

Collective memory: lacustrine life and symbolic reservoir in the valley of Toluca, State of Mexico

José Antonio Trejo Sánchez

Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México / atrejo@politicas.uaemex.mx

Emilio Gerardo Arriaga Álvarez

Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México / egaa@uaemex.mx

Abstract: It is attempted to show how the communication of meanings and contents of collective memory in the zone of the Valley of Toluca, State of Mexico, Mexico, allows treasuring the lacustrine past and contrasting it with the current industrial environment, this enables us to construct and alternative narration of what nowadays has gone missing in respect to the past, providing with a critical meaning the occurrences along time.

Key words: collective memory, lacustrine culture.

Resumen: Se trata de mostrar cómo la comunicación de significados y contenidos de la memoria colectiva en la zona del Valle de Toluca en el Estado de México permite atesorar el pasado lacustre y contrastarlo con el acontecer industrial hoy en día, permitiendo construir una narración alterna de lo que en el presente se carece respecto al pasado, otorgándole un sentido crítico a los sucesos ocurridos en el tiempo.

Palabras clave: memoria colectiva, cultura lacustre.

The collective memory term was set into motion by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1925) to speak of memory as a psychosocial process, outside the individual mind and rather in the field of groups, in that of collectivity; in one word: in that of the culture; a process which establishes the patterns of knowledge from the viewpoint of the social subject, which is interested in becoming a social framework for the production and reproduction of social identity.

Although not many are the studies and researches based on this theoretical notion, the richness of its legacy allows representing the collective processes that are at stake in recovering the past, as a way to obtain answers to the challenges posed by the present, particularly if they resist or oppose to some sort of political oppression or domination. Memory is the tool used by the actors to recover the interpellant capacity or the visibility for the forgotten, disappeared or invisible. All those who in one way or another are denied their rights, capabilities or possibilities to be in the present. Collective memory and social forgetting are both relevant for the production and maintenance of social reality.

In this respect, the work by sociologist Elizabeth Jelin is illustrative on how the memory of repression and transition in the Southern Cone is exercised by actors who fight against exclusion and impunity of the State crimes in the recent past; where the study of memory is strategic to understand the nature of collective identities and their consequences in the current social struggles, around the memory for social and political practices in post-dictatorship societies. In this case, many a social actor in Argentina do not question the need to remember; for them the mandate of memory is normally a premise, a motto based on “remembering so as not to repeat”, on the “struggle against forgetting” and on the need to know about the occurrences as a part of the search for a society that has shared, suffered and wants to continue learning (Jelin, 2001: 100). In this way, the dates and anniversaries are conjunctures of memory activation; some have very broad and generalized meanings in a society, such as September 11th in Chile or March 24th in Argentina, dates on which coups established military dictatorships in Chile in 1973 and in Argentina in 1976.

The construction of collective memory, in the study of a social group, allows the anthropologist to recover, in the social time and space of a group, the traditional knowledge which signify it (Pérez-Taylor, 1996: 11). In this sense, the possibility to recover past events in an active manner draws anthropology near the determinants of ideology and power.

Tradition becomes, in this sense, an active part of society. Remembering all the sort of events from the past, as it may be the origin of the community, technology, agriculture, fishing, hunting, housing construction, kings and priests, as well as religion, and also nonetheless quotidian life and social organization; on its own, at its core it keeps all the possibilities of remembering social life because, then, memory is the faculty to retain and remember the past, being tradition its expression means, which makes all the remembered become a social process (Pérez-Taylor, 1996: 19).

By means of the knowledge on quotidian life and its traditions, or better still, on the different histories that ethnographic practice might reconstruct, the social identity of a group is known. Hence, memory becomes the practice that recovers the past for the present; it is the unifying element of social cohesion, and only by means of a set of common traditions a group of social subjects will know they have a similar story which joins them in the struggle for the present.

Memory becomes the catalyst of social disquietudes, or else, the struggle argumentation of a social group; in any case, memory is the element that turns man into man, into a being with an unparalleled social background; nevertheless, on the other side, this background becomes a unifying substance of the social practice, as it has the same history as the subject it will try to search for similar objectives for society.

The study of collective memory, as a part of the contemporary studies on social imagination, does not state to set an “autonomous psychological” faculty (Baczko, 1991: 27); it is about limiting an aspect of social life, of the activity of the social agents, aspects whose particularities only appear in the diversity of their products.

