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Tanu Sankalia

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Field Report

Hybrid Place: A Reading of Cuetzalan, Mexico

TANU SANKALIA

This essay explores the idea of cultural hybridity in the hill town of Cuetzalan, Mexico. It focuses on two entities within the town: the *tianguis*, or informal Sunday market, and the Santuario de Guadalupe, also known as the Iglesia de los Jarritos, or “Church of the Clay Pots.” Hybridity, the essay shows, is not a facile outcome of the intermingling of different cultures, but the result of historical political struggle — in this case between the indigenous Nahuatl Indian population and the mestizos who moved to the Sierra Norte de Puebla during the nineteenth century. I conclude that by embodying socio-political and aesthetic oppositions, in tension with one another, hybridity creates stimulating places and facilitates the survival of marginal cultures.

An extremely magical town with brooks as ancient as most ancient things upon this Earth, with a pyramid that precedes the time of the Aztecs, with eaves that touch each other and narrow cobblestone streets, with churches of limestone walls and many indigenous people who still speak Nahuatl, with corners to daydream, and people with big hearts.

— Orazio Bio Castillo¹

Tanu Sankalia is an Associate Professor in the Department of Art & Architecture and Director of the interdisciplinary program in Urban Studies at the University of San Francisco.

Nestled on the windward side of the Sierra Norte mountains in east-central Mexico, at 3,214 feet above sea level, the hill town of Cuetzalan is engulfed in clouds year round, while torrential rains soak the surrounding lush green countryside. The town itself is compact, about two square kilometers, or a fifteen-minute walk from one side to the other (FIG. 1). Its steep, winding cobblestone streets are flanked by stately stone-masonry buildings that are covered with stucco, painted white, punctuated by wooden balconies with cast-iron railings, and capped by red tile roofs (FIG. 2). Its central square, *el zócalo*, is anchored by the grand, rustic, stone-finished Iglesia de San Francisco de Asís and the staid white Palacio Municipal, while Cuetzalan’s other significant historic landmark, the

FIGURE 1. Aerial view of Cuetzalan, showing the location of the tianguis and El Santuario de Guadalupe. Google Earth image.



elegant Neogothic Santuario de Guadalupe, is located a little distance away, on the edge of town (FIGS. 3, 4). Along the way stands the Casa de Maquina or the Maquina Grande, a large stone edifice built in 1898, a marker of the prodigious coffee industry that flourished in the region in the early twentieth century (FIG. 5).

Cuetzalan was built and settled in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by mestizos, who came from the regions of Puebla and Mexico City, but also by the local indigenous Nahua Indian population.² Over the decades — despite racial, cultural and political differences that led at one point to armed conflict — the Nahua and the mestizos

have been able to carve out a shared culture. A part of this culture can be seen in the syncretic cult of the plumed serpent Quetzalcoatl and San Francisco, the town's patron saint. And it can be seen in the festivals and ritual dances of the Nahua that permeate the spaces of the neocolonial town. The intermingling of Nahua and mestizo cultures can likewise be witnessed in the temporal practice of the informal market, the *tianguis*, held every Sunday on the *zócalo*, as well as in the town's buildings, of which the Santuario de Guadalupe, completed in 1895, and also known as the Iglesia de los Jarritos, or "the Church of Clay Pots," is a striking example.

In recent times, the fog-covered setting, the Neocolonial stone architecture, the cobblestone streets, the *tianguis* held every Sunday, and the Nahua with their customs have all unwittingly conspired to turn Cuetzalan into a tourist destination. Thus, in 2002, the Mexican government named Cuetzalan a *pueblo mágico* [magical town], and included it in a national initiative that promotes towns across Mexico that promise a "magical experience."³ Yet, while the beauty and mystique of Cuetzalan are unmistakable, government plans such as the Programa Pueblos Mágicos [Magical Villages Program] have been unable to produce much more than a tourist experience of place. Beneath this veneer, what has struck me, however, on my visits to Cuetzalan is not just the collision of cultural differences, but also a mixing of time. And, in turn, this has made me recall Néstor García Canclini's conception of "multitemporal heterogeneity," according to which one may simultaneously experience several pasts as well as the present.⁴ Renato Rosaldo has likewise written about how Latin American nation-states consider themselves as "being caught between traditions that have not yet gone and a



FIGURE 2. Cobblestone streets and Neocolonial buildings of Cuetzalan. Photo by author.



