



Oaxaca Times

Volume XIV No 204 THE INNER LIFE OF OAXACA • DECEMBER 2005 www.oaxacatimes.com



Photo: Marcela Taboada

National Geographic Undermines Indigenous

The National Geographic this month will be presenting its 'All Roads Project,' recognising the work of indigenous and under-represented photographers from around the globe.

"The project is an exciting new forum for indigenous and minority-culture storytellers to bring their lives, experiences, and cultures to new audiences," says Terry Garcia, the executive vice president for Mission Programs, National Geographic Society.

It's surprising, then, to learn that the National Geographic

has presented the prize to Marcela Taboada, a widely published Oaxacan photographer, who told them that she was neither indigenous nor under-represented.

All Roads spokesperson Liz Nickless said, "All Roads is an inclusive project, not exclusive, which is why the programme solicits and considers work from both indigenous and minority cultures, and those who document those cultures."

However, the competition criteria specifically states that 'Award recipients must be

indigenous or under-represented photographers,' which more or less excludes most of the world, especially the category into which Taboada would fit.

In an interview with the OT late last month Taboada said, "I couldn't believe it when I got the phone call. I tried to tell them that I was neither indigenous nor under-represented, but they just replied, 'It doesn't matter, you've won.'"

Of course, exactly how you define a person as indigenous can prove to be problematic. According to Mexican govern-

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¡Viva Cristo Rey!

November 20th, and the largest football stadium in Guadalajara is dressed in white to celebrate the beatification of the 13 martyrs from the Cristero War; 3 priests and 10 laymen including a 14-year-old boy.

The pitch is decorated with gigantic images of the martyrs and the words "Mártires de Cristo Rey" are printed in large type in the centre circle. Cardinal Jose Saraiva Martins from Rome is there to preside over the ceremony being witnessed by over 60,000 loyal supporters.

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— many more who couldn't get a ticket are following the mass on television and radio.

To kick off the event the pope appears via satellite on a large TV screen and sends a message, in Spanish, from Rome: "They are a permanent example for us," the pope says of the martyrs, "an encouragement to give concrete testimony of our own faith in today's society."

The crowd yells "¡Viva Cristo Rey!" in remembrance of the martyrs who chose the way of guns in defiance of the rule of earthly law, but the Church hasn't always been so popular or powerful.

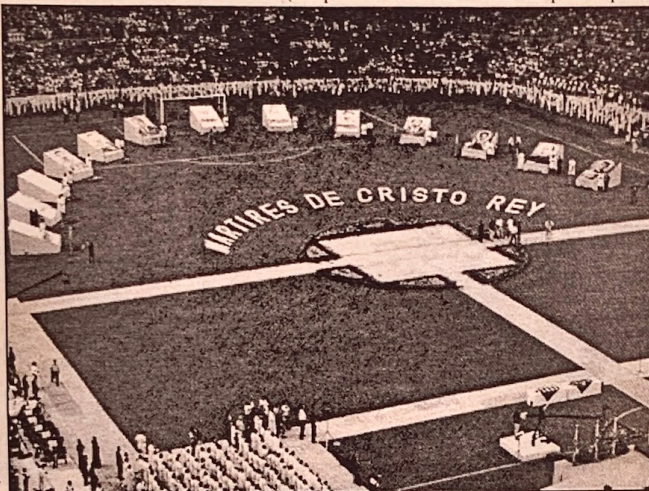
In 1917, a completely revolutionary document that recognised individual rights based on freedom and equality, imposed restrictions on the church, such as the prohibition of public masses and the use of religious garb. It was the end of a series of reforms that began with Benito Juárez in the second half of the 19th century. The church had been gradually losing much of its original political power and after the triumph of the revolution; it was completely erased from the political arena.

As a consequence of this new legislation, the church was alienated from power and public life. Instead, President Calles formed the Mexican Apostolic Catholic Church (independent from the

Cristera, a name that comes from the war cry ¡Viva Cristo Rey! The uprising was quashed and left out of official history. The church had to wait many years to enter the public sphere and still fights to

be re-admitted into the political arena.

Mexico established diplomatic relations with the Vatican State in 1992, after a series of reforms to the constitution. Pope John Paul II played an important role in the normalisation of diplomatic relations after a string of visits to the country. In the year 2000, he canonized 25 Mexican martyrs from the Cristero uprising.



60,000 fanatics cheer for the newly beatified martyrs in the Jalisco Stadium, Guadalajara late last month.

Vatican) and passed a law known as Ley Calles, which sparked the conflict that polarized the nation. The Church called the people to boycott the government by not using petrol or paying taxes. Since the boycott wasn't effective for the intended purpose, regardless of how harmful it was for the economy, the conflict ended up in an uprising in which hundreds of devotees were killed.

