Function, cultural difference and community life: conservation and restoration projects in indigenous places in Mexico

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Abstract

As part of an international movement promoted by intergovernmental bodies and academic institutions, Mexico has developed its own methodology for the conservation and restoration of indigenous objects, spaces and territories; unlike in other countries, there is a much closer approximation to anthropological and cultural studies than to site or administrative management. The advances in this area have been notable, but there is still a long way to go. This essay describes a specific methodology that has emerged from within an institutional context that is interested in understanding the cultural, social and political practices of each community, as well as the specific technical aspects of the problem to be addressed. It also explores some pending problems and challenges; especially those that rely on a deeper analysis of the cultural practices related to objects and buildings, and the marginalization and poverty conditions of most of the small towns and villages where many of the conservation and restoration efforts are carried out. It also takes into account the repercussions on the interactions between government institutions and community representatives.

Keywords: *Indigenous groups, restoration and conservation, cultural heritage, methodological and treatment approaches, poverty and marginalization.*

> Yorem Nokas *(for Mayo language speakers) is the person who speaks our own or another indigenous language. In the environment in which I work, because I am a rural teacher, I see their faces, their doubts and their fears, they do not think the same as the rest, they do not feel the same as the rest and therefore they do not have the same opportunities as the rest.*
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> *Being a Mayo, I would like to speak (or at least understand) the triqui of those children who have emigrated to Sonora due to their parents' work. They are trapped in their language as I am trapped in the other two that I know how to speak..., but even so, the children and I belong to a world in which language can no longer be necessary and those looks and gestures can become a straightforward language.*
>
> Rosario Baygo, October 2018

1.

The discourse on the social legitimacy of cultural differences is already part of many public policies in Mexico. It has been introduced gradually in institutional programs and the degree to which is has been echoed is in accordance with the type of recognition it seeks to vindicate. Today, for example, an indigenous person has the right to a translator who speaks his or her language during any legal process in which they may be involved; this was not the case up until relatively recently.

GROUP OF TRIQUI MAYORDOMAS[1] DRESSING A SCULPTURE IN SAN ANDRÉS CHICAHUAXTLA, OAXACA. *Image: Luis Huidobro, ©CNCPC-INAH.*

Although not always successful, in terms of institutional programs this great step obeys both the democratization of the country (which allows the freedom of speech, the participation of social organizations, public consultation, etc.), as well as a international theoretical discourse that emerged in international circles that largely generates, encourages, studies and supports the implementation of measures of this kind roughly for the last forty years.

Evidently, cultural diversity was not "discovered" in the 1980s, since it is a subject of study of in the fields of anthropology, comparative studies, or those of gender, philosophy, geography, as well as a large number of others. In fact, cultural diversity has always been present, since the conquest of the American continent and before. The main thing, however, is that it gradually became important generically: partially as early as the end of the 1990s, and fully after the year 2000. Those fields that did not have at least one great theorist writing on this subject, lost legitimacy and validity (Anaya, 2004; Díaz-Polanco, 2003; Hernández-Díaz, 2007; Kymlicka, 1996; Sartori, 2001; Touraine, 1997; Villoro, 1998). Regarding legislation and public and cultural policies, mere analysis was transcended, and many policies of action and interaction related to cultural diversity were implemented; several of them had tangible practical consequences, such as the right to consultation, the legitimization of uses and customs, and territorial political autonomy, among others.

At the same time, the explosion of plurality in its ethnic aspect occurred: the conflicts in the Balkans and East Timor, the Zapatista uprising in Mexico or the Tamil separatism in India proved –in case it had not been understood clearly before– that the years of homogenization of public life and the social demands of a country did not erase cultural differences or local feelings of belonging. The public concern for cultural recognition that appeared to be exclusively concerned with difference was then overshadowed by the violence of conflicts and nations' fears of being the victims of territorial secession, and the conservation and restoration field by the severe destruction of heritage sites and cultural assets (Stovel, 2008).

[1] The *mayordomos* are the traditional stewards of religious heritage.

This was especially strong for the theoretical and practical areas related to the conceptualization of cultural heritage and, also, for conservation-restoration, since this shift encouraged questions about its nature and its tasks. Especially since the conformation of the discipline as such, almost monolithically, its main conceptual guidelines had circumvented the role of users of objects and buildings, and had directed its efforts toward maintaining attributes and qualities anchored in the tangible or artistic qualities of the objects or buildings to be treated (Wijesuriya, 2013).

They had overlooked, for example, that the symbolic contents of objects depend on their cultural contexts, and that interventions that were often based exclusively on the ideas the West has regarding matter and its conservation, were empty or, at the very least, innocuous. In some cases they even altered and/or violated the identity matrix of the group related to those objects or properties; identity is one of the most important reasons for which the concept of cultural heritage is maintained, for example (Cf. Giménez, 2000, 2004; Machuca, 2004; Pérez Ruíz, 2003, 2004, 2008).

In the case of conservation and restoration, the main representatives and promoters of a new trend concerned with the specific meanings of each good within its context and the cultural matrices that produced and preserved them were, and still are, Miriam Clavir, Herb Stovel, Dean Sully, Gamini Wijesuriya, Webber Ndoro, Denis Byrne, as well as some interdisciplinary groups of specialists such as those who make up the ICOMOS Australia or the group who drafted the *Nara document*.

