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Abstracts

The Invention of Transgenics: ¿New Relations between Nature and Culture?

Elena Lazos Chavero

Within the current discussion about nature and culture, this article analyzes the meaning of the continuous existence of maize landraces –selected and diversified by peasant families—and of the introduction of transgenic maize for peasant and indigenous communities in Oaxaca as well as for agro-business in Sinaloa. In the same way as the deforestation of woods and rain forests became an urgent topic in 1992, an alarm must be rung about the introduction of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in agriculture, which implies issues of social justice, self determination, political participation and sovereignty. In this context, native knowledge and agro-biodiversity, in particular maize landraces, become relevant topics for the international agenda. It's not just a matter of safeguarding some particular plants and "traditions" in a false dichotomy between tradition and modernization. Political and economic decisions come into play that affect the lives of millions of people whose livelihood depends on the cultivation of local varieties. Research into these areas sheds light on the importance of considering the needs and values of local populations in the discussion about the future of GMOs, within the framework of political decision-making at a global scale.

Key words: transgenics, maize, agro-biodiversity, Oaxaca, Sinaloa.

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Community Conservation in the Upper Section of the Papaloapan Basin in Oaxaca's Sierra Norte.

Leticia Merino

This article describes the experiences of forest management and conservation developed by communities of the Sierra Norte or Sierra de Juárez during the last two decades. Different types of forest have been both used and preserved by communities in the Sierra. The success of community management in the region is strongly related to traditional notions of social capital based on reciprocity (practices such as the *cargos* system and the *tequio*). The development of commercial community forestries has also been a key element for the empowerment of local institutions and for the proper perception of the value of the forest among its local users. The practice of local *governanza* in the Sierra provides suggestive new elements for an alternative conservation policy, one that articulates the participation of the State and other social actors.

Key words: conservation, forests, social capital, public policies, Oaxaca.

On Natural Protected Areas and Participation: Agreements and Disagreements in the Construction of the Public Interest.

María Fernanda Paz Salinas

This paper analyses participation in the management and preservation of natural protected areas, viewing it as a conflictive arena where public, private and collective interests converge and diverge. Focusing on a particular protected region of central Mexico, we try to show how some political and cultural elements encourage or discourage collective action, as well as the construction (or not) of cooperative agreements between the government and local communities who own lands and natural resources in these areas. The first section discusses the concept of participation, making a conceptual and analytical distinction between social participation and civic participation. A brief review is also made of the official proposals for participation, in contrasts with the demands stemming from social movements. This section also points to the social, political and cultural diversity within the natural protected areas. In short, the first section is aimed at a discussion of both the myths regarding participation and the myths regarding natural protected areas. The second section presents a case study that shows the points of confluence and divergence

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among the different types of interests involved (public, private and collective) in the construction of cooperative agreements for collective action.

Key words: natural protected areas, social participation, collective action, interests.

From Environmental Perceptions to Environmental Perspectives. A Reflection on the Role of Anthropology in Environmental Issues.

Leticia Durand

Mexican studies on environmental perception are usually undertaken from a constructivist approach, which separates the natural from the human, considering the natural as a social construct. This point of view has its shortcomings. When we see the natural as a cultural product, culture looses the foundation on which meanings can be developed. On the other hand, a purely anti-essentialist approach overestimates human power to influence nature, and weakens at the same time nature's capacity for sociocultural transformation. To overcome these difficulties we need to consider that humans do not inhabit a world that is culturally constructed in its entirety, and that nature has the means to influence them directly, beyond their social experience. The purpose of this essay is to incorporate these ideas to the study of environmental perceptions, introducing the concept of environmental perspective as a useful element for considering nature in itself as a source of meanings and to overcome the dichotomy between nature and society. The concept of environmental perspective allows us to understand that environmental anthropology does not deal with different constructions of the natural, but with different environments.

Key words: constructivism, environmental perceptions, environmental perspectives, conservation.

The Communication of Science in Mexico: Seminal Studies and Future Paths.

María Alejandra Sánchez Vázquez

This article provides an overview of research studies on outreach efforts regarding science. The review departs from the social construction still favored by many scientists and communicators that considers the scientist as the source of

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pertinent and universally accepted knowledge and the lay public as the ignorant end that needs to be enlightened by scientific knowledge. The article describes the complexities involved in the communication of knowledge, and implies that it should be studied in a situated manner. It also stresses the social utility of knowledge as the core issue for improving its communication and understanding. The studies under review are European and Anglo-Saxon in origin and hence can't be applied to other social contexts; still, they show the way that similar studies could follow in the study of the communication of science in Mexico. It also suggests that this field of research can be useful in the creation of outreach products for the sciences.

Key words: science communication, Mexico, communication models, knowledge.

Peasant Involvement in the Creation of Alternative Technology.

Víctor M. Berrueta Soriano
Fernando Limón Aguirre

This study describes the process followed by a group of organic coffee producers from the state of Chiapas, Mexico, in the development of an alternative technology for the drying of coffee beans. Taking into account the knowledge and experience of both producers and researchers, we analyzed the production process and how to empower it at the drying phase. In this way, a solar coffee dryer was built following their own innovation process and considering available resources. This allowed for the creation of a kind of technology suitable to their socio-economic situation, their vision regarding the management of natural resources, and their cultural reality. The required criteria for building the dryer were defined in open meetings with local farmers, where it proved to be a good alternative in view of the benefits it provided.

Key words: technological development, participative research, appropriate technology, coffee, Chiapas.