Collective memory of lacustrine life

We will next show how the communication of meanings and contents of collective memory in the zone of the Valley of Toluca, State of Mexico, Mexico, allows treasuring the lacustrine past and contrasting it to the current industrial present, enabling the construction of an alternative narration of what the present lacks in relation to the past, granting the occurrences in time a critical meaning; it is then, a full memory exercise, in views of establishing the impugnation reason of a social group in particular.

When one reaches the zone where the Chiconahuapan marsh was, one notices in the inhabitants of these former coastal towns a shade of nostalgia for how “they made their living, when there was a lake”. The proclaimers of such histories are mostly the elderly who still survive, some of them with the havoc from forgetfulness and other with better health, they who live on the large olden households and who still preserve a life pace according to their community.

Because one formerly lived up on water, on cutting tule...there used to be many tule cutters. From September, October... not from August! You see, three months when all the streets were paved with tule; because they sold it a lot. Just imagine [sic] it was like a shinning on the streets; they just left space for the isles and to walk, the streets looked very pretty; in yellow. From street to street everything was yellow; back then there was a lot of tule, anyone could go to the lake and cut tule (interview with Cerón Hernández).

Well, yes, now it is far. From here to the lake it took three quarters of an hour on foot. I remember it used to be a lake, now it is a milpa, just milpa the zone where there was water. I was a *petatero*, I cut tule in the lake. I worked the broad tule, as we called it, to make saddles for the ground. There were also many things to eat: minnows, many frogs, herbs, rockrose and watercress; all of these from the start, but not anymore, there is nothing left.

Back then, they had large trajineras, as in Xochimilco, where they carry people and even sang; if they didn't want they only were moved around the lake, they paid... of course! However it all was very cheap (interview with Manuel Morales).

There was a lot of fish; we the fishers gathered and with a net we caught them in the trenches; then we make fish tamales. To be sold in Toluca at a good price; we also went to the lake for fun, to bathe when the water was clean. We took our clothes off and we dropped into the water, even though we later had to fish. I remember a lot the tamales, we even carried them in sacks to sell, in boxes and we sold everything; when we reached the market, immediately the people gathered and we started to sell. In an hour, an hour and a half, we may finish, then we paid back our debts, we had money (interview with Bernal).

Many strolls were made; the people boarded some large trajineras, the size of a room. On them food was sold, musicians came on board and they danced. All of this was done onboard; not only at weekends, whenever one feels like it. It was the time when there was a lot of fish. All sort of animals: frogs, tadpoles, acociles, but now the lake is dry. There is nothing but milpas.

About the armadas, I never saw them. I always wanted to go and see, because people went there and brought ducks by the sacks. My husband told me not to go, because I would only see bare-naked people! I wanted to see how they set the riffles and killed so many ducks. Because everyone went there without underwear, because they entered into the water and it covered them. Yes, in the shores, because the armadas produced for many people. Ducks had to be sold, because these armadas were bought; the places at the lake were bought. I can't remember who you bought it from, but I imagine that at the presidency they settled that. The ones that bought the armada were the owners of the ducks; every duck which fell in their plot and the shore they hired was for them (interview with Lucrecia).

As survivors of a still fresh past they give an account of a way of life attached to nature and prodigal in products for those who knew how to live on the lake; most participated as "chaluperos" or canoe rowers, as cutters or weavers of tule, as hunters in some armada or simply fishing at the shores and shallows of the lake. The inhabitants, both old and young, remember that one could row in the marsh and feed on the fish and frogs, ducks and diverse minor fowl; the way of life on the lakes was central for the inhabitants of Almoloya del Río, San Mateo Atenco, Lerma, Santa Cruz Atizapán, Texcalyacac, San Antonio La Isla, most municipalities which were lacustrine towns.

The first to be distinguished by the locals are the images of the lake; this is always described as beautiful and rich in resources for men. Not only is it the prime workplace, but also the place where one goes to enjoy the lake resources; it is remembered how people went fishing, cutting tule and collecting large number of aquatic animals and birds: whitefish, frogs, tadpoles, axolotls, coots, doves and ducks. It was a primary source of food that in times of poor harvests helped complement the local diet; because of this, the lake is also a generator of local knowledge on the art of fishing with fish spear, dinghy and net; canoe navigation and the recognition of the places in the lake, such as its numerous springs, its shallows and deep waters, their shores and trenches. What to say about hunting and gathering, as they recognized the different species of birds and fish, the different ways of fishing and hunting individually or in group.