The great conceptual or practical milestones that complemented, or directly attacked, the *Athens charter*, the writings of Cesare Brandi, and/or the *Venice charter* (to cite some cases of prescriptive documents in the field at that time) and that marked a pillar at the time, were the *Burra charter* of 1979 –undoubtedly a pioneering text– the *Nara document* of 1994 and its consequences in each continent (the *San Antonio declaration* of 1996, the Zimbabwe meeting in 2000 and the *Riga charter* of the same year), the *Ask first* guide of the Australian Heritage Commission of 2002, and the book *Preserving what is valued* by Miriam Clavir of that same year.

After these initial texts, we sought it was searched access to the so-called "cultural significance," especially of sites, through the study of the possible values present in them, although not all the above-mentioned authors favored this approach at the same level. The *Burra charter* was fundamental to this impulse, and so were the publications on the subject by the Getty Conservation Institute (Cf. Avrami, Mason and de la Torre, 2000; De la Torre, 2002).

Little by little, however, this approach lost its influence because it implied that a specialist or a group of specialists were the ones who had the last word about the conservation, restoration, use and preservation needs of the sites, and not necessarily their direct owners (Poulios, 2010). Also because in most of the "assessments of significance" values (as they were referred to) were confused with the attributes and intrinsic qualities of the objects, or tautological considerations were made where value was included as part of the description of qualities (Cf. Schneider, 2011).

Fortunately, by 2005, with the *Faro convention* and ICCROM´s the publications on religious heritage (Cf. Ndoro, 2005; Stovel, Price and Killick, 2005), the panorama became more aligned to the way in which this issue is conceptualized today. This is summarized with great clarity in several texts by Gamini Wijesuriya (Court and Wijesuriya, 2016; Wijesuriya, 2013, 2015,

2017; Ndoro and Wijesuriya, 2015) and in an article by Dean Sully entitled *Conservation theory and practice. Materials, values, and people in heritage conservation* of 2013, without implying that the two previous approaches –the one that favors the analysis of the fabric, and the one that favors the analysis of the values present in an object or a site/territory– have been completely discarded (or that it is necessary to discard them).

2.

The conservation-restoration carried out by the *Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* (National Institute of Anthropology and History, INAH) in small rural areas of Mexico is generally implemented by the *Coordinación Nacional de Conservación del Patrimonio Cultural* (CNCPC, the National Conservation Centre at INAH), an area of the institution that has a specific department to serve and guide social groups regarding technical conservation and preservation issues. Paradoxically, this work, carried out for three decades, began to take place without much knowledge as to what was being done in other countries. And if it did, it was probably influenced the so- called "multiculturalism" at the end of the 20th century.[2] In other words, it was influenced by purely socio-political processes that spoke about the end of the idea of a neutral nation-state, and which positioned cultural diversity, as we saw in the international context, but without specific references to the work of the field conservation and restoration in other parts of the world, except for the *Burra charter* and the *Nara document.* Even this is just a speculation, since Mexico has worked without a direct orientation toward the management of sacred or heritage sites, as happens in other parts of the world, where management is considered as a sub-area of conservation[3] (Australia, Canada, the United States, Chile in Latin America, and perhaps Great Britain...).

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[2] "Multiculturalism" was coined in the 1960s by the Canadian government to refer to a new policy, in the context of the Canadian Francophone movement; a policy that could represent the three social entities of the country: Anglophone, Francophone and First Nations (English-speakers as the ethnic majority and the other two as ethnic minorities). Although this treatment did not satisfy either the French speakers or the First Nations, later the multiculturalist policy was extended to embrace the immigrants, also considered as ethnic minorities and over time the concept began to refer to the various citizenships segmented by culture, language and history, etc., that exist within a democratic state. By expanding over the years to other situations, contexts and disciplines, multiculturalism opened the possibility for all cultural groups to be treated and studied as minorities (Barabás 2006, Díaz Polanco 2006): this is intimately linked to identity policies and policies by recognition, it reevaluates devalued identities and attempts to change patterns of representation and communication that marginalize certain groups (Heyes 2012, Song 2010, Taylor and Gutmann 1993, Young 2000).
As in the field of political philosophy and social sciences, the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia are countries fundamentally concerned about dealing with these issues in conservation and restoration; this does not mean that other latitudes will not work on these issues, but the publications that circulated in the world at the time, come mainly from these countries. The Indian Subcontinent and Latin America, as regions, have been interested in the issue, being particularly religiously and culturally mixed areas, and have always developed publications and activities in this regard, but colonialism also goes through academia and international institutions (hence It would be interesting, for example, to carry out an exercise in the compilation and translation of texts from these regions, and others, such as Sub-Saharan Africa, Muslim countries in Africa and Asia, Eurasia, East Asia, etc., from 1990 to approximately 2010 (which is when the proposal of "people-centered conservation" was consolidated in ICCROM and the subject was widely disseminated).

[3] This is also a broad discussion that is problematized in our countries, especially in the definition, scope and conceptualization of the discipline (is conservation undertaken?, do we restore?, is it correct to talk about conservation-restoration or restoration-conservation?, etc. For a brief analysis on the subject, please see the prologue of *Construir Teoría* by Magar and Schneider, 2018).

COMMUNITY MEETING, SANTA MARÍA ACAPULCO. *Image: Diego Ángeles, ©CNCPC-INAH.*

INAH's first projects were totally experimental and as a result, included many errors of very different types (fortunately, material can be rescued from them to show very relevant aspects of the way in which the Mexican state and the cultural practices of indigenous people in the country colide, so they are not necessarily useless efforts).[4,5]

After a few years, the general paths had been laid out in several projects, and today they are only being modified according to the specificities, intentions and scope of the projects, and the characteristics of each locality[6] (its situation during the Conquest and other historical factors, as well as the political and religious operability, poverty, local and national violence, current economy and/or isolation, all very specific aspects of indigenous reality in Latin America).

