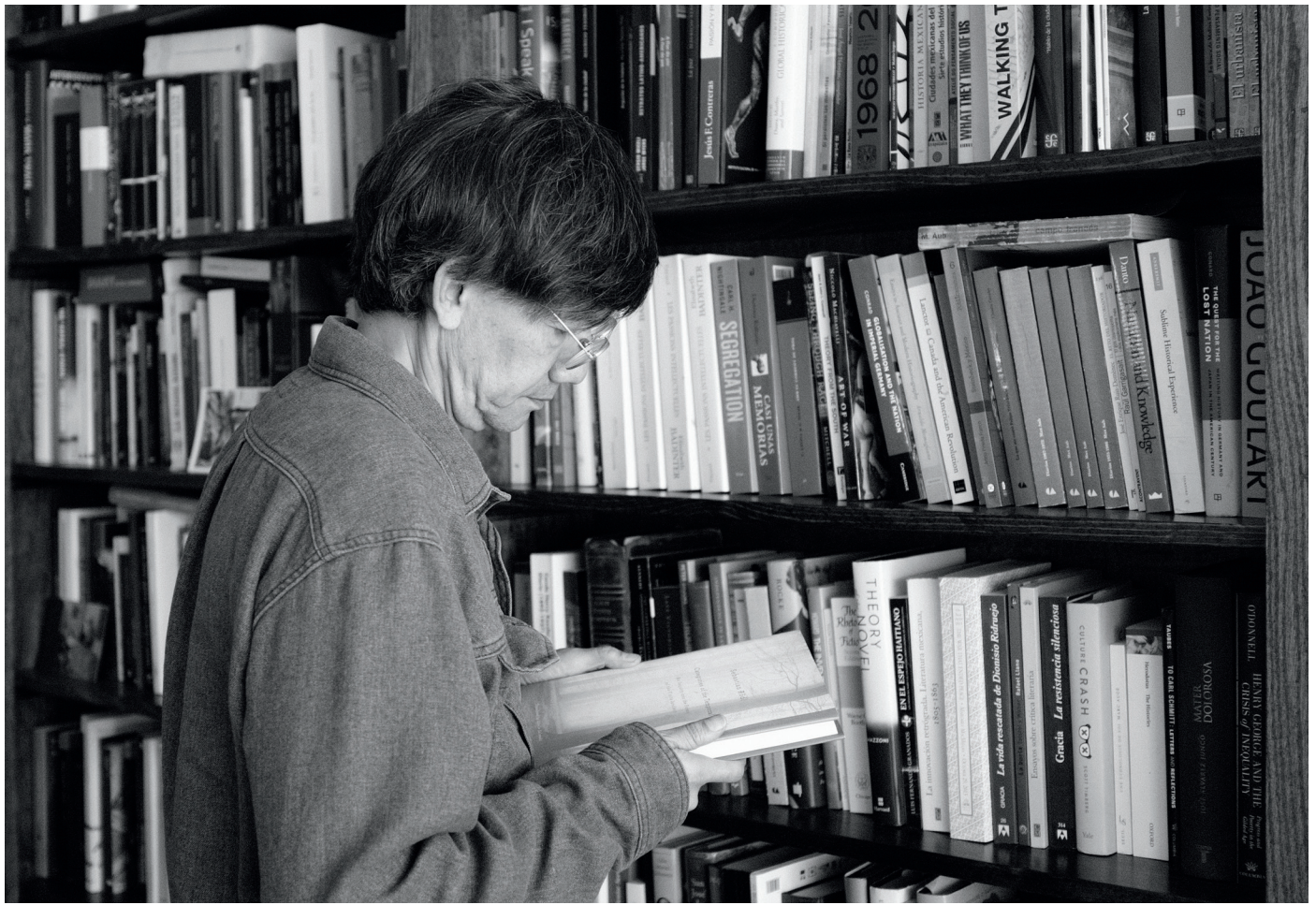
Left: Monumento a la Independencia. Photograph by Félix Miret (1910).



Right: Statue of Guillermo de Lampart inside the Monumento a la Independencia. Source: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico.

plotted an independence movement with religious undertones in the 1640s: a peculiar reading of the Bible led him to believe that Spain did not have sovereign rights over the Americas. He became a controversial figure in Mexican history. The Inquisition burned Lampart in 1650, making him a martyr for anti-Church Porfirian liberals. Placing his monument publicly would have surely triggered





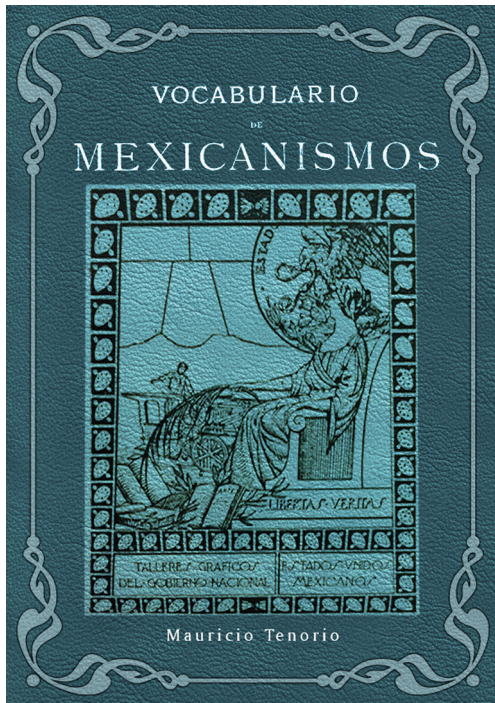
heated historiographical and political debates, weakening the process of national reconciliation. Thus, Lampart made his way into one of the nation's central monuments discretely.<sup>1</sup> Yet Tenorio's driving curiosity lies elsewhere: it is not so much about what cities have to say, but *how* they say it. The location and concealment of Lampart's monument suggest broader discussions on religion and independence, heroes and martyrs, history and the city. Tenorio explores how cities dictate these stories.

He also walks exactly the way he thinks: long strolls with scattered stops to contemplate a door, a monument, or a hallway; sudden excursions to renovated neighborhoods, abandoned places, and streets with dead ends. He wanders through these cities without a fixed route, yet always with some purpose—the walks become essays. I remember he once told me to meet him on the outskirts of Mexico City. Eight o'clock, *sharp*. "Let's take a walk," he said. What I expected to be a stroll around the block became a two-hour march to a coffee shop in La Condesa. "I'm writing a book about walking," he told me. I failed to realize what he meant: he was right there, at that moment, writing. Reading and writing, Tenorio argues, are not simultaneous acts; but walking, reading, and writing are. "Because while we think the urban text we write it, we paraphrase it, we correct it. To walk a sentence is to write it."<sup>2</sup> The embodied experience of walking through cities intertwines the three acts. I witnessed how walks twin words and steps, language and history, body and consciousness. If they are not the same things, they are at least made from the same thing.

I first met Tenorio in 2017 during a talk in Chimalistac, Mexico City. He presented a paper on the concept of peace—an ugly, dirty, and corrupt business yet an indispensable one, he argued—and its implications in history. Exploring the peace after 1876 and dissecting what it was made of yielded two troubling conclusions: (1) War and decreed forgetting, not ideas or agreements, brought peace. (2) War crawls back in when its horrors vanish in the name of desecrating the dirty business of peace. Memory has an expiration date.<sup>3</sup> After the talk, my mentor, Fernando Escalante, introduced us and asked if I would be interested in editing one of Professor Tenorio's manuscripts. I then started working on the manuscript of *La paz: 1876*, a book that deeply influenced me. It worked, along with others, to steer me away from political science and drive me to history.<sup>4</sup>

"I am, first and foremost, a reader," Tenorio replies when asked how he became a historian, "a reader that succumbs to the temptation of writing." He blows the smoke of his cigar. After obtaining a degree in sociology from the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, he went to Stanford and had a rough start. He landed in California's eye of an ongoing storm: the "culture wars" of the 1990s, or, as Tenorio calls it, the moment of the "post-this and post-that."<sup>5</sup> Learning the English language in those years entailed, for him, an effort in ventriloquism. It was a craft he had mastered in Spanish before: language not only as a means to communicate, but as performance. It seemed like mastering a discourse was more than a means to acquire knowledge, it was knowledge itself. To





Tenorio's *Vocabulario de mexicanismos* is available online at [mauriciotenorio.net](http://mauriciotenorio.net).

overcome it, to outgrow the puppet that can only speak about the tip of the iceberg, he started over. “Throw away the puppet and remain silent,” he wrote. “That’s what libraries are for.”<sup>6</sup>

Discarding the puppet meant finding a new voice, a learned English that works as our current Latin. And it worked. English-writing became something like a turbo engine, a style that demands clarity, structure, getting to the point quickly. Like a good soccer referee, the writer should become unnoticeable. But it is not a mirror of his voice in Spanish, where ironies, digressions, and quotes from his favorite *boleros* stand in the way. These obstacles make the writing richer, more interesting, honest, humorous, yet still different. They are experiments rather than expositions. For instance, a month after Mexican artist Juan Gabriel (known as Juanga) died in 2016, Tenorio published a beautiful, personal eulogy in *Nexos*.<sup>7</sup> Intertwining song lyrics, memories, sociological and historical analyses, the essay embraces Juanga’s complexity and importance for the nation, but it also shows how indispensable Juanga was for Tenorio. For a moment, I thought an expanded version of the text would be a great fit for the Music Matters series of UT Press, a *Why Juan Gabriel Matters*. But the project crumbled the moment I went back to the essay and tried to imagine it in English. From the first line, “Quien esto escribe es un cursi,” I knew the idea was doomed to fail. That *something* that gets lost in translation is precisely the thing Tenorio seeks to communicate.

Tenorio’s life work thus resists translation and a clear-cut division regarding language. As with many multilingual academic writers, not only do the topics and types of publication differ between

English and his native tongue, they are also separate tracks of thought. These tracks clashed recently in two published books. In *Latin America: The Allure and Power of an Idea*, Tenorio traces the origins of the idea of “Latin America” and not *Latinoamérica*, which is a different thing. The term feels more at home in English, and, against Tenorio’s prediction that the concept would vanish along with racial theory, it will not go anywhere in the near future. As a teaching engine, as a category used by consultants and regional experts clinging to the existence of their imagined region, as an identity marker for academic studies, or as a pristine border between north and south, “Latin America” will endure. Tenorio proposes, then, to use its power against it: to keep it as a moving target for critique, exploration, and reinvention. Every attempt to destroy it builds something new.<sup>8</sup> The second book makes the clash more explicit. *Clio’s Laws* collects a series of essays written originally in Spanish. While these texts remain untranslatable for Tenorio, the project inspired both hope and terror in him—an experiment he could not refuse. Reviewers will say whether Tenorio’s voice in Spanish, the rusticity and playfulness of his erudite prose, makes its way into the translation. I believe it does, as it did in the popular music chapter of his *Latin America*, but I’ve read both tracks. Perhaps that judgment is forbidden to me, too.

