

# Arturo Warman And Once Again We Beg to Differ...

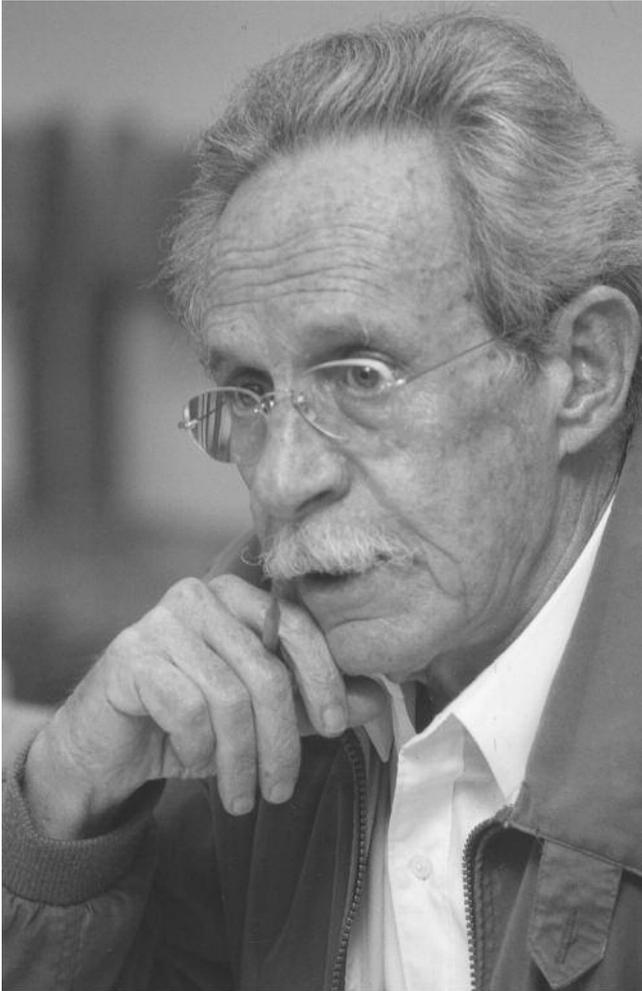
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**W**hile in a way any death is untimely, the death of Arturo Warman in October 2003, is unreservedly so. Warman's work and presence are important and necessary today in different spaces and with regard to dif-

ferent issues. Arturo leaves a mark and his absence a gaping hole in diverse fields: in the promotion and renewal of teaching and social research at the UNAM, in the development of rigorous, problem-posing interdisciplinary thinking that creates new ways of focusing on environmental issues in peasant Mexico, in the education of young specialists, in advisory work for designing informed,

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democratic public policy. Many of us trusted in his collaboration and guidance in various spheres, and we feel his loss in different fields. His work and legacy are solid.

Down through the years, Arturo Warman took on a broad gamut of tasks. He was a promotor of music, popular culture and ethnographic cinema; he was an international consultant, a contributor to newspapers and magazines, the director of research centers, a builder of institutions and a public official. He was a university professor at the National School of Anthropology and History, at

the Iberoamericana University, at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, at the Graduate College, at the Autonomous Metropolitan University, at the Center for Research and Higher Education in Social Anthropology, at the Complutense University of Madrid, at Princeton's Institute of Advanced Studies, at the John Hopkins University Department of Anthropology in Baltimore, at Columbia University's Institute of Latin American Studies in New York and at Cambridge University's Latin American Studies Centre in England.