The locals also talk about the “armadas”, which were a sort of sportive hunting at large scale, for the use of shotguns and gunpowder in gun barrels was combined to kill large amounts of ducks, which were not necessarily consumed; such an activity was part of a local hobby and a tradition which generated revenues from the use or hiring of the lake to hunters from Mexico City; generally, entrepreneurs and ranchers with some family tie in the local haciendas.

These narrations help reconstruct what the marsh of the Valley of Toluca was during the first half of the XX century, composed of three lakes: Chignahuapan, Chimaliapan and Chiconahuapan. Thus far, the extensive archaeological and anthropological researches on the region have been able to outline the way of lacustrine life in the region; as they recover the micro-history and oral tradition they can reconstruct bonds with the past, which now are recreated between the elderly and are transmitted to the new generations; this is to say, the sense and culture the lake configured on the old fishermen, hunters and tule cutters. As well, the point of social inflection its desiccation meant early in the 1950's and nowadays it still affects the social representations of these communities.

The inhabitants bear in mind the hydraulic works that affected their lives, because many had to emigrate and experience hardship to replace their attachment to the lake. It is noticeable that the date when these memories began is so clearly defined: on July 23rd, 1950, on a Corpus Christi Thursday,

the probable starting date of the work that would pipe the water of the lakes to supply the needs of Mexico City. The fact that two months later large contingent of soldiers of the National Army took in Almoloya del Río the facilities of the “Miguel Alemán Valdés” System of Water Collection might have stressed the importance of remembering said year (Vázquez, 1999: 123). A milestone which would mark the feeling of theft and deception prevailing in the narrations when recalling the events of said fatidic date.

In the year of nineteen fifty, *Anastasio Serrano* tells us (italics are ours), by July on a *Corpus Thursday*, the river was lost forever. The people who lived near the shore of the lake say that a night after a downpour with many lightings they heard a noise, as if the earth sucked on something, and they affirmed that in that moment the engineers tested the pumps, installed in “the Cerro”. The following day just mud was seen in the lakebed, later, the lilies and tules withered, and thousands of aquatic species were buried in the mud of the marsh. Nothing was left of the waters which gave life to the famous Lerma River (Vázquez, 1999: 118).

Ever since, the locals ceaselessly repeat such a date. It is a date that defines a then and a now; it severs the idyllic past, seen as a time when, in spite of the hard and modest life, there were neither penuries nor major lacks. Being near the springs and a lake always secured something to eat and allow enjoying a harmonious relationship with the lacustrine environment; it granted a parsimonious life pace and a secure subsistence mode, since the lacustrine resources extracted from the marsh were very varied and abundant. Conversely, the time of desiccation was the time of lacks and uncertainty in respect to the immediate future.

The certainties of the lacustrine environment were displaced by the disadvantages of informal employment, industrial exclusion which does not adopt untrained labor force, or from a primary lifestyle such as that in Almoloya and the traumatizing transformation of social life. The knowledge and abilities related to fishing and gathering, canoe rowing and precision of the fishing spear could contribute with so little to be successfully inserted into the nascent industry in the Valley of Toluca. Most migrated to Mexico City and some other to agricultural labor in the U.S., fostered by President Miguel Alemán.

The process of desiccation was not as impersonal as it may be thought from a point of view that distinguishes its ecological variables; for the inhabitants of the lacustrine zone, the desiccation was a slow process, full of penuries, uprooting and important changes in the life trajectory of people's lives. The chronicles of it may seem untemporary: all simply coincide on stating that "one day water was just gone", the springs were covered and the ridiculous works promised by public powers, such as collective sinks and schools, waned before the collective disorders of the dwellers. Nevertheless, whilst life had to be saved with sub-employment and emigration, the narrations were treasured as a fresh and clear memory of the occurrences. Lacustrine life was expropriated by the government and their most direct mongers, the "engineers". The work of piping water to Mexico City stripped them not only of a collective natural good, but of a primordial subsistence mode. The modernization and urbanization of the zone was at all times chaotic, responding to interests alien to the local people; this was clear then and it is still considered so every time politicians and governors visit the zone.

