

Venture Grant, Block 2, 2011:

Relocating the native in Hispanic food systems

As contemporary society rapidly expands, many communities have lost a sense of connection with the land and the space they inhabit. The extension of colonial power through the asymmetrical influence of one culture over another has led to the loss of a sense of place and the food systems (the network of behaviors, traditions, and beliefs concerning food) practiced by the earliest inhabitants (Long 2004). Food production and current agricultural processes have changed drastically over the past century where quantity over quality drives the market. Especially within the tourist marketplace, specific foods become commodities and their primary functions and roles they may have had for their original users are drastically altered (Long 2004).

Technological advances dominate agriculture and in many cases farmers no longer use the land to grow native crops like they once did. Food security can be defined as “the ability of all people to have enough food for an active and healthy life” (Brown et al 2009). Many communities across the globe are threatened by food shortages and variability because of physical constraints and natural opportunities such as presence of fertile soil, good weather, and access to the sea and mountain ranges. Although such changes have occurred across the globe, there are many cases where communities do have access to these resources, but have lost a sense of connection to the space they inhabit. By analyzing the agro-ecology of a specific area in Southern Mexico, I would like to research the role cultural colonialism has played in the evolution of Hispanic food ways and how communities can return back to and promote these more sustainable and historic agricultural methods through culinary tourism.

My insatiable curiosity towards and continual observation of the many subcultures surrounding my daily life along with my fluency in Spanish have inspired me to pursue a career

at Colorado College in Anthropology and Spanish. I would like to enhance my studies in this field by honing in on pre colonial food ways as a method for understanding culture and community and the way in which people “embellish and add meaning to their lives” as Nelson Graburn states (Long 2004). The specific region of Juluchuca in Guerrero, Mexico, provides a fascinating example of a grassroots movement to restore and regenerate a place that for so many years was dominated by colonialism and post-capitalism industry. I am drawn to this area not only because I speak the native language, but also because it is rich in both cultural and natural resources where community members are committed to preserve and maintain their original environment.

Research Site:

Juluchuca is nestled between the Sierra Madre Mountains and the Pacific Ocean and consists of a unique watershed with two large estuaries, coconut, mango and tamarin groves, and a terraced agricultural system designed with complex irrigation and fertilization systems. This agricultural system is highly influenced by the Aztec culture that arrived over 1000 years ago (Standish 2009). Many farmers and local civilians have utilized their connections to the past to revitalize their land and natural resources. Through indigenous archaeology dating back to the original inhabitants of the region, known as the Cihuatekans, and the use of their cultural resource management (the preservation of and use of cultural resources), contemporary life in Juluchuca strives to simulate cultural change and recognition of history of place to change contemporary agricultural methods and in doing so educate visitors to their area. I would like to take this preliminary cultural historical context further and research the manner in which the local people have found ways to utilize ancient agricultural methods to regenerate and restore their land and how they promote such methods through culinary tourism.

Research Question and Historical analysis:

The deep connection between the people and the land was first dramatically impaired when the Spaniards arrived in 1519. The Aztecs established methods of farming that replaced slash and burn techniques with complex irrigation and fertilization systems along with terracing land, but European civilization and technology drove unsustainable growth through massive deforestation. (Hill Boone 1994). Up until the early part of the 20th century, the area was largely uninhabited because of the massive destruction and depletion of the local population. During this time coastal forests in all of Guerrero regenerated along with local plants and animals. In 1930, the federal government decreed the land was subject to reassignment if it was not used productively, part of the agrarian reform movement lead by President Lazaro Cardenas (Standish 2009). The natives elected to replace natural forests with coconut palm plantations rather than risk losing their lands and the area was reduced to a simple coconut monoculture. Such changes favored short-term return over sustainable ranching practices. After thirty years, the system collapsed. Now, a variety of grassroots movements in Juluchuca are looking to regenerate and replace the natural environment (<http://www.playaviva.com/ecology-in-harmony/culture-and-community/history>). One of the most prominent of these movements is the local artisan salt co-op in Juluchuca that harvests salt by hand, in the same fashion as it has been done for centuries. Locals maintain this traditional, and “organic” harvest method to keep production in amore natural, low-tech process minimizing harm to the natural environment (<http://www.playaviva.com/campaign/salviva>). The local farmers turn to past agricultural strategies of how the land was once used with the resources that were available to remain successful and to build a resilient, sustainable ecosystem. If farmers continue to abuse the land in a way that destroys the native habitat, local communities will deplete resources, increasingly rely