As a researcher, Arturo was profoundly knowledgeable about the Mexican countryside. From his first works (*Los campesinos, hijos predilectos del régimen* [The Peasants, the Regimen's Favorite Children] and *Y venimos a contradecir... Los campesinos de Morelos y el Estado nacional* [And We Beg to Differ... The Peasants of Morelos and the National State]) to his recent work published in the new millennium (*El campo mexicano en el siglo xx* [The Mexican Countryside in the Twentieth Century] and *Los indios mexicanos en el umbral del milenio* [Mexican Indigenous on the Threshold of the Millennium]), the wisdom, intellectual freedom and the critique of academic dogmatism and political fundamentalism are constants. His proposals about peasants' continued existence in industrial societies, the critique of the persistent and pervasive control of the state over peasant and indigenous societies, and the elucidation of the role of the community in the construction of identities and the governability of indigenous and peasant societies have been central contributions. In addition to their explanatory value, they are part of a political agenda committed to democratizing the countryside.

The emphasis on the diversity of social processes in the rural world and on the need to consider and respond to the complexity of peasant and indigenous societies is another of the cross-cutting themes of his research. Already in 1976, in his work on peasants in Morelos, Warman wrote, "I tried to make sure that [country] people and their activities in all their complexity were clear. The result is barely a pale reflection of the enormous

and true diversity that exists.... I tried to discover what was specific about those activities, what was peculiar to them. I did not find *typical* peasants, but, rather, concrete peasants. But I do not explain what is peculiar to it as such, as a unique case... but rather as one way among many that are used to adapt to general conditions.”<sup>1</sup>

Another of the great qualities of Arturo Warman’s work is his mastery of history. Works such as *La historia de un bastardo. Maíz y capitalismo* (The History of a Bastard. Corn and Capitalism), and his writings about contemporary problems reveal a profound knowledge of history, which, in addition to putting processes into their appropriate contexts, leads us to think about the present. As he says in the introduction to *Mexican Indigenous on the Threshold of the Millennium*, “I try to... put the information in a historical context to be able to understand it as an expression of long processes with profound, widespread roots. However, I neither seek nor emphasize what is fixed or permanent; I very much doubt that those eternities can be productively applied to cultural and social phenomena.”<sup>2</sup>

Certainly, the rejection of the state’s authoritarian, paternalistic control over peasant communities is his most transcendental academic and political legacy. In his different academic works, and in his actions as director of the National Indigenist Institute, attorney general for agricultural affairs and minister of the agrarian reform, this was a continuing concern that mingled with a quest, not for utopias, but for the fostering of rural communities and regions made up of citizens with full rights to property, equality and the exercise of their differences. That was the spirit that guided his advice on the change in Article 27 of the Constitution to release the *ejido* and the community from the tutelage of the government, a tutelage which, throughout the twentieth century, was the source of a long history of abuses and corruption. The change in Article 27 made it possible for the communities and not their representatives and/or government officials to decide about the uses to which their lands and resources would be put.

Arturo Warman maintained academic work’s responsibility to social change, for decades assuming in his actions “a positive correlation between knowledge and the best decisions in all fields, above all in politics, in which ignorance turns into intolerance and brutality.”<sup>3</sup> Arturo insisted on the importance of participating as an “academic worker” in the debates on the great issues of the future of the countryside and indigenous societies in the country to “prompt better informed, more serene reflection with the awareness that working through the debate was not a matter for specialists, but for citizens.”<sup>4</sup>

On the threshold of the millennium, the deterioration of the conditions of social and environmental governability is a daily reality in many of Mexico’s rural regions, particularly where the indigenous population predominates. This deterioration involves many factors, including the impact of economic globalization, the lack of public investment (also responsible for the devaluation of peasant spaces and culture) and authoritarian traditions that linger in different spheres and with different justifications. Arturo Warman’s academic and political legacy is invaluable, necessary and timely for taking on current challenges in the spheres of teaching, research, advisory activities and responsible public action. It is the legacy of a liberal, a democrat. The memory we hold dear is that of a generous human being.

Arturo, our shared projects are yet to be realized. **MM**

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Arturo Warman, *Y venimos a contradecir. Los campesinos de Morelos y el Estado nacional* (Mexico City: SEP-CIESAS, 1976), pp. 11-12.

<sup>2</sup> Arturo Warman, *Los indios mexicanos en el umbral del milenio* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003), p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Warman, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.