Far from those crossroads, Tenorio started another untranslatable online project, an experiment in philology: his *Vocabulario de mexicanismos*.<sup>9</sup> The challenge of describing it here lies not only in the words he explores—*amarchantarse*, *apapachar*, *achicopalarsé*, *mamón*, *naco*—but also in the shape of the entries. They do not read like definitions, etymologies, or explanations. The *Vocabulario* elucidates and elicits meaning by weaving in with anecdotes, memories, homages. The entries read like essays, like walks through the words. For instance, and I hope he will forgive me, the entry on *achicopalarsé* begins:

The *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*—which doesn’t bother to define Indian things—considers “*achicopalarsé*” a Mexican and Central American word that plainly means “to shrink.” Nothing more. Since the word is not theirs, they do not feel it, that is enough for academics. For don Joaquín García Icazbalceta, however, the word meant much more: “to swoop, to be discouraged, to be excessively saddened, may apply to animals and even plants” (*Vocabulario de mejicanismos*, 1899).<sup>10</sup>

As I translate those words, the riddle and journey they tried to evoke disappear. I write them down to navigate the blurred yet still real boundary that separates these two tracks of thought, these styles of thinking and putting it on paper. Too many words in italics are usually a sign of trouble.

Beyond the concrete histories and arguments Tenorio makes in his books, the bulk of his work offers broader lessons on the worlds between history and language. While he feels uncomfortable with the label of global history, his work crosses national boundaries



because the subjects demand it. The city, the nation, world fairs, war, and language, they are all objects scattered across place and time. This more-than-national approach allows some apparently impossible mergers: Mexico City and Washington, DC, at the turn of the twentieth century; the myths of Buenos Aires and Mexican legends; Brazilian, Spanish, and American histories. But it also exacts knowing these histories and showing their specificity. Things do not care to fit in methods or frameworks. And to follow them rigorously, one needs to become more-than-national.

Perhaps it is late for disclaimers, but foolish honesty prevails. I tried to write an overview of Tenorio's work, an introduction. Against my better judgment, however, I ended up implicating myself and wrote something closer to what philologist Antonio Alatorre called *estampas*: imprints or vignettes of a shared story.<sup>11</sup> The student defeated the professional reviewer in me. Not because my personal experience matters in any way to showcase the rigor, scope, and importance of Tenorio's work, but because of an endemic problem that I am not the first to encounter: when we write about our teachers, we are always writing about ourselves. ✨

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#### Notes

1. Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, *I Speak of the City: Mexico at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 22–24.
2. Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, *A flor de pie* (Xalapa: Univ. Veracruzana, 2020), 19.
3. Tenorio attributes this conclusion to one of the Laws of History he once transcribed. *Herodes' Law*: "In history, everything turns out badly in the long run." Evil comes, it is just a matter of time. See "The Laws of History," in Tenorio, *Clio's Laws: On History and Language* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019).
4. Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, *La paz: 1876* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2018). Fernando Escalante tried to steer me away from political science à l'américaine months before that morning in Chimalistac, but my stubbornness prevailed. I thank him here for letting me take my own crooked road.
5. "Llegar a saber," in his book *Culturas y memoria: manual para ser historiador* (México: Tusquets, 2012).
6. *Ibid.*, 40.
7. "Juanga," *Nexos*, October 1, 2016. Tenorio contributes regularly to *Nexos* and other publications in Spanish as an essayist and public historian.
8. Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, *Latin America: The Allure and Power of an Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019). For a previous essay along the same lines but with different results, see his *Argucias de la historia: siglo XIX, cultura y "América Latina"* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1999).
9. *Vocabulario de mexicanismos* (mauriciotenorio.net).
10. "Achicoparse," in *ibid.*, author's translation.
11. Antonio Alatorre, *Estampas* (México: El Colegio de México, 2012).



Mauricio Tenorio walks home in Chicago, September 2021.

# Black Women Who Move Mountains

## Responding to Crisis in Rio de Janeiro's Complexo do Alemão

by ANA CAROLINA ASSUMPÇÃO

**I**n times of crisis, people come together for mutual support. This has not changed since the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic. All over the world, people have worked together to mitigate the impact of the virus on society despite the fear of exposure. One example of this collective support can be seen in the work of a group of volunteers in Complexo do Alemão, a chain of favelas located in Rio de Janeiro. The Alemão Crisis Office (Gabinete de Crise do Alemão), founded in 2020, organized campaigns to raise awareness and enhance the prevention of the virus, and to distribute food, hygiene supplies, and cleaning products. From April to September 2020, the group, comprised of thirty-two volunteers, benefited more than 50,000 people in nearby communities.

To better contextualize the group's activities, it is essential to describe the place in which the Crisis Office conducted its work. Complexo do Alemão, made up of thirteen favelas in the Zona Norte (Northern Zone) of Rio de Janeiro, occupies an area of 21,982 square kilometers and, according to the official census, encompasses about 69,000 residents, whose average income is around US\$245 a month. The incredible work of the Crisis Office marked these people's lives and served as an inspiration for other groups, which replicated the model in other communities in the city. In order for all this to happen, the leadership of certain women was fundamental, from the conception to the planning and activities of the project, as we will see below.

### Camila Santos: Women in Action in Alemão

Camila Santos comes from a long-established family in Complexo

do Alemão. As she likes to point out, she is “the root of the Complexo,” since her mother was born at home in the community and was always involved in social movements in the favela. The sense of community care is part of her family heritage. Camila decided to raise her voice and mobilize in the fight for human rights after the government condemned her neighborhood, Favela da Skol, in 2010. Designating Skol as a high-risk area, the government removed residents and announced its intention to demolish their homes. As compensation, some residents were registered to receive a housing allowance, or social rent, in the amount of R\$400 (US\$79) per month while awaiting the construction of new housing units in the same location.

Camila watched for years as the government failed to fulfill its promises and did not construct the new houses. Some of the evicted residents could not find affordable housing with the insufficient government rent support. As a result, they were spread out in the community or moved to the poorest areas. Camila also noticed that most heads of households were Black women struggling to support their families. As of June 2022, the two hundred families removed from Favela da Skol still await their new homes and still receive the same compensation they were offered almost twelve years earlier.

In the process of demanding restitution from the state for what was taken from them, Camila and other women strengthened their ties of mutual support. Since not all families received housing assistance, and it was not always paid on time, as time went on, Camila saw “the cry turn into a scream.” She founded Mulheres em Ação no Alemão (MEAA, Women in Action in Alemão) in 2016 to address this



issue and other demands. According to the organization’s website, “Mulheres em Ação no Alemão has the mission of ending violence against women and contributing to the empowerment of women and their families, thus collaborating to strengthen their autonomy and guarantee their basic rights.” Camila insists that people living in favelas must know their rights so that they can enjoy them and demand that the state do its part. Through her housing advocacy, she became known as Camila Moradia (*moradia* = dwelling).

With the worsening of the pandemic and the restrictive measures put in place by the state, the number of families served by MEAA jumped from 270 to more than 400 during the first months of 2020. Aggravated by the high unemployment rate, more people faced difficulties beyond the financial. Camila reports that requests for help had increased in tandem with the mass dismissal of workers linked to the service sector (predominantly Black and poor) and the closure of schools. Along with hunger, cases of domestic violence also increased. Once again, according to Camila, “the cry became a scream.” She recalls hearing talk on television about the government of Rio de Janeiro state creating a crisis office to act in the fight against the virus. Yet, Camila said, there was no concrete action to address the needs of the city’s poorest. Aware that these families’ situation would worsen, Camila Moradia decided to convene the collectives that already worked in Complexo do Alemão and, in a call to action on Twitter, named the new group “The Alemão Crisis Office.”

In addition to being the one who noticed the movement in the community and sought partnerships to act, Camila also mapped the community, identified the most vulnerable areas, and distributed basic-needs groceries. These deliveries were the most challenging part, she said, as she saw living conditions firsthand: houses made of cardboard built next to pigsties, without any appliances. Nevertheless, some people were grateful for the help and said that because of the pandemic, they were eating better. Unfortunately, all this work came at a cost to the activist, who, more than a year later, cannot talk about everything she has lived through. She is still traumatized, and only in 2022 could she seek psychological help. Before that, Camila said that her therapy was her three children, who accompanied her in the struggle and were with her during Crisis Office activities. When I ask what has changed after the pandemic, Camila replies: “Before, I had a bachelor’s degree in Favela, and now I have a doctorate.”

Camila’s efforts were not in vain. In November 2021, she received a Front Line Defenders Award from the Dublin-based Front Line Defenders, a human rights organization. She had been nominated and encouraged to apply for the award by another Black woman, Crisis Office member Renata Trajano, a human rights activist, mediator, and member of the Coletivo Papo Reto, a group that challenges the mainstream media’s portrayal of police violence in Brazil. A friend of Camila’s, Renata also worked on community mapping, family triage, and food distribution. She nominated



Camila Santos, Complexo do Alemão favela in the background.



Renata Trajano (l) with Camila Santos



Camila Santos (l) with Lana de Souza

Camila “because of all the things she represents as a Black woman, a single mother, and as a leader.” As a result, Camila Moradia was the first person from Brazil, as well as the first person from the Americas, to receive the Front Line Defenders Award.

Just as a Black woman had nominated her, Camila, in return, decided to reward other women who also work to benefit their communities. She presented trophies to Renata Trajano and nineteen other women to recognize their work in the human rights struggle. Calling the Front Line Defenders Award “an immense honor,” Camila remarked that it strengthens and motivates her to move forward: “It reinforces in me that I am on the right path and the right side of history.”

### The Papo Reto Collective

Like *Mulheres em Ação*, *Coletivo Papo Reto* (Papo Reto Collective) began as a response to government neglect of the population and because of a Black woman’s decision to take action. In 2013, heavy rains fell on the city of Rio de Janeiro; Complexo do Alemão was especially hard hit. In the ensuing flooding and landslides, a boulder rolled onto the top of Renata Trajano’s brother’s house, and he was unable to reach the Civil Defense office for aid. In response, Renata asked a friend to post the case on Twitter to seek help and avoid greater tragedy in Alemão. The tweet went viral. Officially founded in 2014 by Trajano and others, Papo Reto uses social media to draw attention to social issues; the collective’s work has attracted the attention of the United Nations and other international organizations.

Unfortunately, the group must sometimes work to mitigate chaos in the aftermath of tragedy. The death of ten-year-old Eduardo de Jesus in 2015 was a turning point for the collective. Eduardo was playing in front of his house when the police allegedly confused his cell phone with a weapon and killed him. Although Renata Trajano wanted to cry and mourn the murder of an innocent child, she worked hard to mediate during the ensuing encounter between outraged community members and the police. Papo Reto also disputes mainstream media narratives about what happens in the favelas. Since its founding, the group has denounced human rights violations and continues to mobilize the population for action aimed at protecting and strengthening the community.

### Lana de Souza: The Importance of Behind-the-Scenes Work

Lana de Souza was also born in Complexo do Alemão. Since 2020, she has divided her days between that community and Maricá, a city in the countryside of Rio de Janeiro. A university graduate with a bachelor of arts in journalism, she joined *Coletivo Papo Reto* as communications coordinator upon its foundation. In this role, she was responsible for developing direct action and generating media content. With the group’s growth, Lana became responsible for administrative tasks as chief executive officer. Her responsibilities include accounts, organization, distribution of tasks, and payroll. Unlike *Mulheres em Ação*, *Coletivo Papo Reto* members are hired and paid to dedicate themselves to human rights work.