The desiccation is remembered as a terrible technical undeftness of the engineers who took part in the piping and drilling works of the springs in the zone. The locals say that when the works started a terrible storm fell; the sky was thundering and the rain came down heavily; then, a lightning stroke near the engineers. Then they remark that because of the hurry the engineers decided using dynamite in the boring of the wells to channel the water, despite their immediate bosses disadvised doing so. They did not pay attention, however, and "firecrackered"; this made the water flow fast trough the wells and leave the springs without liquid. The history might seem incredible and it is far from manifesting that a simple accident can cause such an ecological and social disaster, but what must be considered is the sense of who for the locals is to blame.

The desiccation was not a fortuitous and unfortunate event; it was the product of a plundering and derived from the punitive action of men who represented interests different from the ones of the lacustrine community, as mongers of a modernity alien to the locals' way of life, carries of other knowledge and a new relation with nature. The harmonious relation and respect to the natural surrounding was replaced by a different rationale, less

dependent on the environment and more intrusive with nature. Not heeding the warnings of the thunder and using explosives to facilitate the destruction of land supposes a violent way to establish the man-nature relation.

The recreated technical undeftness of the “engineers” is a sort of mockery to the allegedly technological superiority unfolded against nature for those who do not know how to listen to the signals of the natural elements and for those who want to violate the harmony reached with the territory. In reality, the new way to relate with the environment is less beneficial and more discouraging, the purported swiftness to pipe the water actually provoked a fast desiccation and the destruction of a lacustrine niche which had lasted hundreds of years, providing men with an enviable environment. Finishing this niche only meant the irruption of penances and misfortunes which nowadays are still paid by the local people.

A way to respond to the movement of new modernity is the renovation of certain mythical figures, which allow restituting the past in the name of perennial tale, alien to the successive historic temporalities, which gives an account of the primordial and original time. It is the past that recreates the lacustrine way of life, represented in mythical figures such as Atlanchane or the Mermaid of the Lake. The locals tell stories about the existence of a sort of siren or women with snake tail who lived in the springs and depths of the lake.

The story which we now present acquires humongous richness; it manages to unveil the mysteries of the lacustrine past, where figurations and cosmogonies established the principia of meaning of men with the environment. Nevertheless revitalized by the collective memory, they are loaded with new meanings, as they show that “tradition works cunningly before the movement of modernity”. As the anthropologist Georges Balandier reminds us, resorting to tradition searching for teachings and lost passages allows contributing with an answer to the present; this is to say, the tradition of memory accomplishes the maintenance of the bonds with the past which will facilitate the group adaption, as it is freed from the movement of things and establish supportive points to approach the occurrence and take advantage of some of the open potentialities. In the past, the individuals and collectivities find a reservoir of symbols and images, media, which look for the attenuation of modernity (Balandier, 1989: 37).

For the local chronicler, the idea that there are people, places, mounts or things with determinate supernatural qualities is a constant in most of the inhabitants of Almoloya del Río; mythology is related to Pre-Hispanic deities: Tlaloc, Huitzilopochtli and Ehécatl. The people who claims to be in touch with these deities are known as *ahuizotes*, medicine men and women, who are the divine carriers of the deity they represent; they are even attributed with the power to transform into amphibious small dogs or water dogs, whose body has a large and sharp foot and large tail, and the skin covered in blackish spots. The people have the custom of telling fantastic stories, linked to the Pre-Hispanic past of the region (Vázquez, 1999: 141).

From these tales, distinguishable is that of *Atl-Anchane* or “Mermaid of the Lake”, which is known by most of the formerly-lacustrine towns around the disappeared Chicnahupán Lake, from the municipality of Ocoyoacac and Tultepec to Almoloya, Atizapán, Texcalyacac and Chapultepec, where most varied versions of this ancient tale appear. Its structure can be summarized as the legend only told by the elderly and the people who knew the lake, as among the youths it is forgotten or looked down “as beliefs or ignorance of the people back then”. The legend has it that every morning the dense fog barely allowed glimpsing a beautiful and young woman having a bath and doing her long hair, sitting on the rock of the old “waterholes” of the lake. Anyone who was able to introduce themselves or meeting her might have the fate of that boy who went for grass and met her. The girl revealed onto him and asked him to move her in his canoe to Hacienda de Atenco. They went rowing until they sank into the bottom of the lake never to be seen again. Ever since there are varied stories about how the mermaid appears and deceives asking favors to every young man whom she crosses paths with to take him to the lake and become lost in the depths of it.