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[4] Some parts of this text pick up fragments of the 2017 text "¿De quiénes son las cosas?: ¿de ustedes o nosotros?" ("Who do these things belong to?: Are they yours or ours?") published in the anniversary bulletin of the *Colegio de Etnólogos y Antropólogos Sociales de México*.

[5] For this, the work reports of the projects of the Mixtec sierra of Oaxaca from 1997 to 2001 can be reviewed or, for a general analysis of these problems, see Jaspersen, 2018.

[6] In Latin American countries, another approach that has been extremely popular in addition to multiculturalism, is known as "interculturalism". It comprises a pedagogic proposal aiming at strengthening the link among indigenous communities and with society in general; its main characteristic is a more in depth approach to social sciences and pragmatism, or at least to the existing reality in countries with a high level of diversity. This alternative not only focuses on the minority groups within a country, but on all its social groups. Its goal is for deliberation, having a better knowledge of the "otherness", and creating of specific and casuistic proposals (rather than the creation of pieces of legislation and rights). There is belief that it will help in achieving the integration of ethnic diversity in the daily life of every person, based on a relation of cultural equality. The practical ways in which these proposals need to be developed and the concrete scope they may have, –or if they can have satisfactory practical consequences–, derives from various very interesting debates (Campos, 2006; Fraser y Honneth, 2003; Ossio, 2006; Parekh, 2000; Villoro, 2001, 2007). The work presented here is partially inspired on this conceptual proposal and tool.

The purpose of this text is precisely to stop and take a look at some examples that expose this complexity and reveal part of a mutual confusion of the community representatives and the specific representatives of the governmental cultural institutions. I would also like to point out that, although conservation-restoration in Mexico has managed to accommodate the demands and rights of many social groups in the decision-making processes of intervention –mainly in cases of direct possession of venerated objects and heritage spaces–, we have not yet managed to develop an in-depth understanding of the multiple meanings that communities give their sacred objects and to plan conservation treatments accordingly. One reason for this is that we generally try to apply, as it is still occurring in the rest of the world, deontological concepts that do not correspond to the purpose of their use and function within the group. Also, most of the time we forget that what is sought during the festivities and offerings that involve these objects, is to generate, not only relationships with some or multiple deities, but, above all, processes of community intersubjectivity (Magazine, 2015).

TRANSPORT OF IMAGES IN THE TZOTZIL COMMUNITY OF ZINACANTÁN, CHIAPAS.
Imagen: Sección de Restauración, ©Centro INAH Chiapas-INAH.

Finally, indigenous rural teacher Rosario Antonio Baygo says that although it is very difficult to access a culture different from one's own, bridges can always be built. However, as is in his own case, it is essential to know that in Latin American countries, otherness, apart from segregating as it happens in almost the entire world, is often accompanied by inequality. Not taking into consideration the poverty of the users of this type of cultural heritage is also the cause of many misunderstandings between the parties, for example, by not identifying in our work processes of verticality (after all, "we are the government"), racism, marginality, etc.

3.

As Ananda Coomaraswamy proposed at the beginning of the last century, the work of art and the object of religious use produce a common intrinsic pleasure, but we must know how to look at them to fully understand them. If you do not know the religious, spiritual or metaphysical dimension that produced a certain piece of art, you do not fully understand anything about the object. How then should one restore it then?

VIRGIN OF LORETO FROM THE TEMPLE OF MESA DEL NAYAR, NAYARIT. *Image: Renata Schneider, ©CNCPC-INAH.*

The indigenous communities that live in Mexico today are not identical, not even very similar to those of the past, but they are undoubtedly different from other cultural and social groups that currently exist in Mexico. This constitutes some success in maintaining an updated alterity capable of constantly transforming itself into different historical and political contexts (Bartolomé, 2008). In this sense, the original peoples in Mexico have the right to exist and live by their own rules not because they represent the remnants of an immemorial past, but because they are a consequence of the decisions that their members have always taken to accommodate their present and future (Viqueira, 1994).

The objects used in their rituals, offerings, dances, etc., have also survived because they fulfill very precise functions within these performative activities (or intangible heritage, as they are now called); our work as restorers implies, therefore, the understanding that an object's use is its essence, and that if it deteriorates and no longer fulfills a specific function, in a best

case scenario it can be conserved, but can also be discarded and replaced by another, since fabric is subordinated to meaning and not the other way around. In summary, objects function as long as they belong to a group's future life project; if not, they no longer function (or are misinterpreted), and they are no longer valuable to them.

One of our most substantial differences is based on normativity. Each of these worlds has a different set of norms, as does the Western world on which conservation and restoration were set as a discipline. Examples like the *Mayamata,* which opens this volume of *Conversaciones,* show us that for hundreds of years each culture has been interested in maintaining certain meanings, and that is why it has generated a series of precepts that help it achieve it. The convergence is in the search of morals; in this sense, the content of the laws is what we must carefully analyze (in "their world" and in "our world"), highlighting what they seek to achieve and not only what they enunciate.