This war was known as Guerra

terro uprising. Beatification is the waiting room to canonization. Each of the 13 martyrs must now perform miracles that need to be certified by the same church in order to become saints. It took Juan Diego, the man to whom Virgin Guadalupe appeared, a couple of years. Let's see how long we have to wait for the first canonization of the Cristero martyrs

Immerse yourself 'en español'

Read for yourself! Just one of our satisfied students at the Instituto de Comunicación y Cultura (ICC).

Estimado ICC,

¡Greetings from Guatemala! ¿Qué tal?

I just wanted to write and thank everyone at the ICC for my wonderful stay in Oaxaca last month. To my great surprise, even four weeks of classes prepared me really well for the rest of my travels through Latin America. The handouts I received during the course have been really useful (might I even say invaluable!) and it's so great to be able to communicate with the people over here. Maestro Victor's vocabulary training has set me up to get the gist of what's going on in most situations, especially in the markets!

I've been in touch with my host family — I'm missing Señora Tico's mole like

crazy and look forward to returning home and trying my hand at all the fantastic Mexican recipes Conchita taught me at the ICC cooking school.

Please give Nancy and Gregorio my best and tell them that I've been practising my salsa steps without the need to drink copious amounts of alcohol. I'm confident now so when the latino boys ask me to dance I no longer have to say no or down a few prerequisite beers.

I'm planning on returning back home via Oaxaca so I was wondering if I could return to the school just for a one-week intensive course at, dare I say it, intermediate level.

I look forward to seeing you all soon.

Muchas gracias otra vez,

Julia Fisher

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ment figures, only 10 percent of the population is culturally and linguistically indigenous, but over 30 percent of the population 'feels' like it is. In any case, Taboada claims to have initially declined the prize on the grounds that she did not fit the criteria, but the National Geographic insisted that she accept it.

The decision to give the prize to Taboada pinches an already sensitive nerve in the indigenous community. The majority of journalists in Mexico are of European descent; an unwritten law (not only in the media) dictates that the lighter your skin, the better your opportunities. The National Geographic was trying to address this particular problem, so it's ironic that it should be caught perfectly illustrating the very thing it was standing against.

There are of course many difficulties in hosting such competitions. Initially, it would be very difficult to reach the indigenous population and generate interest. Many of them will be wondering where their next meal is coming from, so selling 'alebrijes' for example, would seem like a much better investment than photography.

After that is the headache of actually getting back good photos. Without some sort of very basic training, the overall quality of the photos might understandably be of a lower standard (not considering flukes and raw talents that is).

So what are the alternatives? One idea could be to hand out a thousand disposable cameras and teach the basics of photography. It doesn't take a good camera to take a

good picture, the father of modern photography Henri Cartier-Bresson would have been the first to tell you that good photography is about catching 'the decisive moment.'

Providing workshops for local communities would be much less intimidating and would address, specifically, the problem of under-representation in minority cultures. The chance to compete with other similar communities on a level playing field would also generate interest.

However equal opportunities sell, so for the National Geographic, their's was a better way to get excellent photos and boost its own popularity. Supporting indigenous rights is now the fashion all around the world. For example, when Oxfam released 'Cafe Direct' in the late 1980s, it remained unheard of until the late 90s, when advances in communication dramatically changed attitudes towards minority cultures.

When reading about injustices in the news people generally want to help but are not sure how. So when a well-respected company like National Geographic claims to be addressing the problems, people support it by buying the magazines. This is big business and works as a great marketing tool. The irony of the commercial aspect that these projects need to consider in order to be successful is that often the people who feature in these photos and films don't see a single penny for all their cooperation. The photo on the front page, for example, isn't a natural composition - it was posed and so the subject is, technically speaking, a

model, but will she get a model's wage? No.

All Roads seeks to provide a platform for cultures that have very little access to mainstream global media and this indeed is a very honourable objective. Without a voice minorities cannot reach the masses and without pressure from the masses, corruption, inequality and the like can never be confronted. On this occasion the National Geographic hasn't been successful in its aim, but there's more than one party to blame here, Marcela Taboada (picture below) would be amongst them, but there could be another - you



Photo: Courtesy of Marcela Taboada

You can voice your opinions on the subject, at:

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1920s Pornography



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This month, the Manuel Alvarez Bravo Photographic Centre is featuring a collection of erotic photographs from an album of unknown origin (probably from the 1920s) that mysteriously appeared in its collection.

As a follow up to the exhibition of the Casasola archives of criminal photography "Espanto de la Modernidad," the exhibition reignites that seemingly never ending debate around the depiction of the naked human body as a form of art in the context of eroticism or violence in the context of pomography.

The exhibition lasts until January. Entry is free as usual.