The tale of such occurrences finds its coronation with the tale of the death of the merman, which was collected during our stay in the place. Once again are men and their intervention which unbalance the order of nature; nonetheless, in this case, it is not men alien to the community, but the very local fishermen who attacked him. The tale goes that one afternoon several men were fishing in the lake; one of them spotted the merman and hit him with a spear; the other draw near and surrounded him to find him again. They were revolving the water and with the spears eventually hurt him.

The merman sank and left behind a trail of blood and disgrace, because the mermaid also sank into the lake searching for her partner. Ever since, both disappeared and their absence coincided with desiccation of the lake. The storytellers still consider these facts point out that the mermaid has just gone momentarily, but any day soon she might be back, and the lake will be able to recover its beauty and natural richness.

Around here there were lots of people who lived on fish. Then he appears and shows his tail; they look where and search for that merman. Then all surround him. They still thought he was a fish, but not because the tail was broad and large; about forty centimeters. Then a lot gathered, many and with the signals, everyone thrust the stick hard downwards and then killed him. Yes, I was told by Uncle Felix that they saw the blood that sprang, as a spring from below. He sent it upwards. They only remained looking. Carps have much blood and this one too. Then they looked, they wanted to see the body and nothing, they used their spears but nothing.

Then the mermaid at night, because the fishermen usually went about six in the evening to set the dinghies and they heard someone crying; someone is crying! Where?! They wondered; then they communicate as they heard those laments. Let's go at night! Let's go at six to set the dinghies! They went and it was that uncle, an old man, around eighty years, who told me everything Hey uncle and how come someone cries in Agua Blanca?

Yes son, she cries; you know why? Because they killed the merman, the man of the mermaid

How did they kill him?

Yeah, there was much blood, about two meters on the water

Alas, uncle!

And we did not find him

And well, what happened to him?

Well that lady took him down, because there it was a waterhole real deep, I think that about here this corner to San Sebastian; that deep downward.

And at night and the following day there were no fish any more. There was but very few, nor mermaids no nothing. It was over, what happened? God only knows. Later they heard a comment, the lady went to Santa María Atarasquillo; she went there. And how was she going there? The way they come they way they go, only God, they way she appeared they way she went. Then the waterworks came [...] (interview with Cerón Hernández).

Hence, we can find an explanation and an exposition logic, whose axis is a mythical “eternal return”. The central in these tales is that men at any time, either members of the community or not, are directly responsible for the ecological disaster of the region. The primordial harmony that establishes a relation of man with nature will be destroyed when man decides to trespass said ancestral limit. This took place when the hydraulic works were unfolded, which would bring along the modernization and urbanization of the zone, and which for the locals meant the transformation of their lives, with penances, uprooting and abandonments in the middle.

The lacustrine way of life was disrupted and destroyed, an early heritage from industrialization in Toluca and Lerma, which would irradiate the whole Valley. Former fishermen, hunters and tule cutters had to look for other horizons. The remembering of the lacustrine niche and the mythical return of its waters and the mermaid can be nevertheless, considered as the last battle of these people to preserve their collective memory and build in the social imaginary another story, alternative to the budding modernity.

Memory battles: memory and forgetting

Memories on what the lake was and how life was on it become the social frameworks which enable the recognition of a present tradition; attachment and forgetfulness modulate the way in which a local identity might be conceived. As we visited the different communities of the lacustrine region from the first lake of the Valley of Toluca, the tales and stories on the lacustrine niche modulate different ways of conceiving tradition and identity. There are municipalities such as Almoloya del Río, San Mateo Atenco and Santa Cruz Atizapán where the tales about the lacustrine past still excite their inhabitants and maintain an important reservoir on the handling of fishing nets, spear manufacturing, aquatic traps to catch ducks, the way to row and build canoes; the varied forms of preparing and cooking dishes with frogs, ducks and numerous aquatic plants, included in the local diets. The lacustrine activities defined the towns, some were “petateros” such as San Lucas Tepemajalco, or tule cutters such as San Mateo Texcalyacac. Other were recognized by the large number of fishermen who abode them, namely San Mateo Atenco, Santa Cruz Atizapán and Almoloya del Río.

The longest lasting and densest local identities seem to be anchored to the lacustrine memory of the region; it is a common past that allows reconstructing perdurable identities. The populations and communities that lived on the lake and which directly linked their past to some lacustrine activity are nowadays the municipalities with the strongest local identity. There is a local past to which refer and give an account of their traditions, those who were engaged to fishing, cutting tule, navigating the lake, hunting ducks and gathering aquatic plants.

