

Publisher without Borders

Journal of the Southwest

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The University of Arizona's Southwest Center has enjoyed a long history of collaboration with researchers from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and with other institutions of higher learning across the border. Over the years, much of their work has appeared in *Journal of the Southwest* (JSW), the center's flagship scholarly publication. From ethno-botanical studies of Mayo River drainage and general surveys of northwest Mexico's flora and fauna, to the cultural geographies of food and the dynamics of immigration, JSW continues to make Mexican scholarship available to an Anglophone readership. For those of us who research and work in Mexico, the importance of

this kind of bi-national collaboration and publication is obvious. On a fundamental level, politics and society in Mexico and the United States are inextricably linked. Nonetheless, U.S. scholars, sometimes even within those fields that focus on Mexico and Latin America more broadly, can be woefully unaware of the vibrancy of Mexico's scholarly tradition. In its small way, *Journal of the Southwest* has attempted to address this unfortunate gap.

One of our recent issues (Autumn 2014) includes a translation of the book, *Between Yoris and Guarijíos: Chronicles of Anthropology* (*Entre yoris y guarijíos: crónicas sobre el quehacer antropológico*), by María Teresa Valdivia Dounce, published in 2007 by the UNAM's Institute for Anthropological Studies, where Valdivia is a researcher.¹ This article, based on my original introduction to the translated volume, provides an overview of Valdivia's experience in southern Sonora's Guarijía Mountains. It also briefly narrates the epic struggle

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Photos courtesy of David Burckhalter, photographer and writer. Tucson, Arizona.

Sierra de Nadie is an unflinching, frank assessment of institutionalized anthropology in Mexico. It is also a deeply personal account revealing the courage of a young *indigenista*.

of the Guarijío indigenous people for their land, ending with the present moment, in which they are faced with a new threat in the form of a dam now under construction on the upper Mayo River. Accompanying this article is a small selection of photographs by Tucson-based David Burckhalter, whose work has been featured in several magazines, journals, and books.

David and I have been working with Teresa (“Tere”) since late 2011, when I first approached her about the possibility of publishing a translated and edited version of her book in *JSW*. Years earlier, I had spotted a yellowing copy of her first publication, *Sierra de Nadie* (Mountains of No One) on a bookshelf at the Southwest Center.² *Sierra de Nadie* is an unflinching, frank assessment of institutionalized (“applied”) anthropology in Mexico. It is also a deeply personal account revealing both the naiveté and courage of a young, inexperienced *indigenista*, whose convictions led her to support the Guarijío people in a long and difficult struggle against exploitative landowners and corrupt government officials. That support certainly placed Teresa at odds with her superiors. On more than one occasion, it also led to death threats from private landowners. The circumstances in fact became so menacing that for a time Teresa took to walking around with a knife tucked into her belt for self-defense.

Teresa began her relationship with the Makurawe (Guarijío) people of southern Sonora and southwestern Chihuahua in 1978, contracted by Mexico’s National Indigenist Institute (INI) as part of a larger team of rural community development workers whose backgrounds ranged from agronomy to medicine. The institute’s core objective was to support indigenous people with a variety of social and cultural programs to bring them basic services and “development.” They had offices all over Mexico, particularly in the southern and more indigenous regions of the country. And at that time the Guarijíos needed all the help they could get.

When Tere arrived in Sonora, in her early twenties, she found most of them suffering from starvation and forced into near enslavement by several non-indigenous ranchers (whom the Makurawe and other indigenous groups of southern So-

nora typically refer to as “*yoris*”). She had never experienced anything like it before in her life. She was also ill-prepared for the harshness of the Sonoran landscape and climate. On top of it all, the institute’s approach was generally paternalistic and its objectives often vague. The INI was paralyzed by a conservatism that ensured survival in Mexico’s semi-authoritarian political culture of the time, and which often undermined the effectiveness and reach of its programs. Officialdom tended to view social activism of any kind during that period as the work of communist agitators. (Only ten years earlier the government, under President Díaz Ordaz, had initiated a campaign of brutal repression against university students and others, culminating in the murder of several hundred people in the now infamous Tlatelolco massacre of October 2, 1968.) Within bureaucracies, activism typically was met with some kind of discipline or even summary dismissal. Yet, in some instances, in some regions, the work of those associated with the now-defunct INI could also be transformative. In most of these instances, such transformation had as much if not more to do with the work of courageous individuals as it did with official programming. Such was the case with Tere in the Guarijía Mountains.

Teresa’s loyalty to the Guarijíos (in most instances, over the institute) showed them that people from outside the area cared about them, that there was broader concern for their plight. It gave them much-needed courage, and —just as important— a connection with a trustworthy interlocutor who could help them negotiate the labyrinth of bureaucratic *realpolitik*, paperwork, laws, and, in some cases, the horrors of official repression. Much of the work involved countless trips to the offices of the federal Agrarian Registry in Sonora’s state capital, Hermosillo, as well as numerous meetings with the Guarijíos, who came from remote villages, traversing the extremely rugged, arid, mountainous terrain of the Guarijía Mountains. Tere was no seasoned veteran of Mexican bureaucracy when she arrived. She was also one of very few women in a team made up almost entirely of male professionals. Nevertheless, her persistent efforts at organization helped the Guarijíos win several critical battles against the entrenched ranchers and their government allies, people who had no reservations about resorting to violent means when they deemed them necessary. Those victories ultimately allowed the Guarijíos to regain control over much of their ancestral lands, to build schools and health clinics, and to lift themselves, if only partially, out of the starvation conditions they had known for so long.