During the pandemic, when Papo Reto participated in the activities of the Crisis Office, Lana was responsible for renting the shed to receive donations, controlling and monitoring distribution, and other logistics. Lana didn’t attend the direct-action events on the street because she was “always focused on ensuring quality logistics for the team and the families served,” she said. Camila Santos affectionately calls her “Big Boss” and says that the great work the Crisis Office carried out is due to Lana’s behind-the-scenes efforts. Similarly, because she is “switched off” while at work, as she puts it, Lana does not appear in photographs released by the group, which can give the false impression that she is not working. Quite to the contrary, she managed the Crisis Office’s distribution of more than 110,000 items during the pandemic.



Currently, Lana has a YouTube channel where she shares her experiences and gives financial and personal organization tips. This is a space where she can express herself and deal with subjects outside her daily human rights work, she explains. She is also one of the recipients of Camila Moradia's trophies. When asked about her work and what has changed since the Crisis Office wrapped up its operations in September 2020, Lana says: "I want people to know that what I do is essential so that my peers can have the tranquility to carry out their missions and responsibilities. I feel thrilled and fulfilled when I see a campaign finish and the team and volunteers are happy and fulfilled."

### Who Takes Care of the Caretakers?

Camila, Renata, Lana, and so many other women across the Black diaspora work tirelessly for the well-being and support of their communities. Their work is transformative and literally saves lives. However, this vital work also comes with a burden. Women activists suffer from mental and physical health issues such as anxiety and fatigue; some face constant death threats. Camila Santos won the Front Line Defenders Award, but the single mother of three still struggles to find paid work. During the Crisis Office activities,

Renata Trajano was hospitalized several times due to back problems. She and Camila took to social media to discuss how exhausted they were and to urge the community to demand help from the government. Lana also complained of exhaustion, the burden of too much responsibility, and a lack of care. It is not that they want to be praised or put on a pedestal. On the contrary, they want better conditions for their community without having to compromise their health to achieve this.

Black women must be recognized as essential political subjects since an entire population benefits from their actions. This recognition can be in the form of health care, social assistance, or sponsorship, but it must also take the form of public policies that allow them to take care of themselves. As Angela Davis wrote, "When the black woman moves, the whole structure of society moves with her." Axé. ✨

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Photo by Bento Fabio

Lana de Souza

# Martín Fierro

## From Marginal Outlaw to National Symbol



“An Argentine Gaucho in Texas”  
The Benson at 100 podcast  
[podcasts.la.utexas.edu/the-benson-at-100/](http://podcasts.la.utexas.edu/the-benson-at-100/)

It has been 150 years since the publication of Argentina’s renowned epic poem, *El gaucho Martín Fierro*, by José Hernández. In spring 2022, graduate research assistants Melissa Aslo de la Torre and Janette Núñez organized an exhibition in honor of the poem’s sesquicentennial in the Rare Books Reading Room of the Benson Latin American Collection.

At the time of the poem’s publication, Argentina’s gauchos, the nomadic horsemen and cowherds that roamed the Pampas of central Argentina, were a maligned and disappearing group. Private ranches increasingly took over the vast, flat grasslands they inhabited. The national government used military conscription to support frontier warfare with native peoples. Meanwhile, Argentina saw growth in its urban population fueled by European immigration.

Hernández’s entry to the canon of *gauchesca* poetry sought to capture the essence of the gaucho through the voice of its titular character. A humble, noble figure, Fierro valued freedom and was not naturally drawn to conflict. The poem reframed perceptions of gaucho barbarism and lawlessness in the context of governmental and societal mistreatment and brutalization.

Although Hernández wrote for an urban audience, *Martín Fierro* became popular in rural areas. The poem’s initial printings quickly

sold out. Within a few short years, the story of Martín Fierro gained widespread popularity and took on mythic importance as it was read and performed throughout the countryside.

It was not until the early twentieth century that the literary elite of Buenos Aires reevaluated and recognized Hernández’s epic. Decades after the writer’s death, the Argentine cultural elite elevated the gaucho from a marginal figure to a national icon. Over time, Martín Fierro’s popularity bridged all social classes. *El gaucho Martín Fierro* and its sequel, *La vuelta de Martín Fierro* (1879), have been published in hundreds of editions and over 70 languages.

The Benson exhibit examines Martín Fierro’s contribution to the immortalization of the gaucho as a symbol of national identity, and draws from the over 380 items in the collection relating to *Martín Fierro*, highlighting its language and style, subjects, translated editions, and enduring legacy. ✨

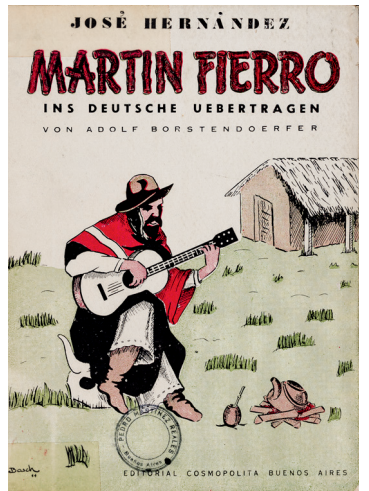
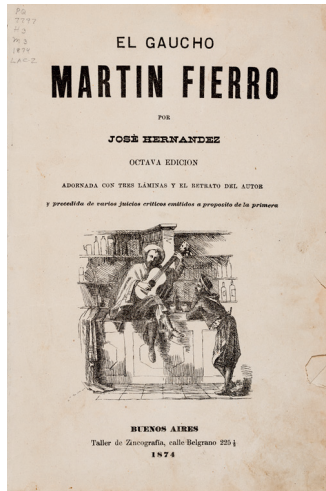
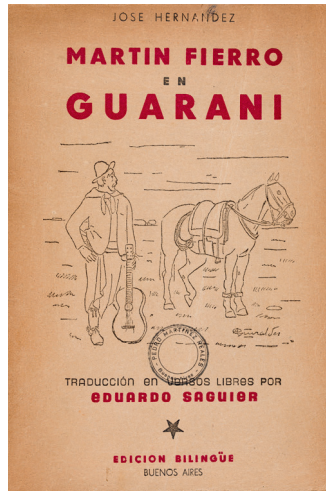
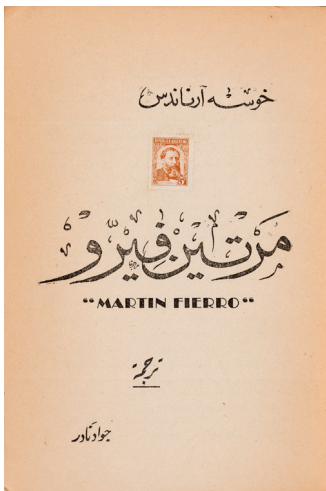
*Text provided by Melissa Aslo de la Torre and Janette Núñez.*

Opposite: A color lithograph by Carlos Alonso depicting the unnamed Black characters who face violence at the hands of Martín Fierro. From a 1960 edition of *El gaucho Martín Fierro y La vuelta de Martín Fierro*.

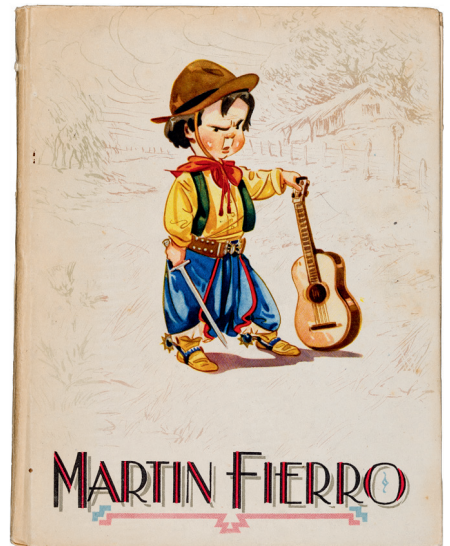
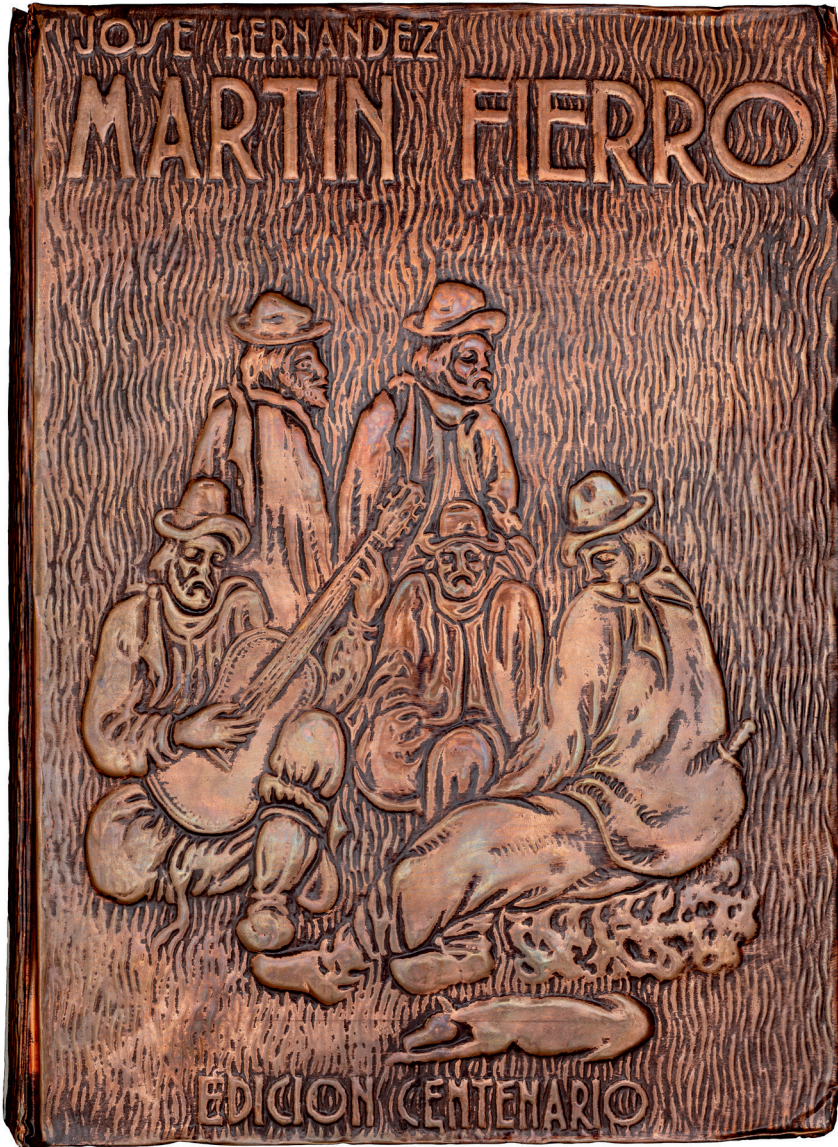








From left: Editions of *Martín Fierro* in Arabic, Guaraní, Spanish, and German.



Clockwise from left: Centennial edition of *Martín Fierro* with engraved metal cover, small hide-bound edition, children's edition cover.



# INDUMENTARIA DEL GAUCHO



7 NOVIEMBRE, 1960

23

"Indumentaria del Gaucho" from a Buenos Aires weekly children's magazine, *Biliken*, November 7, 1960. Artist unknown.