The imagination that comes out from these tales helps reconstruct the entire lacustrine scenario. The places and trenches to fish, full of history about accidents and memories of work in group; the departures at dawn and the joyful return at dusk; there were names for all the springs in Almoloya del Río. The large tube where the washing was made and there were talks is remembered; also the place where in the morning the little mermaid may appear. The strolls and popular celebrations were held on the islets of the lake, with music, food and drinks for everyone. The solitudes of daily work in the field and meanders and shallows of the lake. The enjoyments and idleness recreated up to the grandchildren now of the old happenings of the grandparents, and the old stories of love and adventure across the lake.

I sailed with my husband, when we were newlywed. To fish in the lake on a little raft or canoe. In the water, you put your hands along the side of the raft and simply saw how the fish moved and you could throw them upwardly. One could fish barehanded.

We set off at about midnight. I got a bit dizzy, because I saw the stars up in the sky and the stars down reflected in the water. Then my husband told me not to move too much, because the rafts only hold two and then only sank two fingers only to touch the water. Only for the canoe not to sink, because he did not know how to row very well; then we left at one at night, but we already had cazuelas with these little fish, then the next day I gave them away or cooked them, depending on my mood (interview with Ms. Juana).

Nowadays, the towns with the tightest bonds to the lacustrine niche seem to deal with fewer difficulties the presence of new social and political relationships and with the construction of new institutions and socialities. Indeed the marsh is the common image that describes in a clear manner how different localities see themselves and conceive their relation with

the industrial, urban and modern present. The lake is the central image to reconstruct the local history and culture. The relation with its desiccation is determinant to redefine their identity in the present. The towns which had the tightest bonds to their environment and based their life style on activities related to the lake now mourn and show profound longing for its natural richness and beauty.

The elderly who were fishermen, tule cutters and hunters are the local guardians of said tragedy and memory along time. They are the ones who still tell the mythical adventure of the merman and the lake. Conversely, those who neither witnessed nor exploited the resources of Chiconahuapan marsh only have the most painteresque pieces and features of that lacustrine life, as it is the case of the municipality of Metepec, where there is even a clay mermaid in downtown, more as a political and mercantile calculation than as a common referent for the population, which currently works clay and hardly recalls some relation with the lacustrine environment.

The anthropological work permits reconstructing the politics of the identities in the broad space of national culture. The recent findings in study cases enable glimpsing a contradictory and not always solved struggle between the project of nation that is faced and tries to uniform the expression of local culture, and these cultures are intimates of the motherland, by opposition to the cultural force of the fatherland, which seek to resist or accommodate in their own manner to this process of the last century, as historian Luis González claimed.

Conclusions

What we hereby present is a local history from the point of view of the elderly of the place, who share their nostalgia for the “water that is gone” with the new generations of the place, who appropriate the past in very complex and diverse manners. As they do so, they recreate part of their personal and collective history clearly stressing the most creative and beneficial aspects of lacustrine life, in views of constructing a coherent discourse on the importance which for the community life the flora and fauna form the lake had. As well to pinpoint that the desiccation and loss of said ecosystem was the result of a spoliation and external deceit; which became an excluding modernization for their community.

The story which gives an account of how the lacustrine niche was desiccated is in reality a collective reconstruction of the occurrences; not to reckon the historically verifiable facts, since some dates cannot be precise, but to interpret the meaning of them for the collectivity. That is why we wield rather the verisimilitude of the stories than the veracity of the occurrences, for memory is not so interested in the accuracy of an event, but on the reconstruction and meaning of the occurrences for a group (Mendoza, 2005: 8).

The desiccation of Chiconahuapan Lake is interpreted as a moment of historical inflection for the community; a moment when the tranquility and parsimony with which life was led end. The everydayness of the work at the lake, the ways of life linked to the flora and fauna of the place, the adventures and anecdotes on their waters and lakebed, local histories are disrupted and have to adapt and modify for the new circumstances which regional modernization imposes. Work in the field and at the lake verify the preponderant place, prior to desiccation, held by tule cutters, fishermen or day laborers who are displaced by the new socioeconomic dynamic in the region.