Unlike other regions of the planet, Mexico was not only colonized, but also conquered. The beliefs held today by many of these people (which function as cultural units in themselves, as previously mentioned) have Catholic matrix elements very deeply imbricated in other religious processes dependent on agricultural cycles: sometimes they are quite similar to Catholicism in the *mestizo* communities of the rest of the country, sometimes they are barely related. At least, and in practically all cases, the festivities of the Holy Week and those honoring patron saints are observed and celebrated. It is essential to take a closer look at these two cycles to be able to understand the uses and meanings of the objects and the spaces where we work, since in general we are asked to restore collections of objects derived from a Catholic matrix. Likewise, analyzing the religious cycles of the wet and the dry seasons can be of great use in defining conservation and maintenance strategies.[7]

PORFIRIO MONTERO, INHABITANT OF SANTA MARÍA ACAPULCO, SAN LUIS POTOSÍ, stabilizing and consolidating a mural painting. *Image: Norma García, ©CNCPC-INAH.*

[7] In Mexico there are basically two seasons: the dry one, which coincides with the Catholic holidays and which goes, more or less, from the *Día de Muertos* (All Saints festivity) in November until the end of Holy Week, in April, and the wet season, which runs from May until the end of October and that is related to agricultural activities and beliefs.

It is also possible to speak of other similarities and confluences among communities: in practically all Mexican localities with a majority indigenous population where conservation and restoration work is carried out, the idea that there is a fundamentally local *cultural heritage*, but that at the same time belongs to the Nation, is paradoxical and generates interpretations of all sorts. Working with that concept or discarding it when it is not relevant requires a careful process that must be revealed gradually and that involves different ways of proceeding in an indigenous community. In the cases of communities to which these mean absolutely nothing, it is then necessary to build a common language of another kind and ignore the term.

Likewise, in almost all cases there are both material and spiritual elements (De la Mora, 2011). These objects are not interconnected in all cases. It is very helpful to establish methods to detect their qualities and their differences (as well as trying to know if spiritual ones are connected in any way with the objects we work with). In this context, having specialists in anthropology to support conservation efforts is essential.

Perhaps the most problematic aspect related to the field of conservation and restoration, is that of previous interventions, some which have been done empirical and even gross and defective and that have invaded or covered the initial appearance of the objects. Nevertheless, they have fulfilled a function and have been useful for the purposes of use and veneration of the sculptural images (or the canvases, the liturgical objects, the mural decoration, the altarpieces, etc.). Expressing our disapproval of this practice of "painting over" doesn't just offend communities, in fact, many do not even realize that we are condemning it. If the cleaning or the removal of chromatic layers is carried out, it should not be done for deontological reasons nor for aesthetic ones (since we lack a common aesthetic language). This problem can sometimes be confronted with arguments of a historical nature ("what the people from the past saw", "what their grandparents tried to communicate and admire"), but the solution and possible cleaning will depend, as in all cases, on each community, given that it is impossible to convey a universal concept of decay.

However, and on the contrary, there is a tendency towards conservation that cannot be ignored and that seems to be shared by both worlds. This should be our starting point, since in addition to the other two points already mentioned (the seasonal cycles of celebrations, the presence of two kinds of elements and the lack of a shared thematic vocabulary), they seem to be our primary indicators.

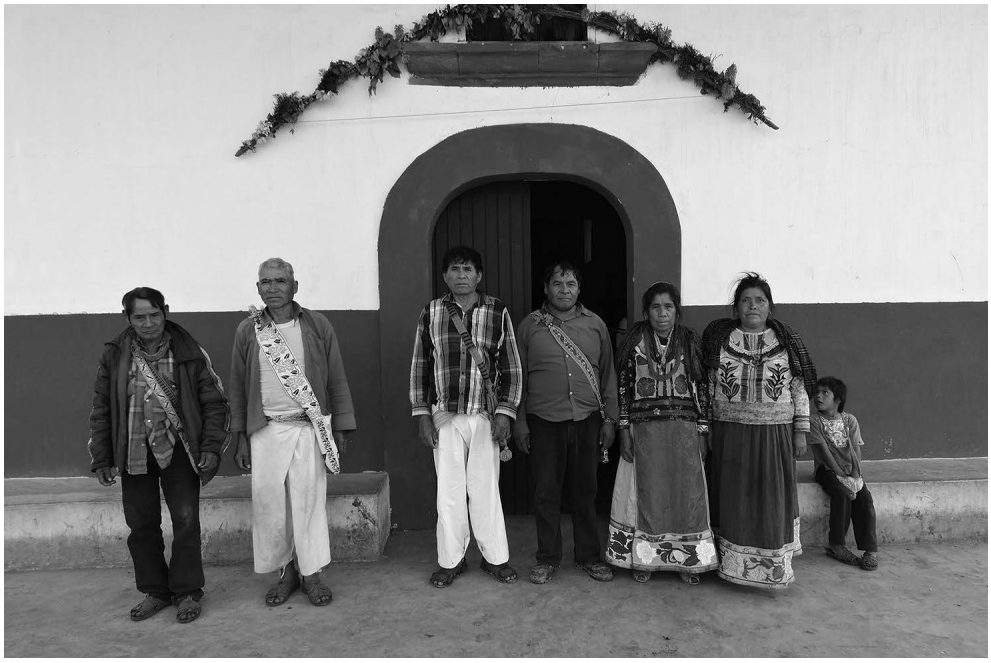
In order to explain it better, we can take a look at two case studies that reinforce this idea: the anthropologist Pedro Pitarch (2013) considers that in San Juan Cancuc, Chiapas, a Tzeltal region, "the erosion of the saints is the product of their sacred identity," and that their psychic power overflows and consumes their body. With this he somehow assumes that in Cancuc the Catholic saints are all the more holy if they are materially deteriorated. Pitarch's explanation is very suggestive and detailed, and is based on local conceptions of the human body and of the saints that were collected and carefully documented during several seasons of field work. Paradoxically, most of the sculptures have previous interventions, especially attempts of structural restructuring and many examples of painting over the previous layer (personal communication María Rosa García Sauri and Nayeli Pacheco, October 2016). These interventions are difficult to detect by the untrained eye, but they certainly show an intention moving in the direction of conservation.