# A Town amid the Waters

## The Building of a Hydroelectric Dam in Eastern Antioquia, Colombia

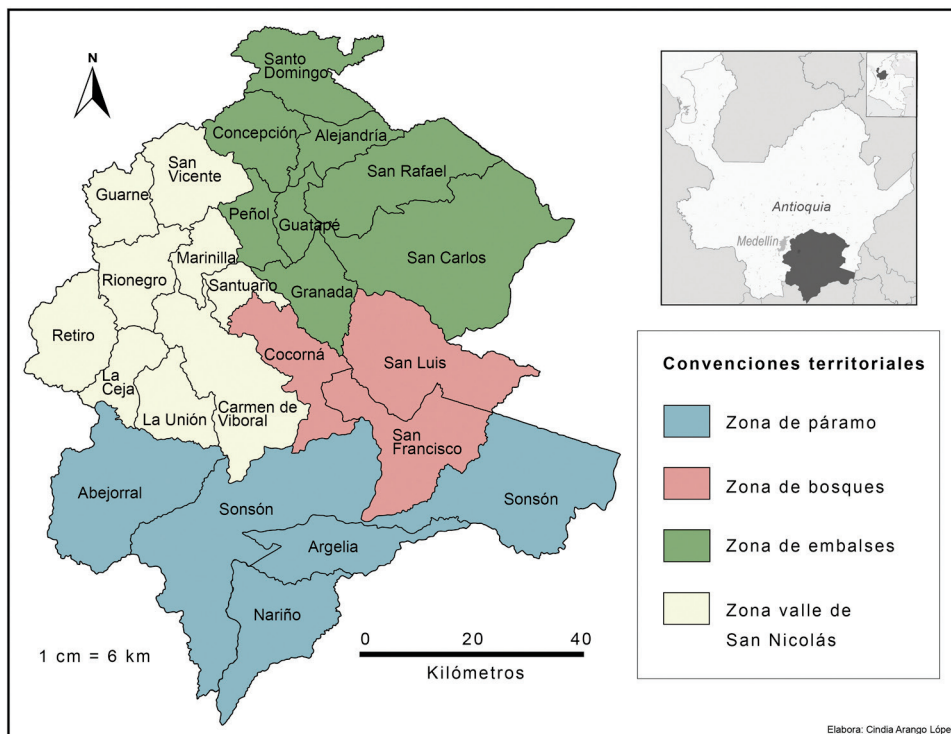
by CINDIA ARANGO LÓPEZ

**E**l Peñol and Guatapé are two towns in the mountains of the central Colombian Andes, in the Eastern Antioquia region. In the early 1960s, their inhabitants never thought they would have to migrate through the water with their belongings and stories on their backs. Generations of residents, primarily peasants, had spent more than 200 years in these same territories.

Then, from one moment to the next, their life projects, territorial anchorages, and identities were disrupted by the construction in the 1970s of the Guatapé dam and the creation of an artificial body of water. Decades of history and roots were completely shaken in the span of a few years.

In the history of Latin America, the generation of hydroelectric energy and the commercialization of water resources have come to represent a means of land and natural resource grabbing. This has taken place under the prevailing model of economic development promoted since 1960. Water is perhaps the most debated non-renewable resource on current global political agendas. At the same time, the demand for alternatives to biofuels and hydroelectric plants seems to be on a slower path.

The inhabitants of El Peñol and Guatapé bore witness to a hydroelectric project that was presented in 1970 as the most significant development initiative for the Department of Antioquia and Colombia as a whole. The construction of the Guatapé dam in Eastern Antioquia allows us to understand the implications of the debate on water amid development projects (see Eastern Antioquia map). In addition, it makes evident the social, territorial, and cultural repercussions of infrastructure projects in rural communities.



Eastern Antioquia map. Presented in “Desafíos del Programa Desarrollo Territorial. El caso del Oriente antioqueño,” Medellín, Universidad de Antioquia, 2022.





Main plaza of El Viejo Peñol in the process of flooding, undated. Municipio de El Peñol.

### Water Shortage and the Search for a Regional Solution

Colombian engineers have noted the hydroelectric potential of Eastern Antioquia since 1920, in particular the town center of El Peñol and rural areas of Guatapé, San Carlos, and San Rafael municipalities (area identified in green on map). Since 1930, the population growth in Medellín that accompanied the city's period of urbanization and industrialization led to the widespread assumption that it would be necessary to look for drinking water beyond the city itself. Indeed, in the 1930s, an article was published in the newspaper *El Zócalo* with the headline “Medellín morirá de sed dentro de 50 años. Hay que salir del Valle de Aburrá” (Medellín Will Die of Thirst within 50 Years; We Must Leave the Aburrá Valley). One of Medellín's closest subregions is Eastern Antioquia, at a distance of approximately 30 kilometers (about 18 miles). This prelude opened the door for engineers and technicians from the city to consider the importance of seeking alternative sources of potable water nearby.

In response, in 1955 the Public Companies of Medellín (Empresas Públicas de Medellín, EPM) was established in Antioquia as an autonomous provider of essential residential services such as water, telephone, and electricity. Locally, EPM is regarded as perhaps the best public utility company in Latin America. With its foundation, the company promoted the need to expand the city's water supply. The first technical and inspection studies to explore a major hydroelectric project at Guatapé began between 1960 and 1963. This meant significant growth for EPM.

These studies were carried out in the urban area of El Peñol and rural areas of Guatapé due to their proximity to the Negro-Nare River, which flows into the Magdalena River. Between 1963 and 1970, the project was developed and proposed on a technical level, yet the impact on the local community remained unclear. In response, residents organized in opposition, realizing that an

infrastructure project of this magnitude would reach the doors of their houses and the very boundaries of their properties without considering them. In particular, the inhabitants of El Peñol were facing the physical disappearance of their town and their own possible forced resettlement.

Meanwhile, EPM applied for loans from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, currently known as the World Bank. In contrast, the community of El Peñol organized massively to confront the project and prevent its installation. Their collective efforts bore fruit in 1969, when a document known as the *Contrato Maestro* was signed between EPM and the municipality of El Peñol on behalf of its inhabitants. In the document, 95 clauses were drafted that sought to mitigate the impact of resettlement and consider social readjustments for the population. The technical studies continued to advance, accompanied at the same time by the construction of houses on a new piece of land at a distance of approximately 57 kilometers (about 35 miles), also in Eastern Antioquia. Although some rural portions of Guatapé were flooded, its urban center was preserved. Currently, it is a town with a scenic pier in facing the great dam. In contrast, the new settlement of El Peñol was built on a mountainside, facing away from the dam.

Both processes were traumatic for the population. On the one hand, EPM began gradually violating the agreements made in the *Contrato Maestro*, including the pledge to build new homes that were like the originals. On the other hand, the residents of El Peñol had to decide whether to leave or to stay while the water rose to their ankles. Leaving meant carrying their territory on their backs—the dynamic space comprised of memories, practices, traditions, and the past.

### Creation of a Reservoir, Destruction of a Town

El Peñol was built on the banks of the Negro-Nare River, giving its



The flooding of El Peñol, undated. Museo Histórico de El Peñol, permanent exhibition.

inhabitants easy access to water. Founded in the eighteenth century, it began as an Indigenous town, focused on growing corn, potatoes, beans, and carrots. The area's inhabitants used the river for fishing, irrigation of crops, and for daily tasks such as washing clothes or transportation.

The sight of the peaceful river flowing by the central park in El Peñol changed with the flooding of the reservoir, which began in 1970 and culminated in April 1979. The river eventually engulfed the park and grew until it became a mirror-like body of motionless water. Resettlement activities included the exhumation of approximately 1,100 corpses from the cemetery of El Peñol, the disintegration of family nuclei, and selection of families who would populate the new settlement. The peculiarity of excluding single residents, including widows and widowers, was integral to the new social composition of El Nuevo Peñol. The resettlement process meant the forced forgetting of collaborative networks that were anchored to a traditional space. It meant adapting to the new urban plan, as the old town, built on a Roman grid, surrounded by the river's waters, with crops on its slopes, was replaced by a new settlement with urban lines and tiny, homogeneous houses that did not meet the needs of large families so common in Antioquia.

The artificial body of water has partially reconfigured the vocation of El Peñol from an agricultural town to one focused on tourism. The reactivation of the agricultural sector in the rural portions of El Nuevo Peñol took years to achieve, and the promotion of new crops and their insertion into the regional market is still an ongoing process. Meanwhile, the urban center of Guatapé faces the dam, featuring varied gastronomic offerings and recreational activities for residents and visitors. At the same time, the dam continues to generate power in Antioquia and other parts of Colombia.

This entire process can be understood as a spatial and economic rearrangement influenced by the commercialization of water, a project carried out in the name of development that ignored and all but erased community ties. Even today, some ruins of El Peñol emerge from the water, like the cross of the main church, currently a reference point for religious and sporting events. Many memories still survive among those who lived in El Viejo Peñol, as the town that came to rest under the water is known. However, the inhabitants' collective ties are among the most palpable traditions from the past.

The social organization among inhabitants of El Peñol during the 1960s was significant for Eastern Antioquia as a region. According to the National Center for Historical Memory, Eastern Antioquia was the industrial and commercial hub of Antioquia, an area where one-third of



the country's energy generation would be concentrated. Many leaders of El Peñol, as well as community members, opposed the dam proposal. Although it was impossible to stop the project, the Contrato Maestro included the first guidelines for human resettlement in Colombia. The 1970s and early 1980s saw the establishment of the Civic Movement of Eastern Antioquia (Movimiento Cívico del Oriente Antioqueño), which included leaders from El Peñol and other municipalities, such as Marinilla, and was mainly motivated by the high price of energy. Paradoxically, EPM and the government displaced an entire town to build a hydroelectric dam, yet residents of the territory ended up paying for the most expensive energy services in the country.

Local and subregional residents organized a series of strikes and protests in 1982 and 1984 during one of the most critical periods of social protest in twentieth-century Eastern Antioquia. On December 30, 1989, one of the leaders of the Civic Movement, Ramón Emilio Arcila, was assassinated in Marinilla, a few kilometers from El Peñol. With his murder, the paths of protest were closed, and the future of natural resource exploitation and its impact on the population remains uncertain.

In Eastern Antioquia, there is a proud memory of the social movements of the 1960s through the 1980s, which led many Colombians to realize that the development of territories should be mediated by awareness of the resources we have, but also by the active participation of people who reside in these territories. Water continues to be in the eye of the hurricane because Eastern Antioquia remains a waterpower for Colombia. The question is whether Colombia will continue with the same model of water development or if it will be inspired by new social movements to build alternative models.

### The Meaning of Water

According to the World Bank, Colombia is rich in water resources, but this wealth does not reach all Colombians equally. Water administration in the country follows environmental policies that could be considered obsolete within the framework of sustainability. Hydroelectric projects have put entire communities at risk of disappearing, a lesson that continues to be relevant. Such is the current case of the Hidroituango dam, also in Antioquia. In recent years, this project has displaced more than 500 inhabitants and put hundreds of families at risk. A hearing on April 27, 2013, in the Congress of the Republic corroborated this violation of international humanitarian law. Thus, the case of the resettlement of El Peñol is not an isolated experience. On the contrary, infrastructure projects and the unsustainable use of natural resources continue to impose themselves on many Colombians.



Sign in the main church of El Viejo Peñol. The caption reads, "This temple was built with the faith and devotion of an entire people. It will not be changed by he who was born from abuse and impiety." Museo Histórico de El Peñol, permanent exhibition.





Panoramic view of El Peñol-Guatapé reservoir, June 10, 2022.