The formerly lacustrine communities suffer a process of social and economic reorganization, which takes some to emigration and most to the transformation of their life style. The narrations account for new trades and demographic mobility toward the U.S. and/or Mexico City, or else the variety of local answers to adjust the new socioeconomic reality. It is worth bearing in mind that the countryside of the State of Mexico experienced frosts and bad harvests for almost two decades (1930 and 1940), besides the pulverization of the agrarian repartition and the absence of financial credit (Jarquín and Herrejón, 2004: 123). Perhaps the desiccation of the lakes ended with a source of resources, which tempered during the first half of the XX century the crisis of the peasantry in this side of the State of Mexico. In this sense, the inhabitants of municipalities such as Almoloya del Río were left aside from the new industrial environment, since desiccation had already caused their departure heading for other labor places, located outside the region.

What is told is a history of tranquility and a profitable relation with Chiconahuapan Lake or Marsh; more to emphasize a meaning of life and community than because the past was really idyllic and ancestral. Most of the people worked for local haciendas, as pawns and peasants. The memories of the lake do not leave behind other stories on disgraces and tragedies, which also occurred. Such as the frequent epidemics and famines after the Revolution battles; there are also histories on the frugality and rudeness of work in the countryside; when labor started “very early” and there was only chili and tortillas for breakfast; where women had an arduous work at home and a long day: “from the moment I woke up until I went to bed, there was work to do”; whilst men continually suffered the unforeseeable events of life, such as accidents at the lake, fouled harvests or discrimination, for merely looking like “an indigenous and ignorant”. When other stories are tracked, the picture of local life turns out less idyllic and harmonious; however, the stories still contain certain tragic and ironic sense at the time, which allows continually recreating the accidents and problems witnessed:

And then, I saw the flock. I started to pull the thread of the canoe. While I got the shotgun ready, but the canoe started to turn [...]

It was when I shot crossed and I turned too. I fell into the water. The strap of the shotgun was so heavy, when wet, that it got stuck around me. So it sunk me and I knew nothing about me until a sir took me out. Because he says he heard a noise: I screamed?! Yeah right!! Pure desperation.

The water was cold and I did not feel the bottom to break my fall. I did not know how to swim. I was wading as God made me understand. But the strap didn't let me maneuver; the sir, who pulled me by the hair, started to row and took me to the shore; where he shouted to my Uncle Pastor. He remembers so and once they took me out, stripped me and put me before a bonfire. They changed my clothes and that was it. I believed this thing was to put an end to my love of hunting, but no... next Saturday I was already at the lake (interview with Mr. Cerón).

The elderly, old tule cutters, fishermen and hunters of the lake proclaim their stories as a way to keep alive the memory of those times. These guardians of collective memory fight between the finitude of life and the disappearance in the new local representation of community. For instance, in Almoloya del Río an identity is constructed around Tailoring and the

Trouser and Clothing Fair in September. Many are damaged by alcoholism and biological forgetfulness, but the yearning allows them to claim a way of life, which secured a place in the community and a social historical meaning of their activities, as things were done: hunting ducks at the lake, catching herons at the banks, fishing with a spear, navigate the turbulent waters of the springs and marsh. But mainly the community had a relation with its environment and an own historicity in the social sphere.

The old locals are bearers of the strength of remembrance when life was another thing; for these old people the vital and collective circumstances were otherwise, more significant and fruitful than life nowadays, the one concerning the industrial and peripheral sphere the new generations have been driven to live. With their memory they can exercise at least the irony of the present and a cultural criticism on their modern tragedies.

Bibliography

- Aguilar, Miguel Ángel (1992), "Fragmentos de la memoria colectiva de Maurice Halbwachs", in *Revista de Cultura Psicológica*, vol. 1, num. 1, Mexico: Facultad de Psicología, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.
- Albore Zárata, Beatriz (1995), *Tules y sirenas. El impacto ecológico y cultural de la industrialización en el Alto Lerma*, Mexico: El Colegio Mexiquense, Gobierno del Estado de México, Secretaría de Ecología.
- Baczko, Bronislaw (1991), *Los imaginarios sociales. Memorias y esperanzas colectivas*, Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión.
- Chihu Amparán, Aquiles (2006), *El "análisis de marcos" en la sociología de los movimientos sociales*, Mexico: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (Conacyt), Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa.
- Fernández Christlieb, Pablo (1994), *La psicología colectiva un fin de siglo más tarde*, Mexico: Anthropos, El Colegio de Michoacán.
- Jarquín Ortega, María Teresa and Carlos Herrerrón Peredo (2004), *Breve historia ilustrada del Estado de México*, Mexico: Gobierno del Estado de México, Secretaría de Educación y Bienestar Social, Instituto Mexiquense de Cultura and El Colegio Mexiquense.
- Jelin, Elizabeth (2002), *Los trabajos de la memoria*, Madrid: Siglo XXI.