Another case is that of the Town of Laguna, New Mexico, USA, where the ceiling made of buffalo hide that hangs from the presbytery represents in some way the sacred history of the community. For the Keres Indians of Laguna, the day that the ceiling finally decays, their tribe will disappear. They feel it is important to leave that process to the will of time and natural

REPAINTED SCULPTURE WITH ITS *MAYORDOMO* IN SAN JUAN CANCUC, CHIAPAS.
Image: Nayeli Pacheco, ©INAH.

forces. During the microchemical analysis of the ceiling's materials (Schneider, 2002) it was possible to verify the presence of synthetic pigments produced in the 20th century covering areas where the initial polychrome was already substantially deteriorated. As we see, the intention moving in the direction of conservation is often underestimated; it is a very deep-seated impulse that can even ignore other community precepts.

Fortunately, and thanks to this, the decisions of conservation and restoration interventions can generally be shared. However, as mentioned above, there are still problems of communication and mutual understanding between both sides because, although it is possible to negotiate, there will always be an aspect that will remain unsolvable since the languages and intentions are very different from each other. Coming to this realization is fundamental and is perhaps one of the most interesting parts of our work, since we collaborate, project by project, in retrieving substantial differences that remind us of the vitality and importance of cultural diversity. Let's pause for a moment to look at the methodology used to work in these places and refer also to this complexity and illustrate it with some examples.



CORA *MAYORDOMOS* FROM SANTA TERESA DEL NAYAR, NAYARIT. After a meeting to prepare a field season of conservation work. *Image: Renata Schneider, ©CNCPC-INAH.*

4.

The project that I have coordinated for more than twenty years is almost always carried out in places with a high degree of marginalization and important indicators of poverty, headed by a traditional government or a specific group of people dedicated to the care of what is being restored (usually Catholic religious images, but also parish archives, colonial maps that consign territorial boundaries, ceremonial objects and/or architectural decorative elements of temples). These are places where it is easy to detect a certain, or a high level of hierarchical structure in decision-making (whether or not there are tensions between community groups), in which, in addition, they allow us to directly observe certain social and political processes (often already studied by other disciplines for which we sometimes have published ethnographic or sociopolitical studies, etc.).

However, it is important to consider that, despite having common features, it is impossible to make a generic characterization of each community since in practice each locality behaves as a cultural unit onto itself. This is the result of diverse factors which will not be dealt with in this text. In fact, they are related to very different reasons such as the way in which that specific region of the country was evangelized, how the independence was experienced there, how isolated it is from the rest of the country, its internal forms of organization, and its dependence on agricultural cycles, among others.[8]

[8] "... If we emphasize the organizational character, many of the indigenous communities that belong to the same ethnic group could be understood as autonomous ethnic groups, since they behave as totalizing organizational and ascriptive formations, in which they even generate a residential identity, in other words, it is circumscribed to the community level. This supposes that each community would manifest itself as a primary organizational level [...], which would induce to characterize it as a singular ethnic group resulting from the historical process of colonial fragmentation..." (Bartolomé 2004: 54). This is a proposal by Miguel Alberto Bartolomé (dating from 1997, approximately) to refer to a specific fact of the national indigenous reality. In my personal experience I have observed the same thing, at least in the communities of the south of the country (this explains, for example, that there are so many municipalities in Oaxaca, 418 which are completely indigenous, many of them behaving as an independent cultural entity. It must be said, however, that in the north in some groups there is the idea of belonging to a specific nation: the Yaqui nation, the Seri nation, the Tohono O'odham nation, etc.).

To situate the works in an operational framework, it is important to mention that we usually work in situ for periods of three months per year (sometimes in two places each year); the amount of time spent each place depends upon the collections. Because of the work that INAH carries out is mandated, we are only allowed to treat historical objects, even though in the communities many contemporary objects are equally important (and every effort is made to give them equal discursive importance even if we do not undertake the direct treatments.)[9] The different-sized teams are made up of professional restorers and several local auxiliaries who are trained in specific activities, as each case requires, and who also act as communication channels among the various sectors of each area. The conservation work that is done is totally free. The only thing required of the community is a space to house the team.

In each place, we start out by identifying specifically what the community expects from the conservation and restoration actions that it has requested;[10] we then carry out the interventions treatments and finish with educational activities such as the preparation of inventories of cultural objects, the implementation of workshops and courses on preventive conservation, the elaboration of clothing for vows made to the sculptures, the handling of sculptures in processions, the traditional waterproofing of roofs, etc.

The assessment work is the most important and is carried out simultaneously with some "test" conservation actions that show the community what the scope of the work could be at the end of the project. Thus, during the first session of field work in each place, we are guided by the following ten groups of questions (these questions are parallel to the specific technical problems of conservation and restoration in each case), and that are refined during each new field season. Some of them are solved by restorers, others are the work of anthropologists hired for that purpose:

a. Which are the power groups in each community? How is the community organized structurally? (in general, but not always, the structure derives from a system of fixed positions, which mixes the civil and secular functions of traditional government with functions related to religious activities and codes, commonly called *costumbre* (custom) and that derive from a mixture of agricultural Mesoamerican beliefs and Catholicism).

b. Which will we consider the main group of communication and internal decision-making? (The council of elders, the traditional governor, the groups of *mayordomos* –or traditional stewards–, those in charge of the patronal festivity?, etc.).

c. What were the characteristics of the conquest and of the evangelization in the place? Was the process for the conquerors difficult or easy? Were there rebellions during the colonial period and in modern Mexico? Does the community currently participate in a socio-political vindication movement?