It could be said that a population traditionally dedicated to smallholding-type agriculture was seriously disrupted by new, unprecedented vocations such as tourism and the water trade, all a result of the dam's creation. The inhabitants of El Peñol had to relocate and reinvent themselves in view of hydroelectric development projects, which continue in the region. They had to adapt by creating new collective spaces and assume that the water that had accompanied them daily—for fishing, for irrigation, and for transportation—had also changed. Water now represents electrical energy for many Colombians in the central Andes. It also represents nautical tourism. It would be pertinent to observe how a resource can have multiple meanings and at the same time completely transform an entire town, disappearing or reinventing it. ☀

*Cindia Arango López is a LLILAS doctoral student from Colombia whose research interests include environmental history, human geography, identity, and race.*

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# Silks and Swords

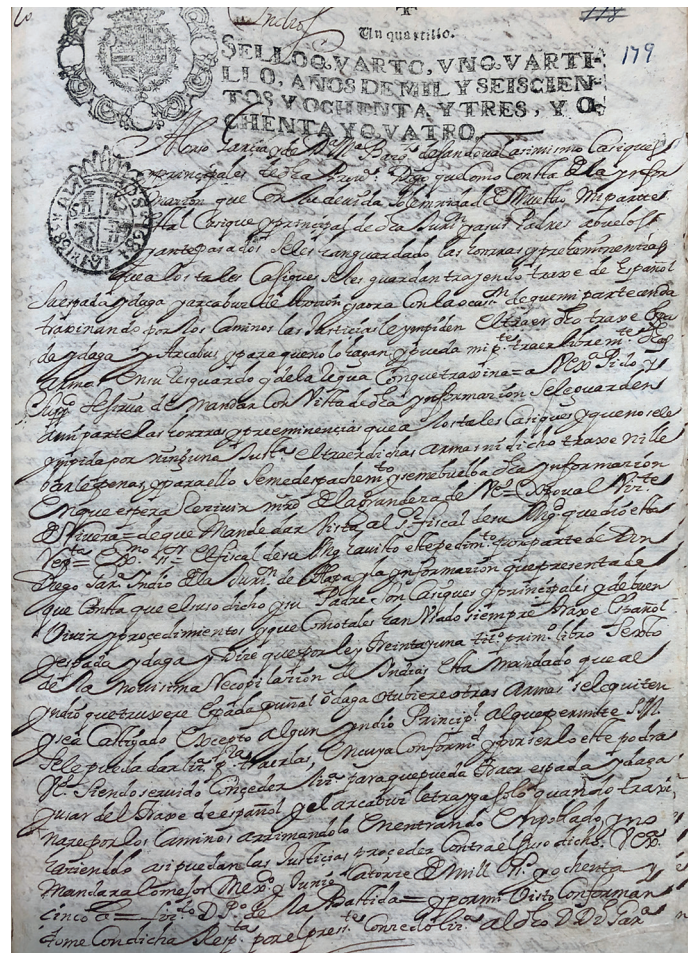
## Sumptuary Laws and Gender in Colonial Mexico

by HALEY SCHROER

**O**n June 8, 1685, Don Diego de García, *cacique*, or Indigenous leader, from Tlapa (now in modern-day Guerrero), petitioned the viceroy of New Spain to intervene on his behalf. As the “legitimate son of Don Alonso García and Doña María Bárcquez de Sandoval, themselves *caciques principales* from the same province,” García insisted that he held unique privileges. According to the noble, “his parents, grandparents, and ancestors have always possessed the great honors and preeminence bestowed upon *caciques*, including the ability to wear Spanish clothing and carry a sword, a dagger, and a harquebus.” Yet, despite such access, García complained that “town justices had impeded him” from carrying himself in this manner.

In response, imperial scholars debated the legitimacy of García’s claim. Although “his father and grandfather were *caciques* and lived reputably,” colonial law forbade the use of weapons among Indigenous populations. Ultimately, authorities acquiesced that “*indios principales* may be permitted by Your Majesty to acquire a license.” Thus, the viceroy reaffirmed the *cacique*’s right to carry personal weapons and García won his case.

The case filed by Don Diego was not a unique event. Rather, it represented just one example of the conflicts that arose in colonial Mexico surrounding sumptuary laws—statutes that barred select groups from wearing certain garments or using particular items. Between 1575 and 1693, Indigenous individuals from over 277 different towns submitted 505 petitions against these restrictions. Yet, in spite of the high number and geographic diversity, this phenomenon reflected an overwhelmingly male endeavor. Only two women requested sumptuary exemptions. The remaining 503 requests belonged to Indigenous noble men facing discrimination for sporting European attire and using status items like swords and horses. As a whole, the documents represented a majority privileged, male perspective.



The first page of Don Diego García’s petition. Archivo General de la Nación, Indios, Volume 28, Expediente 213.

Such a gender imbalance does not reflect the overall distribution for Indigenous litigation in the colonial period. Scholars of colonial Mexico and Peru have demonstrated that females actively participated in the legal sphere.<sup>1</sup> Not only did they actively protect their right to inherited assets, they often fought for fair treatment from fathers, brothers, and husbands. The male-dominated nature of sumptuary petitions thus created an anomaly within the Indigenous legal experience. An important question arises from this imbalance: why did sumptuary requests exist as a uniquely male endeavor?

### Sumptuary Laws against Indigenous Communities

In order to understand the gendered nature of sumptuary requests, we must first consider the legal precedents. Spanish restrictions against natives developed throughout the sixteenth century. As early as 1501, the Crown warned natives who “carried a sword, dagger, or any other weapon” that they faced confiscation and “may be condemned to more punishments, according to what the court sees fit.”<sup>2</sup> In response to a perceived disregard for the law, the monarchy reissued the restriction six more times over the course of the next 70 years.

By the 1560s, imperial authorities feared their hold on the Americas was waning and launched a series of new policies aimed at strengthening Spanish control.<sup>3</sup> In 1568 and 1570, the Crown further prohibited *indios* “from riding a horse and demand[ed] that authorities enforce and execute the law with no hesitation.”<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the 1570s witnessed the beginning of the juridical transition of Indigenous populations into *miserables*, or legal dependents. Spanish administrators increased efforts to appropriate native lands and replace local authorities with outsiders from other towns. Early modern European ideas of political succession centered around masculinity and patrilineal succession. The petitions developed at a time in which native elites experienced threats to their legal rights, territorial ownership, and political influence.

### Cultural Origins and Gendered Implications

By the time petitions began in 1575, Indigenous men faced increased control over their personal possessions and their participation in colonial society. Yet these laws did not develop in a vacuum. Rather, they built upon pre-existing ideals. At the time of contact, native groups were not strangers to clothing regulations. Pre-Columbian Nahuatl and Mixtec cultures possessed a long-standing tradition of utilizing garments to regulate status and identity.

Within Aztec society, leaders imposed specific laws against their own tribes as well as subordinate groups. Such laws also tended to focus on traditionally masculine items. Rules determined the length and level of decoration on items like capes (*tilmatli*) depending

on one’s standing as an elite, a warrior, or a peasant.<sup>5</sup> For example, only nobles gained access to turquoise (both as a color and a stone), sandals, and specific headdresses.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, seasoned warriors received capes and jewels decorated specifically for recognition in battle.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in everyday life, one’s garments spoke directly for one’s standing and achievements.

At the same time, similar items possessed profound connotations in Spanish society. In particular, military attire played an important role in defining masculine honor. The possession of personal arms assisted in maintaining one’s masculinity. Furthermore, the rise of the *espada ropera*, or dress sword, by the sixteenth century created new sartorial meanings for the weapon. Meant to complement and enhance men’s clothing, fashionable rapiers became integral to everyday masculine attire.<sup>8</sup> Swords, in part, became markers

of affluence and upward mobility. For sixteenth-century Indigenous nobility, the combination of native and European elements became critical markers of elite power as they straddled both worlds.

Just as weapons served as status items, so, too, did horses. Steeds possessed deep ties to Spanish society. Within Iberian life, horses acted as a key tool for war and success in military arts. Sixteenth-century scholars applauded the animal as “the most apt for things of honor and the advantage of man.”<sup>9</sup> Spanish imperial society valued animals as a means visually to portray dominance in public life.<sup>10</sup> Corresponding equestrian accessories, much like clothing, assisted in self-expression in early modern Europe. This gear became critical to the successful portrayal of elite status.<sup>11</sup> Not only did a horse provide more efficient transportation, but it also projected images of power upon its rider.

Such colonial values built upon pre-existing Indigenous relationships to material objects. After the conquest, native elites incorporated the shared “social currency” of military garb in both Indigenous and Spanish cultures and focused on items reminiscent of martial service.<sup>12</sup> This took the form of European garments, weapons, and

equestrian equipment like those requested by Don Diego García.

For native elite men, then, the right to bear arms highlighted much more than their privileged status. It demonstrated colonial acknowledgement of their once dominant standing and partially vindicated their marginalized reality.<sup>13</sup> American residents thus conceptualized the sword as intimately representative of its wearer. With the rise of such trends in the colonies, sumptuary restrictions against natives and other non-Spanish ethnic groups situated honorific items like swords within the European sphere. Not only did such possessions provide advantages for transportation and personal protection, but they also connoted inclusion in Spanish culture.

Sumptuary regulations thus emphasized masculine objects like warrior attire, weapons, and horses that possessed profound



Pre-Columbian warrior attire. The red cape and quetzal feathers denote elite status and martial success. Codex Mendoza, fol 64r, 1540s, ARTstor.



connotations in both Indigenous and European cultures. The overly masculine nature of laws and subsequent requests correlated directly to early modern gender norms. In Spain, seventeenth-century definitions of manhood similarly privileged visual markers and centered on performative masculinity. Men proved their virility through external markers, such as behavior and appearance. In particular, demonstrating substantial martial skill acted as one of the key tenets to becoming a man.<sup>14</sup> By the 1550s, swords became a crucial aspect for elite dress, acting as a sort of male jewelry. In part, this is due to the fact that early modern conceptions of Spanish honor centered around appearance. Building upon the pre-Columbian awards given to successful warriors, Indigenous men incorporated European sartorial values as well. Male apparel possessed greater potential for subversive power because items of attire directly appealed to definitions of masculine honor and reputation in public life.

The items requested by Don Diego García reflected both Indigenous and European definitions of masculinity. By focusing on European attire and personal weapons, García took advantage of the social currency imposed by Spanish colonizers. As an elite, García faced decreased political power and increased marginalization under the new regime. Garments and swords provided the ability to visually assert himself in everyday life. Ultimately, petitions submitted by García and his peers reflected not just a request for special status items but an attempt to assert their belonging as elite men in colonial life. ✨

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Comparison of everyday Indigenous attire and Spanish attire. Image on left includes decorative sword. Codex Tepetlaoztoc, 1550, The British Museum.