My colleague at the Southwest Center, Dr. David Yetman, had translated and used excerpts from this incredible story in his own volume, *The Guarijíos of the Sierra Madre: Hidden People of Northwest Mexico* (2002).³ Seeing this brief translation made me realize that Teresa's work needed to be available in its totality to Anglophone readers. The Guarijíos' struggle is a critical and largely unexamined dimension of the larger story of agrarian struggle and indigenous cultural survival in Northwest Mexico. The translation and publication of Teresa's research in *JSW* is important for another quite pressing (and related) reason: Since late 2010, state and federal authorities, working together with agribusiness interests and construction firms, have begun building a second dam and reservoir for the Mayo River (the first dam, located more or less between Navojoa and Alamos, was completed in the mid-1950s). The Mayo River runs through Guarijío territory. This new reservoir, when full, will inundate several of their fields

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and some of their communities situated along the flood plain, forcing relocation, or, in the case of floodplain fields, outright elimination. Work crews contracted by the state of Sonora have already cleared hundreds of hectares of tropical deciduous forest and begun building replacement villages. Others are busy constructing the reservoir's concrete "curtain" or wall.

Many Guarijíos are opposed to the dam. Others are in favor. To date, however, officials have made no sincere effort to openly and freely consult with them about this project, a process nonetheless required by law under constitutional reforms ratified in 2011, and in more than one instance, ordered by the courts. Instead, we have seen an organized campaign of intimidation and threats against anyone who dares to speak out, indeed, against anyone deemed by state officials and at least some regional business interests as standing in the project's way in any form or fashion. This is a situation that, unfortunately, characterizes large-scale infrastructure project across the planet. To oppose them, in many instances, is to put one's life at risk.

Once again Tere is in the thick of the struggle. She is part of a team of researchers and consultants assisting those Guarijíos whose voices have been squelched by the stridency and aggression of state and local officials, or of those with whom they have contracted. In August 2013, for example, authorities forced the Guarijíos' traditional governors to sign papers endorsing the project. They also forced the ouster of a traditional indigenous *gobernador* who had refused to sign, replacing him with another whom they had handpicked. He immediately provided his signature. Shortly after that, members of Teresa's team of consultants received threats by telephone and were forced to leave the state for several months. The systematic intimidation that we see today might make the Guarijíos' previous struggle seem quaint by comparison. The forces now rallied against them are indeed a juggernaut, and the construction project continues to advance despite legal and other challenges. Still, there would be no resistance today without those early efforts—there would be no land to protect at all, no memories of past victories to fuel the present will to resist.

For the 2014 translated special issue of *JSW*, I remained as faithful as possible to the style, rhythm, and tone of the original work, including to the more colloquial Spanish of an oral *testimonio*, a labor of love that led Teresa to spend countless hours tape-recording and taking notes in conversations with an important Guarijío leader, Cipriano Buitimea. Following Teresa's brief introduction, the first essay of the volume comes from her teacher and mentor at the Veracruz University in Xalapa, Veracruz, Andrés Medina Hernández. "The Diffuse Line: Ethnography and Literature in Mexican Anthropology," as the title suggests, is an in-depth, beautifully rendered exploration of the relationship between scholarship and literature in Mexican anthropology. This is the tradition within which he situates Teresa's work. Medina's essay is one of the few, if any, to ply this important line of inquiry. Next is Teresa's *Sierra de Nadie*, originally published by the INI in 1994 but revised and republished in the 2007 work, *Entre yoris y guarijíos* (Among Yoris and Guarijíos). Following that is "Like a Painted Footprint," the oral *testimonio* mentioned above. Teresa's efforts here are exemplary. She pushed herself to develop a distinctive approach to ethnography and oral history that, in the final product, allows Cipriano's language, so deeply rooted in Guarijío's ways of knowing,

to ring powerfully and clearly throughout. Finally, we included a scattering of the originally published photographs, as well as those of David Burckhalter's portfolio, which together help the reader experience visually the terrain of the Guarijía Mountains, see some of the actors involved in the land struggle, and better understand the Guarijíos' way of life in this isolated, "forgotten" region. This special issue of *JSW* is but a modest attempt to honor the Guarijíos and Tere, and all of those who continue in the struggle for life and livelihood in southern Sonora. The Southwest Center and its flagship publication, *Journal of the Southwest*, are enormously proud of this longstanding tradition of collaboration with the UNAM, and we remain firmly committed to the task of presenting critical Mexican scholarship to Anglophone readers. ■■

NOTES

¹ María Teresa Valdivia Dounce, "Among Yoris and Guarijíos: Chronicles of Anthropology," trans. Jeffrey M. Banister, *Journal of the Southwest* vol. 56, no. 3 (Autumn 2014), pp. 365-553.

² Teresa Valdivia Dounce, *Sierra de Nadie* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1994).

³ David A. Yetman, *The Guarijíos of the Sierra Madre: Hidden People of Northwest Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002), p. 270.