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[9] INAH divides the conservation and restoration work into three areas: one area is dedicated to the conservation of immovable heritage (*Coordinación Nacional de Monumentos Históricos*, National Coordination of Historic Monuments), another to the conservation of movable heritage and decorative elements (the aforementioned CNCPC), and another to the archaeological heritage (*Coordinación Nacional de Arqueología*, National Coordination of Archeology). The latter does not have specialized conservation areas, so the attention is provided by members of the first two. INAH has under its legal and normative custody palaeontological, pre-Hispanic and historical sites and objects (dating until 1899; after 1900 the heritage is under the responsibility of the *Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes* –National Institute of Fine Arts–, both depending on the Ministry of Culture). By law, all sites and objects prior to the Conquest belong to the state and cannot be in the hands of individuals unless they are registered collections; neither can they be moved abroad. In the case of the CNCPC, as already stated, there is a specific area dedicated to providing services to social groups, not just indigenous communities. The restorers that are assigned to this area have methodological and conceptual freedom to carry out the projects that we coordinate, under our own strategies that are reviewed occasionally by the whole group. The area not only has long-range projects but it also promotes and imparts courses and workshops, responds to reports of theft of sacred art, provides guidance in the matter of fundraising, and mediates in conflicts related to conservation actions, among many other tasks.

[10] With the exception of a few cases chosen due to political pressure, INAH only conserves and restores in communities that have expressly requested its participation.

d. What is the purpose of the objects or places in each location? How are they venerated? For what? Is the veneration system complex or does it involve one object at a time? Are bone remains or natural forces or water sources worshiped along with historical objects? Can women carry male-objects or not? Or can men carry female objects? Do the objects still have their initial dedication or has it been transformed?

e. If there are *mayordomías* or positions, are they for life or do they change annually? This depends, for example, on the type of capacity-building courses we provide and even if it is worth giving them: in places where the position changes every year, it is very difficult to ensure that basic preventive measures can be implemented year after year, and therefore intervention treatments must be planned to be more durable. On the other hand, in populations with lifetime positions or given through vows, the courses have worked very well and the recommendations and measures established by both sides in the workshops are carried out regularly.

f. Once the work has begun, how to share the technical decisions in each field season? It is important to remember what is strictly "artistic" is almost never the specific reason for the attention of the indigenous communities. Also, do they still have experts in the manufacture of some objects or in the construction of traditional houses if a building of this type is preserved and restored?

g. How is the group doing the restoration treatments inserted in the dynamics of resignification and what responsibilities derive from being involved or not? How not to impose other materials different from the appropriate and local ones? Or how to protect the fabric and adapt it to the specific practices of the place? (for example, in the case of polychrome sculptures subject to river immersions, processions and wakes in the corn fields with severe temperature and humidity changes that damage the fabric, etc.).

h. For our discipline, what do the expected results contribute to the study and development of restoration and its techniques of preservation and direct intervention treatment? What does the project contribute to in terms of hard data to anthropology and other social sciences? (Should it provide them?)

i. How to avoid being vertical when we know that the funding for the intervention treatments comes from the state and we are dealing with poorer communities that need temporary jobs and also to have things restored? How to negotiate Western concepts of intervention with their own concepts towards what it means to restore? Or, on the contrary, how not to fall into the complacent attitude of accepting what the "community" wants? In other words, who is the owner of things at the time of decision-making: the state or the people? How to be co-owners?

j. How to follow up and manage the sequence of post-intervention supervision? Is it necessary to do it, or, as it has happened before, will it be assumed that the community will be able to preserve the objects two or three hundred years longer? What courses should be prepared later, on what topics, with what regularity, etc.?

Although these questions are very useful and have guided us adequately so far because they apparently deal with those points that were designated as problematic in the previous section, there is still a third aspect to develop; it is the liberal idea of consultation rights adopted by specialists that is not entirely resolved. For example, which property rights arise when certain things that for years were the problem (regarding their conservation) only of a small social group, are actually "discovered" and then "protected" by INAH, or by some other governmental or religious agency? What are the social and economic consequences of this change, independently of the great advances that already exist in terms of participation in consultations and technical decisions, especially in the joint definition of the final appearance of the objects?

5.

In order to show examples of our work in these places, but above all, for some complicated and unresolved cases, I will talk about problems that were presented in intervention projects in very distant and different indigenous localities, such as Mesa del Nayar in the Sierra de Nayarit (a Cora or Náayarite place), the Village of Tórim, one of the eight Yaqui or Yoreme people of Sonora and Santa María Acapulco, in San Luis Potosí (a Pame or Xi'ói enclave).[11]

The temple of Our Lady of the Assumption of Santa María Acapulco, in San Luis Potosí, was struck by lightning in July 2007. The temple burned down completely and through a series of works of anthropological and conservation-restoration prospection (Schneider, 2014; Vázquez *et al.*, 2007) the decision was made to reproduce the objects and buildings that had been lost in the fire, for the purpose of recovering the sacred space. This was important for the daily and symbolic reproduction of a large part of the "Pame" activities, which at that time and even today, revolve around this church built in the 18th century by Franciscan friars and indigenous relocated in reductions.[12] The church and its objects were recovered almost in their entirety (both restored and reproduced objects) and, after a period of almost eight years, in use once again. This means that candles are used there, people eat inside, minuets with guitar and violin are played, people dance and pray, and romances are born, among other things (the Pames care little for the maintenance of the building).