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# A Century of Perspective

## A Conversation with Professor Emeritus Karl M. Schmitt

interviewed by ADELA PINEDA FRANCO

*Professor Emeritus Karl Michael Schmitt joined the faculty of the Department of Government at The University of Texas at Austin in 1958, where he spent the majority of his career as a prominent Latin Americanist. He became associate director of the Institute of Latin American Studies (ILAS, now LLILAS) in 1968, under director Stanley Ross. He has been an advocate of LLILAS ever since, particularly through his support for the Hackett Lecture series. I visited Karl at his home in Austin to talk about his career as a historian and political scientist, his love for libraries, and his long-standing relationship with LLILAS. Brilliant yet unassuming, Karl has an infectious vitality, enjoys good company, and is a natural conversationalist. A centenarian this year—his 100th birthday is July 22—his unique perspective allows us to conceive of the institution of Latin American Studies at UT as an important archive of U.S.–Latin American relations during the Cold War and beyond.*

*Karl's reflections on his life and career are now collected in a memoir, which he recently donated to the Benson Latin American Collection. During our visit, we discussed the field of Latin American Studies during his lifetime. His anti-doctrinaire spirit and utter rejection of pomposity and self-congratulatory approaches to Latin America make for refreshing conversation.*

*Adela Pineda Franco*

*Lozano Long Professor of Literary and Cultural Studies  
Director, Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies*

***Could you talk about your academic trajectory? What motivated you to become a Latin Americanist?***

It was purely an accident. I enrolled as a freshman in 1940 at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. I received a work scholarship that paid for my tuition. In my freshman year, I was assigned to the library. It was there that I met Dr. Manoel da Silveira Cardozo, who, at the time, was an assistant professor of history and the curator of the library. The library was quite disorganized, so he made me move books from one place to the other. In the process, I became interested in Latin America. I did not know about the region, yet the more I read, the more I wanted to learn. Catholic University was small, basically a graduate school.

Once I got into my junior year, I realized that there were no more undergraduate courses to take, so I could only major in American or European history. Latin American history was not an option. So, I majored in American history and my second field became Latin America. At the graduate level one could specialize in Latin America, and that is what I did when I began my MA at the same institution.

My mentor, Cardozo, who belonged to the Azorean/Portuguese community, was a Brazilianist, a pioneer in the study of Luso-Brazilian history in the United States. Yet Mexico became my main area of research because I was attracted to the study of its revolution. Also, one of my closest friends was from Mexico, Alberto Casares. When I met him in 1940 and during my years at the Catholic University, Alberto remained very anti-revolution. His family had lost their lands. As years went by, Alberto came to admit that the revolution was a necessary change.

***I find it very interesting that your initial connection to Latin America was a library.***

The Oliveira Lima Library at Catholic University got me started. I used to read every book that looked interesting. Although the Latin American collection was small, it was a good collection. However, I must admit that Catholic University did not achieve what Texas did with its Latin American Collection, thanks to Nettie Lee Benson. I really began to understand the importance of libraries when I was writing my dissertation at the University of Pennsylvania.

***What do you think about the role of mentors in choosing academic fields?***

My main mentors were Cardozo and, at UPenn, Arthur Preston Whitaker. That was the way I was socialized into academia. I don't think students think that way anymore. When Cardozo advised me on where to pursue my doctorate, he did it in terms of mentors, not programs. At that time, I was interested in Mexico, particularly in the Reforma period and in Church–State relations. I wrote my MA thesis on this subject.

For my PhD, I chose UPenn because I was impressed with Whitaker. He was the one who admitted me, not the department. I really liked what Whitaker was doing. I read his two-volume book on the



Mississippi question. I admired his intellectual qualities, his fondness for clarity and precision, and how well he wrote. As a mentor, Whitaker was enormously supportive, but I did not like his personality. Once he threw me out of his office. I called Cardozo and said, "I am coming back, Manoel, I can't stand Whitaker." Cardozo obviously replied with an assertive "No, Karl, you are not coming back."

### **When and why did you come to UT Austin?**

My first job was teaching at a small college in upstate New York, Niagara University. It would have been a dead end if it had not been for Whitaker, who recommended me for a job at the State Department. That was a fascinating position, a five-year appointment as an intelligence officer. Then came the offer from UT Austin. A number of people, including historians and colleagues in the State Department, warned me about coming to Texas. There was political interference in academic life, they said. But I did not listen. I was attracted to the position because of the library, and I knew it was heavy on Mexico because of the Genaro García Collection. This was around 1957 or 1958. I wanted to join the History Department because I was a historian, but the invitation came from Malcolm Macdonald, who was the chair of the Department of Government. The real challenge for me was that I had to change disciplines and had to immerse myself in the new theories of human behavior and statistics, which, at the time, were shaping the discipline of political science. I did it, but not with the necessary depth of knowledge it required. I think I had a good career, but not a great career.

### **Can you talk about the reach and scope of your scholarly work?**

A central theme of my scholarship on Mexico was the study of Church and State relations. My first publication was about the complex role the clergy played in the independence of Mexico. My main argument was that, although there was no consensus over Mexico's independence among the creoles and mestizos forming the lower clergy, this group was the only one with strong ties to the masses; thus, an important sector of the lower clergy supported the initial rebellion, joining the insurrection and monopolizing the field of rebel journalism. In contrast, it was only after the Riego revolt in Cádiz that the upper clergy, fearful of the Enlightenment, supported the independence of Mexico, which was controlled by conservative forces by then, against a liberal-governed Spain.

I have also written about the Reforma (1857–1861) and the Porfiriato (1876–1911). My original plan was to write a complete history of Church–State relations. I envisioned several volumes, from the independence movement to the present, highlighting

continuities and breaks of that relationship beyond the conventional periodization of Mexican history. Coming here prevented me from fulfilling this plan because I had to write about politics. So, I began to write about the politics of violence, in particular. I studied the politics of assassination, highlighting cases such as Trujillo and Somoza.

The book that got me tenure was *Evolution or Chaos: Dynamics of Latin American Government and Politics* (1963), a study of Latin America in the context of Kennedy's Alliance for Progress. *Communism in Mexico* (1965) got me my professorship. The initial investigation that went into this book was the result of research I carried out in the State Department. It analyzes Mexican communism through its political organizations and fronts in the context of Mexico's PRI-driven political system.

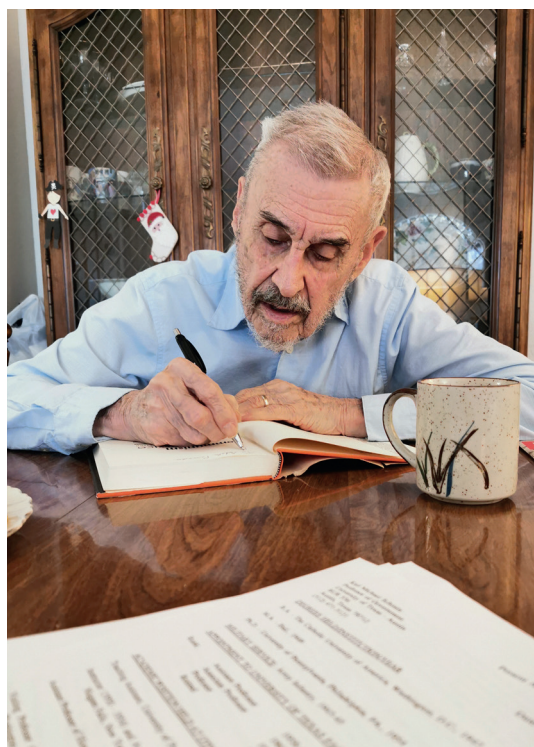
### **What was your connection to the Institute of Latin American Studies?**

Macdonald mentioned the institute when he offered me the position at UT. When I arrived at UT, the institute was rather small, largely a degree-granting operation. Yet, it began to change in the early 1960s. In 1962, John Parker Harrison became the new director. Richard Adams was his associate director. This was the Alliance for Progress period, so the U.S. government began to provide many funding opportunities for Latin American Studies projects. Harrison and Adams knew how to obtain grant funding and they began to sponsor substantial research and publication. Many professors in all sorts of disciplines became affiliated with the institute, even physical education professors were conducting comparative-oriented projects. In 1967, Harrison was finalizing his tenure as ILAS director. He called me and said he had funds that needed to be spent

before the end of the academic year and offered support for my research. Hence, the institute granted me four thousand dollars to research and study congressional campaigning in the Mexican state of Yucatán. I interviewed all the candidates, except the PRI, who did not grant me an interview. Of course, the outcome of the elections was clear even before it started. PRI was going to win.

When Jack Harrison left, the university hired Stanley Ross. He was also a historian, and he had published a fine biography of Francisco I. Madero. It was then that I was asked to become the associate director of ILAS. Since Harrison, each successive director has left an imprint on the institute. I am certain that the institute will keep expanding and diversifying its operations in years to come. 🌟

*Editor's note: A version of this interview that includes citations of some of Schmitt's publications can be found in Portal magazine online. Visit [lillasbenensonmagazine.org](http://lillasbenensonmagazine.org).*









# Nora C. England

## *Visionary Linguist and Mentor*

by SUSANNA SHARPE

**N**ora England's passion for linguistics was sparked in college, where, almost on a whim, she enrolled in a field methods course. "That really got me going—actually hearing data from another language and paying attention to it," she recalled in an interview, describing one lecture as "jaw-dropping." That linguistics class at Bryn Mawr, taught by Nancy Dorian, was "the first course that I ever took where I was willing to stay up late and study instead of fool around."

England, who died on January 26, 2022, at the age of seventy-five, would go on to make an international name for herself in the field of documentary and descriptive linguistics. Among her key publications are her 1983 *Grammar of Mam, A Mayan Language* and the 2017 handbook *The Mayan Languages*, co-edited with Judith Aissen and Roberto Zavala Maldonado. Yet she is most celebrated for her decades-long work in Guatemala, during which she recruited Indigenous Maya, trained them as linguists, and worked with them to build a model of linguistics in which Indigenous scholars documented languages with and for other Indigenous peoples.

England was diagnosed with terminal cancer in August 2021. She was able to continue working throughout her treatment. The use of Zoom and virtual teaching during the pandemic allowed for the fall 2021 graduate seminar in documentary and descriptive linguistics to become an oral history lab with England as the subject. These recordings of England are the source for quotations from her in this article.

In 1990, while on the faculty at the University of Iowa, England co-founded OKMA (Oxlajuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib'), an Indigenous academy in Antigua, Guatemala, devoted to research and teaching on Mayan languages and linguistics. Through OKMA, England trained Indigenous speakers of Mayan languages in linguistics, including the documentation of their own languages through the creation of dictionaries, grammars, and texts transcribed from everyday speech.

In 1993, the MacArthur Foundation awarded her one of its coveted "genius" fellowships, citing her training of over 100 Indigenous

Mayan linguists. But England's Indigenous students didn't all stay in Guatemala; some would eventually become graduate students in the United States, which brings us to Texas.

England joined the faculty of The University of Texas at Austin in 2001; in 2007 she was named the Dallas TACA Centennial Professor in the Humanities. At UT, she established and led the Center for Indigenous Languages of Latin America (CILLA) in partnership with the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies (LLILAS). A revered and beloved professor in the Department of Linguistics, England was the department's longtime graduate adviser at the time of her death.

### Early Days in Guatemala

According to England, she almost didn't go to Guatemala. While completing her master's degree at the University of Florida in 1971, she saw a call for linguists to work on a language-documentation project in Guatemala. England recalled, "I looked at the announcement and it looked awfully interesting, but then I said, 'Well, I can't do that. I don't speak Spanish . . . I don't know anything about Guatemala.' It scared the pants off me . . . so I threw it away."

But the Guatemala project intrigued her. As envisioned by Terrence Kaufman, "the crazy gringo in charge," to quote England, the Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín (PLFM) would establish a research center where Indigenous language speakers would work on their own languages. The project was subsidized by the Peace Corps, and included intensive training in Spanish and a modest stipend. When the call arrived a second time, England answered it.