on imported food and increase their dependence on fluctuating global economies. After years of neglect, I want to understand the variety of ways in which the local people are working to restore their relationship with their native roots. Reestablishing this connection is essential because it could inform other communities that are trying to mimic this process, and if applied elsewhere would have a global impact.

In order to promote and revitalize the Juluchan culture and nurture the natural resources, like the salt coop, the connection between the community and tourism is of prime importance. Moving away from a cultural and colonial tourism model and focusing on the link between the local people and their unique natural resources is the next step (Pinter 2005). Illuminating the meanings and relationships people create between food and the manner in which it embodies a personal and cultural past is essential to create change not only because it can solve problems in struggling communities, but it also can offer new development in some places and cultural regeneration in others (Long 2004).

Description of Research Plan:

In order to successfully study this relationship I plan to travel up the watershed in Juluchuca and do a cultural survey of the native crops that thrive in the region, along with an intensive study of the primary archeological site where a vast number of artifacts reveals the ancient history of agriculture in the area. In other words, I will supplement my cultural survey and ethnography with prehispanic data. My main focus will be on the construction of the terraces, the staple crops, and the tools and materials used by the original inhabitants of the region. Most of the research will be conducted through archival research, photography, and field notes, but basically, it will be a daily ethnography, recording the local peoples' thoughts on matters in which they have expertise regarding their relationship to their food system.

Academic Preparation for Research:

My academic career at Colorado College has both motivated and inspired me to pursue opportunities like this one. My initial interest in the subject was prompted by a two-block Anthropology course called “Rio Grande: Culture, History and Region,” where for three weeks, I followed the Rio Grande with ten other students from its point of origin in Stony Pass and Lost Creek Trail, to Boca Chica, Texas, where it feeds out into the Gulf of Mexico. I kept an ethnographic conceptual, food journal and focused on the many different culinary subcultures we visited and explored. I enriched this anthropology curiosity with several other Anthropology courses: introduction to anthropology, biological anthropology, human evolution, global health, and archeology. At the same time, I took several courses in Spanish and studied in Spain Fall semester 2010. This type of academic training has prepared me to undertake this research project. I would like to further my anthropology and language interests by taking this opportunity to focus on the specific relationship between food and people and merge it with culinary tourism. By researching prehispanic food production and the consumption and the ways in which the contemporary civilians today have incorporated such sustainable agricultural strategies in Juluchuca, I hope to aid in promoting the cultural restorative movement in the communal area. I would like to go beyond this and study the network of behaviors, traditions, and beliefs concerning food and how it can be used as a tool for change in contemporary society. I am considering graduate school in anthropology/archeology and food systems (e.g. UC Berkeley program is of great interest). This research will hone my skills and prepare me for graduate school.

Detailed Budget: Venture Grant, Block 2, 2011

Component	Cost	Details	Total Cost
Transportation (flights)	\$700	Flying from Denver International Airport to Zihuatanejo, Ixtapa International Airport and back	\$700
Food	\$7/ day	Includes groceries and meals at the local community center	\$200
Accommodations	\$100	Staying at local house, which is available to researchers, students and interns visiting the archaeological site	\$100
Transportation (while in Mexico)	\$200	Buses and taxis	\$200
Total Cost			\$1,200

I will apply to the anthropology department for research funds to supplement my local transportation and accommodations.

Works Cited

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