Lighting has never come from electricity, so recently several members of the community have asked the representatives of INAH, federal and local, to do electric installations. The institutional representatives have refused to do so on the grounds that there could be another fire and because of a lack of effective maintenance (we have tried to provide training courses for this purpose on several occasions. However, due to the fact that the stewardships and other positions are annual, and not life-lasting, it is impossible to obtain a sustainable base of people related to the church). This situation continues to generate friction in assemblies and work meetings: the traditional authorities have accepted our refusal, but they feel it as an imposed decision. After a long conversation with the current traditional governor, who complained about the vertical and powerful presence of the government in his town, it became obvious that no matter how much was said and thought that the project of recovery of the temple was done for the community and based on their wishes, the people of Santa María feel that the church is no longer theirs, but rather on loan by INAH... so much so, that they cannot even install lights in it.

The light problem is not the only one. During the reproduction of the heritage elements lost in the fire, some material was reproduced, but not the wooden curved ceiling (coffered ceiling) that separates the interior of the temple from the palm roof. The ceiling was originally profusely painted with various motifs related to evangelization and the mendicant orders that catechized New Spain. Unfortunately, the photographs we have of this element have a distorted perspective; they are blurred and only cover a part, they are grainy in black and white. The community has been told on several occasions that it is not possible to reproduce those images… or at least in cannot be done by a restorer because restorers are limited by a series of very precise regulations that would be violated if a invented decoration is added; however, they could perhaps paint the temple since it is theirs after all.

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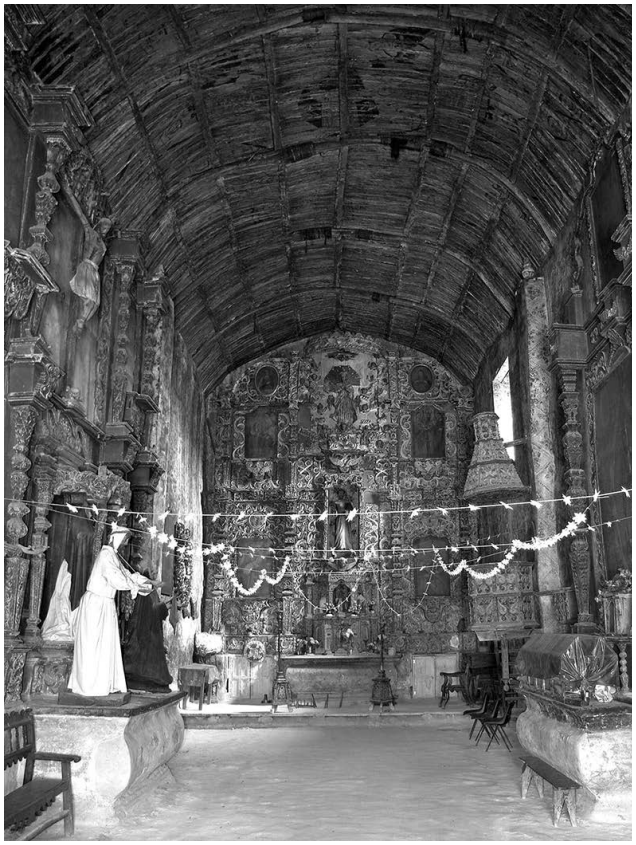
[11] Based on the 2010 National Census, the results of the National Population Council tell us that all these towns have high marginalization: Santa Catarina, where Santa María Acapulco is located, is in the 40th place of marginalization among the 2463 municipalities and 16 city halls of the country (number one is the most marginalized and number 2479 the least marginalized). The Nayar is in the fourth position. Tórim is in a municipality of low marginalization, Guaymas, but the Yaqui settlements of the municipality are extremely marginalized: in some there is not even a health sector clinic. Tórim is very close to Ciudad Obregón, a very large city in the north of the country and that does act in its favor to be particularly integrated into the national context, although many communities with a predominantly indigenous population are much more "Westernized" than in the other three places. As we can see in almost the entire country, cultural difference seems to be equated with inequality (Bartolomé, 2018).

[12] Reductions were settlements created by the Spanish during the colonial period. The Spanish relocated indigenous groups into settlements, which were modeled on towns and villages in Spain.



INTERIOR OF THE TEMPLE OF SANTA MARÍA ACAPULCO IN DECEMBER 2006. *Image: Gabriel Martínez, ©CNCPC-INAH.*

INTERIOR OF THE TEMPLE OF SANTA MARÍA ACAPULCO IN JULY 2007. *Image: Renata Schneider, ©CNCPC-INAH.*

INTERIOR OF THE TEMPLE OF SANTA MARÍA ACAPULCO IN AUGUST 2014.
Image: Renata Schneider, ©CNCPC-INAH.

The coffered ceiling served as a guide for a series of dances: the figures on the ceiling gave the spatial and mathematical guidelines for the movements. Without them, they cannot offer certain gifts to the deities that help with the rain and the harvest. For the community it is substantial to recover those clues written in the Catholic decoration of the ceiling. Our arguments are not understood, or, if we somehow manage to build a bridge of understanding, it collapses with the next traditional government. It is likely that over time, we will create a common path, but in the meantime the community does not receive certain gifts. Rituals are not whims, but instructions from ancestors and deities. They probably refuse to do it because they do not remember the decoration well, but they believe in the specialist: what we would give them would be reason for new geometries but it would be understood by them and would be resignified by the deity. Is our negative refusal of a mental colonialism? What matters more: the Pame belief system or the normative belief system of the profession in the West? What matters more: the validity of the object as an object in use or the material and iconographic purity? (its presence as an insulating layer of the roof is not debated by anyone).