Indigenous Maya make up close to half of the population of Guatemala, and live also in other parts of Central America and south-eastern Mexico. But until the 1970s, most Maya had very limited access to education. During her time with PFLM, England was part of a cohort of young linguists who worked on some of the thirty different Mayan languages. She cites the PFLM as a major force in the expansion of the study of Mayan grammar in the 1970s and the increasing inclusion of native speakers in that process.





England works with Indigenous community members, Guatemala, 1973.

England would continue to cross paths with Kaufman throughout her career. In a recent phone conversation, Kaufman described her as “a giant figure in descriptive linguistics.” Kaufman himself died on March 3, 2022. A portion of his extensive papers and field materials are part of the Archive of the Indigenous Languages of Latin America (AILLA) at UT Austin.

### Oral History

Through seven sessions recorded with students and colleagues in fall 2021, England recounts her trajectory as a student, linguist, teacher, and researcher, and discusses her vision and her philosophy, not only for linguistics, but for teaching, for mentoring, for living. Her intellectual clarity is on full display in these sessions, as is her well-known penchant for blunt truth-telling. But what really jumps out is her conviction that speakers of Indigenous languages must be leaders in how their languages are studied, taught, preserved, and revitalized.

“Speakers of Indigenous languages, to my mind, will never have control of their languages if they leave some aspect of those languages always to foreigners,” England said in one of the sessions. “The most important thing that those of us who are ‘true outsiders’ . . . have to work on, is making sure people in the community become the leaders of this whole enterprise of strengthening the languages through the use of linguistics, linguistic knowledge, and materials that you can produce once you have those.”

“Nora was a pioneer in developing initiatives toward training speakers of Indigenous languages in linguistics, which required a

fabulous mix of fearlessness, personal warmth, and an ability to listen and attend to other people’s needs even when these were not very overtly expressed,” said Pattie Epps, her UT Linguistics colleague. “One sometimes got the sense that she was trying to hide a very soft heart under a gruff exterior, without much success in that her warmth always showed through.”

Born Nora Clearman in Washington, DC, in 1946, she was raised in Hicksville, NY, a blue-collar community on Long Island, the daughter of a physicist father and a mathematician mother. Her brother, Stephen Clearman, describes his older sister as “unrelentingly selfless and generous.”

“She had a broad sense of duty and obligation, and she found an outlet for that in her career,” said Clearman.

England’s own words echo that notion: “When people want to know something and you know it, then you have a responsibility to teach it to them.” She was dogged in her belief that Indigenous Maya were experts in their own languages, and that those with an interest in linguistics, and an aptitude for it, could be trained to be linguists to work in the preservation and revitalization of their languages.


After graduating from Bryn Mawr College with a degree in anthropology, England earned graduate degrees at the University of Florida in linguistic anthropology. Her work with PLFM in Guatemala during the early 1970s gave focus to her later doctoral work and her specialization in Mam, a Mayan language spoken by over half a million people.





England at CIRMA (Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica), early 1990s.





England's love for her field, and her deep belief that Indigenous speakers must be part of the forefront in linguistics, has led to a strong and growing presence of Latin American Indigenous students pursuing graduate degrees in linguistics at UT. To date, eight Indigenous students have earned a PhD in linguistics and one in anthropological linguistics.

"Nora was the heart and soul of our program in documentary and descriptive linguistics," department chair Richard Meier said. "Her life, her person, her scholarship, were all wrapped up with her students, her colleagues, with supporting the Maya in Guatemala, with promoting the training of Indigenous speakers of Latin American languages to become linguists and receive doctorates."

As longtime graduate adviser in the Department of Linguistics, England was known as a firm but supportive mentor to students. "Fue una mamá académica [she was an academic mother]," wrote Jaime Pérez González, an Indigenous speaker of Tzeltal from Chiapas, Mexico, who earned his PhD in 2021. "She put her faith in a diversity of voices in linguistics from Latin America, and was able to make this blossom at UT Austin, promoting us and making us feel included. I am a fruit of that effort."

England played a role of "transformational importance," turning certain accepted norms on their head, according to her close colleague Anthony Woodbury. "Whereas it is typical for distinguished new faculty to start big funded research projects and let doctoral students—mostly from the global north—join in as a part of their training and then 'parachute' into Indigenous communities to do research, Nora took an opposite approach," wrote Woodbury. Her plan was "to recruit native speakers of Latin American Indigenous languages as doctoral students, make sure that they received adequate training in English, shepherd them through our regular Linguistics program, and let their work guide the direction of Latin American language research, all with a strong community basis." The success of this plan was unprecedented.

England's vision changed the field of linguistics, but her deep sense of generosity should receive equal billing. Martin Kohlberger, now a professor at the University of Saskatchewan, recounts how England and her colleague Pattie Epps intervened when they saw him struggling to finish his dissertation at the University of Leiden. "They invited me to Austin and let me stay in their homes for many months at a time, without asking for any rent money or anything else. They gave me the necessary space and safety network that I needed to get back on track with my dissertation and finish it. I will always fondly remember the many months that I lived with Nora. I'll cherish the memories of lounging in her living room in evenings, with Nora cracking jokes in her usual blunt and sharp tone."

"Nora's living room" deserves a place of honor in her story. "Her house was this hub of connection," said colleague Danny Law. "She would host monthly gatherings for people who worked in Latin America." The presence of visiting linguists was also an occasion for such parties. "It's one of the things that people really remember about her—how she would bring people together at her house, bring people into her life."

### Beyond the Linguistics Department

Nora England's activities and initiatives on the Texas campus are further testament to her broad and inclusive vision and her commitment to what longtime friend and colleague Charles Hale (director of LLILAS Benson, 2009–2016) called "her lifelong project of forging a current of Indigenous-centered linguistic practice."

Upon joining the UT faculty, England established the Center for Indigenous Languages of Latin America (CILLA), whose activities include a large biennial conference held at UT Austin that brings dozens of linguists to campus to present their research. Talks are primarily given in Spanish, making the conference accessible to Latin American scholars.

She was also an affiliate and former advisory board member of the Native American and Indigenous Studies (NAIS) program at UT, directed by Luis Cárcamo-Huechante, an Indigenous Mapuche and professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. Cárcamo-Huechante acknowledged his colleague for "actively collaborating in the search for and recruitment of new Indigenous members of our faculty at UT Austin." Recalling his early visits to campus in 2009, he added that England's support for his recruitment "was a major honor and reason for me to come here."

England's support is also remarked on by Kelly McDonough (Anishinaabe-Irish descent), professor in Spanish and Portuguese and a scholar of Indigenous Nahua intellectuals. "Nora provided me with crucial mentorship. She gave no-nonsense advice and provided a stellar example of female success in male-dominated fields." McDonough says she applies two "classic Nora points of wisdom" in her daily life: "First, she never suffered fools, and second, she only paid attention to what was important: the ideas and the people they affected."

"Nora was a towering figure for every Guatemalan with a passion for Mayan languages and for linguistic justice," wrote Sergio Romero, associate director of the LLILAS Indigenous Languages Initiative. "She was one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the Indigenous Languages Initiative, a sincere believer in the power of linguistic scholarship for substantive social change."

Social change might inevitably be a result of Indigenous linguistics being in the hands of Indigenous linguists. However, Hale makes an important point about Nora England's work and beliefs: she "objected vigorously" to being called an activist.

"Nora perceived no contradiction whatsoever between the basic tenets of linguistic science and her fervent commitment to Indigenous empowerment through training and promotion of Indigenous intellectuals. Nora's ability to locate her life work in this space of convergence became her superpower; it made her a Rockstar in the profession—respected, often revered, even by those who did not show any particular enthusiasm for the changes she sought and embodied."

### Legacy

At some point during her years of research and collaboration in Guatemala, England was given a Maya name, Ixkeem. OKMA



co-founder Pakal B'alam Rodríguez Guaján writes that in addition to accepting this name, “she also showed solidarity with the Maya sisters in the use of *uq* (Mayan skirt), *po't* (Mayan blouse), and *pas* (Mayan belt).” According to England’s longtime friend and 2017 co-editor Judith Aissen, *Ixkeem* means *tejedora*, or “woman weaver,” including “woman weaver of words.” It is significant that the weaver of words would be drawn to showing her solidarity through a nonverbal act—the wearing of woven garments. In Guatemala, this is also a political act.

The powerful example and impact of Nora England’s actions and her words will be her legacy as her students, colleagues, friends, and family find ways to honor her life and continue her work. This is true for longtime collaborators and brand-new ones, like LILAS Director Adela Pineda Franco, who arrived on campus in August 2022 and was only able to meet England via Zoom.

“I truly regret not to have had the chance to meet Nora England in person, shake her hand, and thank her deeply for her contributions to Indigenous language and cultural studies at LILAS Benson. Her work led many linguists to become collaborators in language revitalization in several regions of the world. Yet, her most important legacy lies in her relentless effort to understand cultural affirmation and activism through the struggle for social rights and language. Her work at LILAS Benson will remain alive for generations to come.”

“There has been a major shift in the role native Mayan speakers play in Mayan linguistics,” said Judith Aissen. “In the 1970s, they worked as ‘consultants,’ assisting outside linguists in their research projects. But there is now a significant cadre of native-speaker linguists with advanced degrees in linguistics who have taken up research, teaching, and public policy positions in Guatemala, Mexico, the U.S., and Canada. And really, the central person responsible for this shift is Nora.”

### Messenger of Peace

On May 31, 2019, Nora England was honored by the Guatemalan Ministry of Culture and Sports at the Patio de la Paz (Peace Patio) in Guatemala’s Palacio Nacional de la Cultura. During a ceremony acknowledging her forty-eight years of work on the preservation of Maya languages and training Maya linguists, England performed the *Cambio de la Rosa de la Paz*—the Changing of the Peace Rose—a ritual gesture of peace

evoking the end of Guatemala’s armed conflict in 1996. Indigenous Guatemalans had paid a heavy price during the thirty-six-year war. Following the ceremony, England received a document naming her *Mensajera de la Paz*—Messenger of Peace. It was the last time she would visit Guatemala.

Aissen said that England knew she was nearing the end of her life. By all accounts, it was a life lived intensely, and well. England was student and teacher, listener and leader. She could be gruff and direct. She was also enormously generous and kind. Perhaps she believed that to render one’s unvarnished opinion is a form of kindness. She treasured languages and their speakers, and saw no hierarchy among them. Her work lives on in those who continue documenting and preserving Indigenous languages, and in those who value and uplift this work. That was her message; that is her legacy. ☀



England with AILLA Manager Susan Kung in Guatemala, 2019.



# UT Maya Cluster

The University of Texas at Austin has welcomed four new faculty members who specialize in Maya studies. These newcomers, who started in fall 2021, are part of the Cluster and Interdisciplinary Hiring Initiative of the Office of the Executive Vice President and Provost. The initiative was developed to build on UT's existing strengths, and to take them in new and exciting directions. Several UT faculty worked together to target new lines that would exist at the intersection of archaeology, environment, and religious studies, spanning the hard sciences and the humanities in exciting ways. The new hires that resulted reflect the future of interdisciplinary research in the Maya area, looking at concepts about the environment within Indigenous cosmology, resource exploitation and its changes over time, and human adaptations to changing environments. (The new faculty are Thomas Garrison and Amy Thompson in Geography and the Environment, Iyaxel Cojti Ren in Anthropology, and Mallory Matsumoto in Religious Studies.) Each of these faculty is doing new and innovative research that overlaps with the others in interesting ways. As of now, UT can claim to have the largest community of scholars working in Maya studies anywhere in the world. It's a boon for research and teaching, and it complements the exciting work UT Austin is already known for in Maya archaeology, art, and historical studies.