OT Photo Competition

Next month, The Oaxaca Times will be launching its Photo Competition in conjunction with the Manuel Alvarez Bravo Photographic Centre.

The motto is "no boundaries" so everybody is welcome to submit photographs in any format.

Film or digital, colour or black & white, no age limits, and no groups.

In order to provide equal opportunity

ties to all competitors, two categories will be considered:

Professional: meaning photography is your main source of income.

Amateur: meaning everyone who is not professional.

You must be able to prove that you fit into the appropriate category on follow up to a successful entry.

More information can be obtained at:

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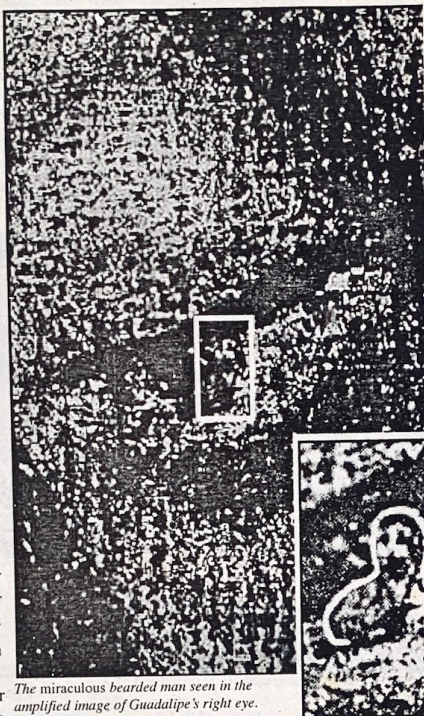
been released through peer reviewed publications.

Some of these studies say that a proof of the miracle is the depiction of men in the eyes of the Virgin. Enlarging minute sections of the painting, seems to reveal faces; and not just any faces, but the faces of Juan Diego and Bishop Zumárraga among other personages of the saga. The impossibility of painting images of microscopically visible dimensions by human hands with the lack of technology of the 16th century is wielded as proof.

The antiapparitionist explanation here is very simple and it is the same behind other miraculous appearances. Percidolia: a type of illusion or misperception involving a vague or obscure stimulus being perceived as something clear and distinct. For example, one sees the face of Jesus Christ in the discolorations of a burnt tortilla, or the image of Mother Teresa in a cinnamon bun or a man in the moon. The spots seen on the amplified image of the right eye of the image of Guadalupe are as clear as any other shape in the Rorschach ink blot test.

Whether she appeared or not is irrelevant. The year of the appearances was 1531, just ten years after the end of the military conquest. Conversion to the "true faith" involved the destruction of the ancient beliefs but required the construction of new ones on top of the old ones, literally. Many church-

es were built with the rocks of old temples or on top of pyramids. The same happened with Guadalupe. Guadalupe demanded to have a shrine right where the female impersonation of the Aztec deity, Tonantzin, was worshipped.



The miraculous bearded man seen in the amplified image of Guadalupe's right eye.

Guadalupe represents the end of the old faith. The name is sometimes associated with the virgin of Extremadura in Spain. However, another story explains the choice of the name. The virgin chose not Guadalupe but *coatloxopeuh*, which is pro-

nounced "quah-tla-supe" very similar to *Guadalupe*. *Coa* means serpent, *tla* is the determinate article *la* (the), and *xopeuh* means to crush. So the Virgin chose to be The Serpent Crusher. Two obvious interpretations emerge: Molech the biblical serpent but also Quetzalcóatl, the plumed serpent, the god of the Aztecs.

At first, some sectors of the church condemned the cult of Guadalupe, but by the middle of the 16th century, the cult had become very popular and dramatizations of the apparitions called *Neixcuitili* were very popular. An archbishop called Montufar seems to have ordered Antonio Valeriano to write the *Nican mopohua* based on one of those dramatizations. It was meant to institute the cult and strengthen the already thriving devotion.

Catholic religion in Mexico never completely exorcised the older beliefs. Adoration of gods or spirits like *Don Goyo* the spirit of the Popocatepetl volcano are mixed with Jesus and of course Guadalupe.

The encounter of the European and the Indigenous, catholic and pagan, merge into one. Guadalupe always represented the particular faith of Mexico and is still a proud source of identity. The war of Independence started the night of September 15 when a catholic priest brandished an image of Guadalupe inciting people to fight the imperial tyrant. A lame reenactment was performed by the later victorious presidential candidate Vicente Fox in 2000. Perhaps the importance of Guadalupe cannot be better explained than with the words of Ignacio Manuel Altamirano: "If one day the Virgen Guadalupe is forgotten, possibly that day the existence of Mexican nationality will be threatened."



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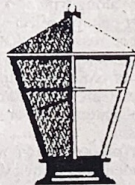
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