Another example: from 2015 to 2017 the canvases and sculptures of the temple of the Holy Trinity of Mesa del Nayar were treated. The community, moreover, expressly asked us for help in the preparation of an inventory of the temple's collection, which had to be delivered together with the images treated for their conservation. We believed that the community sought to protect itself from potential future thefts, now that a paved road communicates its inhabitants with Tepic, the state capital. During the planning of a meeting on the appropriateness of reproducing one of the temple bells, several members of the council of elders and the communal property commissioner insisted on the need for the archaeologist who would register the sacred sites located in the lands of the community, to be present in the decision-making about the possible reproduction of the bell. The archeologist could not be present during the meeting and the disappointment was evident. We are perplexed: what does a broken bronze Colonial bell have to do with the sacred sites of the non-Catholic cycle of Náayarite life?

MEETING TO DISCUSS THE REPRODUCTION OF THE MAIN BELL AT MESA DEL NAYAR, NAYARIT.
Image: Diego Ángeles, ©CNCPC-INAH.

The next day, two worried members of the council told me that decisions on all matters concerning their affairs should be unanimous and well-sustained, that the record of what was theirs had to be complete and should be delivered soon. That the way things were going was not making that possible, and that the construction of the Las Cruces dam by the state and federal government was becoming a stronger threat for them; therefore having an inventory –produced, paradoxically, by a government agency– was the best way to prevent their territory from being leveled (the polychrome wooden saints, the doors of the church, and the bells being a part of that territory).

With this, it became clear that the orders and classes in which heritage is divided and classified by institutional specialists does not make sense to this community. In addition, the process of certification of possession and conservation of heritage sites and objects serves the inhabitants because it is based on claims of territorial rights, and not to strange concepts such as cultural heritage. Thus, the bell, the doors of the temple and the saints for them represent assets in the defense of the Mesoamerican heritage that does not refer only to the right to one's own culture, but to specific social and economic rights, which include the territory, especially when these can be threatened. In that sense, at what point is a beautifully manufactured polychrome sculpture valuable as a vestige of a common history with the rest of the Mexicans? Does it matter that it is?

In Tórim, finally, when the images are veiled and taken out in procession on the day of their respective patron festivity, they are also decorated with perfume. They are decorated because Jesus and the saints in heaven appreciate and look at the perfume, being a spiritual essence. However, they have already suffered two small fires caused by the presence of candles and the alcohol in the perfume. As they know that this is the reason for long conversations with the aim of trying to dissuade them from the act of adding perfume to the image, they simply hide it from us. Are we really a kind of police to whom "reprehensible" acts are hidden? (Is INAH the heritage police in Mexico? What are we communicating wrongly so that the consultation systems in the end do not seem to be so? What should we attend to, what should we modify in our protocols, what new alternatives can we generate between both sides?).

YAQUI *KILLOSTES* (MAIN MAYORDOMAS) DURING THE PRESENTATION OF RESTORED OBJECTS IN THE VILLAGE OF TÓRIM, SONORA. *Image: Renata Schneider, ©CNCPC-INAH.*

6.

It is fundamental to recognize, as does Bill Martin (1998), that the phenomenon of cultural diversity places the question of difference in a way that is basically contrary to the forms inherited from the West. In fact, he considers that a totalitarian mode in this area constitutes a problem, not a solution. Therefore, in my opinion what should be taken as a methodological axis, and even as a deontological one, are the forms of approach, not the usual rules/guidelines/criteria that indicate what should be done in each conservation and restoration intervention treatment. That is, we must pay attention to the consequences, not the rules, and positively value the differences instead of suppressing them.

There are already several proven lines of action that allow us to speak of satisfactory intervention treatments: short but repeated intervention treatments during seasons of field work that allow us to "take the temperature" and measure the effectiveness of the interventions, encourage a high level of ethnographic research, verify the religious cycles and the use in them of the objects and of architectural decorative elements, promote community assemblies as much as possible while remaining independent of the internal debates and specific decisions of each community, etc.

VISIT TO A PROVISIONAL AREA FOR RESTORATION WORK IN THE VILLAGE OF TÓRIM, SONORA.
Image: Diego Ángeles, ©CNCPC-INAH.

Even so, we will never fully know what the communities expect of the conservation and restoration work (beginning with the fact that no social group is totally homogenous). However, our responsibility is to extend as much as possible the life of objects, spaces and territories that mean something to these communities. It is also our responsibility to analyze the ways in which these elements are given new significance following the intervention treatments and how those conservation and restoration actions help the group's life project on a daily basis; and we must remember to avoid conceptual delimitations focused more on the satisfaction of professional priorities than on the description of social realities.

The fate that a social group gives or will give to its inheritance and its transmission to future generations is what gives sense to the discipline of conservation-restoration in these cases, cases that speak of their own spaces and purposes, which do not have a public other than themselves and that speak of specific processes of conservation that have worked until today.

Since the late 19th century, the Ananda Coomararaswamy recovered the intersubjective power of music in the understanding of the artistic tradition of India. Let us remember, then, that our role as Mexican restorers is to enable intersubjective processes to be carried out, processes that provide social, cultural and political tools to these communities, at least from the material objects that reinforce each day their identity and group processes, which is no small thing.

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PROCESSION OF OUR LADY OF SORROWS IN SANTA MARÍA ACAPULCO. *Image: ©INAH, 2012.*

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