David Stuart  
Schele Professor of Mesoamerican Art and Writing  
Department of Art and Art History

## MALLORY MATSUMOTO Department of Religious Studies

One of the many fascinating aspects of Classic Maya civilization (250–900 CE) is that a series of common cultural traits appear in settlements that are widely distributed geographically, yet they do not appear to have originated in one central location. “They were

shared among populations that were not only distant in space and time, but were never united as a single polity,” Assistant Professor Mallory Matsumoto explained in a recent online presentation. “In this context of political fragmentation, we still remain pretty ignorant of how this culture developed and spread across the area.”

Matsumoto is an anthropologist whose work bridges archaeology, epigraphy, ethnohistory, and linguistic anthropology to examine language, religion, and material culture in pre-colonial and colonial Maya communities in Mexico and Central America. She earned a PhD in anthropology from Brown University in 2021.

In a talk titled “Circulating Religious Knowledge in Classic Maya Culture,” given in March 2022, Matsumoto brings together her research on Maya hieroglyphs, supernatural Classic Maya scribes, and a phenomenon (and symbol) known as *wahy*, meaning ‘sleep, transform’ or ‘companion spirit’. Below, Matsumoto discusses what brought her to the crossroads of diverse disciplines.

### *What first drew you to Maya studies?*

The potential to combine my interests in archaeology and languages. I was also extremely fortunate to have several teachers along the way, from grade school through graduate school, who encouraged me to think of school and these subjects as contexts where I could thrive. I became interested in archaeology as a kid; growing up in Virginia, I visited a lot of historical sites on school field trips and with my family from a young age. I was also really interested in languages, and I was afraid I'd have to pick one or the other. But as an undergraduate, I learned more about what archaeology and linguistics are really about, as well as about epigraphy, the study of ancient inscriptions. Once I learned that Mesoamerican studies was a space where I could bring it all together, I couldn't resist.

### *What is the connection between studying Classic-era hieroglyphs and delving into the realm of religion and belief systems? What was your path in that regard?*

Since the beginnings of formal Mesoamerican studies in the nineteenth century, there's been a strong focus among scholars on religion and the calendar—in part because that's something that they were really attuned to at the time, in part because it offered an avenue into interpreting sources that no one could read phonetically at the time. That legacy remains. But another aspect of the almost omnipresence of religion in studies of pre-colonial Mesoamerica is





the reality that what tends to get called “religion” really was seamlessly integrated into daily life in a way that nineteenth- and even twenty-first-century European and North American scholars aren’t familiar with from their own lives. So it makes sense that that integration is reflected in scholarship—and is pretty illustrative of my own path, too.

***How do Mayanists know the pronunciation of things written in the Classic period (and others)? For example, how do you know the pronunciation of wahy?***

In short, thanks to several generations of very educated guesswork. What ultimately made Maya hieroglyphs decipherable (as opposed to, say, other older writing systems like Rongorongo on Easter Island) is that there are still several dozen Mayan languages spoken today in the same region where the Classic-period texts were found, so it was possible to connect those texts to known languages. None of these languages is identical to the one that was represented in the hieroglyphs, which researchers now refer to generically as “Classic Mayan,” but they’re all descended from a common, much more ancient ancestor language that linguists call “Proto-Mayan.” Based on detailed comparison of vocabulary and grammar from across all Mayan languages, including from available historical sources, historical linguists and epigraphers (people who study Maya hieroglyphs) have a pretty good idea of where Classic Mayan fits into the language family tree. Most agree that the closest “living” relative of Classic Mayan is a language called Ch’orti’, which is still spoken in eastern Guatemalan and western Honduras.

But, as one would expect for any writing system used for such a long period of time, there was variation, too. Some inscriptions from Yucatán Peninsula show clear influence from Yucatec, for instance, and others, from the area near what’s now the Chiapas–Guatemala border, preserve features that resemble modern-day

Tzeltal, another Mayan language. Epigraphers are still working on a more detailed picture of linguistic variation in Classic Mayan inscriptions. At the same time, we still don’t know for sure how to pronounce some things. We don’t know how to read some hieroglyphs; most of the writing system has been deciphered by now, but not all of it. Even when we do have syllabic spellings of words, we don’t always know how a particular word was spoken out loud. In short, there’s still plenty more to be figured out.

***What does your fieldwork look like?***

As an archaeologist, my fieldwork is usually very hands on. I spent a month in early summer 2022 excavating at the site of Lacanja Tzeltal in Chiapas, Mexico, as part of a project directed by Andrew Scherer (Brown) and Charles Golden (Brandeis). But there have also been times when my “fieldwork” has more focused on visiting other archaeological sites or museums to examine artifacts there, or even going to archives to look at older photos of objects or sites that may look very different today or, in some cases, have since deteriorated or gone missing altogether. Similarly, as an ethnohistorian, I’m not “in the field”; I’m usually in archives paging through manuscripts—or, especially during pandemic times, scrolling through scans or online finding aids—to track down information relevant to the topic at hand.

***What courses will you be teaching in the coming academic year, and what can students expect to focus on with you?***

This fall, I’m teaching Introduction to the Study of Religion and an intro course on Classic Maya hieroglyphic writing (through Linguistics). In the spring, there will be a graduate seminar on language and religion in the colonial Spanish Americas, plus an undergraduate seminar on early Mesoamerican religions.



Matsumoto at Budsilha, an archaeological site in Chiapas, Mexico.



**AMY E. THOMPSON**  
Department of Geography and the Environment

In her research, Assistant Professor Amy E. Thompson uses trans-disciplinary approaches of geospatial methods with traditional archaeological techniques to assess wealth inequality, differential access to resources, and community formation among the ancient and modern Maya communities. With the help of geographic information systems (GIS), she models smaller social communities of the past, such as neighborhoods and districts that existed within ancient cities. She studies inequality by assessing variations in house size of these ancient communities. “Like cities today, ancient cities were not homogenous,” says Thompson. “They were diverse in their composition and had relatively high degrees of wealth inequality.”

Thompson earned her PhD in 2019 from the University of New Mexico (UNM), and was a Bass Postdoctoral Fellow at the Field Museum of Natural History in 2020–2021. She was awarded the UNM Tom L. Popejoy prize for her dissertation, “Comparative Processes of Sociopolitical Development in the Foothills of the Southern Maya Mountains.” Here, she answers questions about her current work and future course offerings.

*Please talk about your current research and where you conduct your fieldwork.*

I have two current research projects—one in Belize and one in Honduras. I am establishing the initial foundation of the ancient Maya



cities in southern Belize and mapping previously excavated areas using new geospatial technologies in Honduras. These cities date to nearly 2,000 years ago and were occupied for centuries. In Belize, I conduct a pedestrian survey where I hike through the neotropical forests documenting the size and location of ancient houses; this survey is guided by light detection and ranging (lidar) data and handheld GPS units. Then, I excavate small test units in a select sample of houses to understand when the houses were constructed and the material goods found within them. Finally, I evaluate the settlement patterns of these ancient cities and differential access to resources through time, assessing the drivers of settlement selection as it articulates with wealth inequality. These results are directly applicable to modern communities, as we choose to live in certain locations for specific reasons—for example, being close to UT, where we can afford to live, or in a certain neighborhood that we like. Additionally, my work in Belize engages in a community-based archaeology, which occurs alongside modern Maya communities.

My second project takes place at Copán, Honduras, where I use geospatial technologies, including a total station and terrestrial lidar, to map an intricate tunnel system under the Copán acropolis. The tunnel system was excavated by archaeologists as a way to uncover and document buried temples. Mapping these tunnels in 3D is useful for the continued conservation of the ancient Maya temples, which have well-preserved paints, stuccos, and façades, and to gain a better understanding of how the ancient buildings articulate with each other. These tunnels are inaccessible to the public due to their delicate nature, but by using lidar we can create virtual reality (VR) of these spaces using 3D data, allowing people to experience them in a VR.

*How do you engage in community-based archaeology?*

My community-based archaeology focuses on involving local, Indigenous communities in my archaeological research. In Belize, I work with Mopan Maya communities. In addition to receiving permissions and permits from Belizean government agencies to conduct my research (such as the Belizean Institute of Archaeology and the National Institute of Culture and History), I meet with the community to discuss my research questions and objectives. While many archaeological projects hire the same individuals year after year to assist with archaeological excavations each summer, the communities I work with prefer a rotational labor system in which each person only works for one week (or a few days) rather than for the entire field season, which are typically six to eight weeks long. This system was requested by the communities I work with and encourages more financial equality among community members, rather than a single person or family having weeks of pay while others have none. The rotational labor system provides economic opportunity to more community members and allows more people to experience archaeology firsthand.

During the field season, I have the opportunity to work with dozens of people, teaching them about archaeology and how we



use artifacts and features to answer questions about past people. I also learn about modern Maya foodways, cultural traditions, and how to speak Mopan! Finally, as part of my community-based archaeology, I create transparency between the sciences and Indigenous communities. I invite community members to visit the excavations so they can see in person what archaeology is like, even if they cannot work alongside me (I conduct my research in a village of about 800 people and work with only four people each week). I have also taught an archaeology lesson at the local school, and at the end of each field season, I present my findings to the community at an Archaeology Day event by displaying the artifacts we found that season and giving a public presentation.

***What will you be teaching in the coming academic year?***

I am teaching Environmental GIS and Sustainable Maya Geographies: Past to Future in fall 2022 and Field Techniques and Introduction to Human Geography in spring 2023. I am excited to teach Sustainable Maya Geographies for the first time, and I think LLILAS students will find it of particular interest. We will discuss Indigenous peoples living in the Maya region from the earliest occupations to modern Maya communities, and cover topics such as food and chocolate, agriculture, community formation such as neighborhoods, craft production, and inequality.

I am delighted to be a part of the Maya cluster hire at UT Austin! My Maya cluster colleagues and I represent diverse research interests in discrete regions of the Maya world. I hope that our integrated scholarship here at UT will provide a more holistic approach to understanding the ancient Maya and modern Maya communities alike. The four new hires plus the extant scholars of Maya studies strengthen UT as one of the leading institutions in Maya studies. 🌟



The Classic Maya center Lubaantun in southern Belize. Lubaantun means “the place of fallen stones” in Mopan Maya.





# 2023 LOZANO LONG CONFERENCE

## A Water-Centered Perspective on Latin America and the Caribbean

Water is essential for biological life as we know it, but it is also essential for livelihoods ranging from the individual to the community, on regional, national, and transnational scales. It is no coincidence that the phrase *El agua es la vida / Água é vida* is the central slogan of many environmentally centered struggles throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, from ethnically mixed urban and rural sectors to Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities. It conveys a fundamental message about the perceived vitality of water.

This spring 2023 conference will explore the central role that water has played historically, and continues to play, in the evolution of the human/nature-other-than-humans nexus in Latin America and the Caribbean. We will explore the topic of water from a variety of disciplines and perspectives, including archaeology, architecture, earth sciences, ecology, geography, history, public policy, sociology, and Indigenous, race, religious, women's, and gender studies.

Associate Professor Carlos E. Ramos-Scharrón, Organizer  
LLILAS / Department of Geography and the Environment