- Jelin, Elizabeth (2001), “Exclusión, memorias y luchas políticas”, in Mato, Daniel [comp.], *Estudios Latinoamericanos sobre cultura y transformaciones sociales en tiempos de globalización*, CLACSO and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).
- Mendoza García, Jorge (2005), “Exordio a la memoria colectiva y el olvido social”, in *Athenea Digital*, revista de pensamiento e investigación social, Autumn, num. 8, Spain: Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona.
- Pérez Taylor, Rafael (1996), *Entre la tradición y la modernidad: antropología de la memoria colectiva*, Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas.
- Portal, María Ana and José Carlos Aguado (1991), “Tiempo, espacio e identidad social”, in *Alteridades. Identidad*, year 1, num. 2, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Iztapalapa.
- Sugiura Yamamoto, Yoko (1998), *La caza, la pesca y la recolección: etnoarqueología del modo de subsistencia lacustre en las ciénegas del Alto Lerma*, Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas.
- Sugiera, Yoko and Ma. del Carmen Pérez (2003), *El hombre y las ciénegas del Alto Lerma. Arqueología de la vida lacustre de la Laguna de Chignahuapan, Atlixapán, sureste del Valle de Toluca*, Mexico: Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, Notebook of the temporary exposition from December 7th 2002 to February 9th 2003.
- Vázquez Castillo, Jaime (1999), *Almoleza del Río*, Monografía municipal, Gobierno del Estado de México, Instituto Mexiquense de Cultura and Asociación Mexiquense de Cronistas Municipales.
- Zárate Hernández, José Eduardo (1997), *Procesos de identidad y globalización económica. El Llano Grande en el sur de Jalisco*, Mexico: El Colegio de Michoacán.

Interviews

- a) Cerón Hernández; hunter and tule cutter; June 22nd, 2000
- b) Emilio Gómez Hernández; fisher; June 1st, 2000
- c) Pastor Gómez Mata and Juana Estrada de Gómez; spouses: he was a fisher and she was a housewife; May 26th, 2000
- d) Elías Camacho Alarcón; tule cutter; May 25th, 2000
- e) Lucrecia Alcántara; housewife; daughter of a tule cutter; May 18th, 2000

f) Manuel Morales Cerón; fisher and tule artisan; May 18th 2000

g) Manuel Bernal; tule cutter; November 26th, 1999

José Antonio Trejo Sánchez. Master in Social Anthropology; professor-researcher of the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Autonomous University of the State of Mexico. Research lines: juvenile cultures, collective memory and cultural policies. Recent publications: “De eso que llaman antropología visual” (*On that they call visual anthropology*) in *Metodologías cuantitativas y cualitativas en las Ciencias Sociales. Perspectivas y experiencias*, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México y Miguel Ángel Porrúa (2007); coauthor with Jorge Arzate Salgado de *Desigualdad, ciudadanía y evaluación cualitativa de políticas sociales en el Valle de Toluca* (Inequality, citizenship and qualitative evaluation of social policies in the Valley of Toluca), UAEM, Bonobos, Mexico (2006); “Identidades y cultura política desde lo juvenil: una exploración etnográfica” (*Identities and political culture from the juvenile: an ethnographic exploration*), in *Cultura política, participación y relaciones de poder*, El Colegio Mexiquense, Conacyt and Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Campus Iztapalapa (2005).

Emilio Gerardo Arriaga Álvarez. Doctor in Social Studies from Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Campus Iztapalapa. Ascribed to the Institute of Studies on the University (*Instituto de Estudios sobre la Universidad, IESU*) of the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico. Research lines: political sociology, social organization, structure and institutions. Recent publications: *Senderos de la investigación científica: un planteamiento inicial* (Paths of scientific research: an initial statement), 2^a edition, Bonobos, Mexico (2008); “El concepto de biopoder. Hacia la construcción de una educación para la paz” (*The concept of biopower; toward the construction of education for peace*), in *Comunicación, Educación y Cultura de Paz*, Miguel Ángel Porrúa, UAEMex (2008); “Reingeniería educativa y educación pública mexicana: breve acercamiento” (*Educative reengineering and Mexican public education: a brief approach*), in *Espacios Públicos*, Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales, UAEM (2007).

Sent to dictum: May 24th, 2007

Resent: December 2nd, 2008

Approval: December 15th, 2008