FIGURE 3. *The Iglesia de San Francisco Asís in the background, and the Palacio Municipal in the foreground. Photo by author.*



FIGURE 4. *El Santuario de Guadalupe — entry gate and steeple. Photo by author.*

modernity that has not yet arrived.”⁵ Such a hybrid position of “in-between-ness” — past-present, colonial-indigenous, tradition-modernity — is not entirely alien to me, given my own foundational experience of having lived in India. It was also why, as a subject of the global South, I was keen to find out how hybridity may be constituted in a Latin American town such as Cuetzalan.⁶

If the Nahuatl and mestizos jointly created the town of Cuetzalan, and if they fashioned through conflict and negotiation a shared culture of everyday life and architecture within it, how can this shared culture be seen through the lens of hybridity? How can “hybridity thinking” help uncover an old hybridity (as opposed to newer forms produced by globalization), one that may “be concealed under homogeneous identities” such as the Magical Villages Program, or under an overarching national culture based in Spanish mestizo traditions?⁷ By focusing on the lived space of Cuetzalan’s *tianguis* and the architectural motifs of the Santuario de Guadalupe, my goal here is thus to show how hybridity actually links to “concrete realities of the physical environment.”⁸

Since the 1970s, anthropologists, ethnographers, and political scientists have conducted research on the Nahuatl Indians, their villages, customs, and resistance to mestizo culture.⁹ After tourism took hold in the Sierra Norte region during the early 1990s, scholars have tried to understand its impacts on Nahuatl culture.¹⁰ Yet, there has been little scholarly work, especially in English, on the architecture and urbanism of Cuetzalan — a condition that I hope this essay will begin to address. The essay is based mainly on fieldwork conducted during two trips to Cuetzalan, the first in July 2016 and the second in January 2019. And it is further informed by primary source material I was able to collect during my visits, interviews, and subsequent research using secondary sources.



FIGURE 5. *The Maquina Grande. Photo courtesy of Ernesto Casas Chavelas.*

HYBRID CULTURE, HYBRID PLACE

To get at the question of how hybridity can serve as a lens to understand the shared culture of the Nahua and the mestizos in Cuetzalan, I begin by revisiting some key ideas that frame the concept of hybridity, and by adding several other insights relevant to my analysis. At the outset, I must acknowledge that not only is hybridity not a new concept, but scholars have, in fact, asserted that it has now become “ordinary” — just another part of everyday life in a postcolonial world of expanding globalization and pervasive multiculturalism.¹¹ Thus, Homi Bhabha, in a foreword to Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood’s recent edited volume *Debating Cultural Hybridity*, argued that the preponderance of hybrid culture has resulted in a hijacking of the concept by “neoliberal globalistas,” as it is turned into “a ubiquitous form of cultural universalism, the proper name of a homogenizing pluralism.”¹² Yet, despite these negative connotations, Bhabha fervently defended hybridity as a concept that is truly liberating, because it also represents a politics of the minority — an important consideration when examining power relations between the indigenous Nahua and the colonial mestizos in Cuetzalan.¹³

Terms such as transculturation, syncretism and hybridity are indeed central to the understanding of culture in the Latin American and Caribbean region. According to Jossiana Arroyo, syncretism is the creation of new cultures through the combination of two or more religious or social practices; moreover, she argued, “All cultures in Latin America are syncretic — a fusion of European and indigenous or African elements.”¹⁴ For Néstor García Canclini, hybridity — or “hybridization,” as he has called it — is an all-encompassing term. It consists of “sociocultural processes in which discrete structures or practices, previously existing in separate forms, are combined to generate new structures, objects, and practices [emphasis added].”¹⁵ Canclini further observed that “discrete structures” are not necessarily “pure points of origin,” but can be hybrids in themselves.¹⁶ Considering the vast range of hybrid cultures, from “syncretic religions” and “eclectic philosophies” to “mixed languages and cuisines, and hybrid styles in architecture, literature and music,” Peter Burke has likewise stressed the importance of not assuming that hybridity has similar meaning in all cases. According to him, hybridization can be differentiated through the categories of “practices, artefacts, and people.”¹⁷

Canclini has claimed that given the fundamental mestizaje nature of Latin American society — its mixed-race quality — hybridity cannot be ignored in analyzing social developments and cultural forms.¹⁸ Thus, Boaventura de Souza Santos has critically reexamined the historiography of mestizaje — from the formative, subaltern consciousness of José Martí’s *Nuestra América*; to the Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade’s idea of “anthropophagy” (the ability of Latin American subjects to devour everything alien to them); to Fernando Ortiz’s idea of “transculturation,” defined as a four-

century synthesis of European, African and Asian cultures in Cuba. And he has pointedly asked, “Who hybridizes whom and what? With what results? And to whose benefit?”¹⁹ De Souza Santos also argued that indescribable violence and loss of life were masked behind “the façade of a benevolent mestizaje” that became the self-serving narrative of white mestizos.²⁰ He thus distinguished between a white mestizo/colonial mestizaje and a dark mestizo/decolonial mestizaje, and claimed that crucial differences between the two have never been fully examined. To examine such differences is beyond the scope of this essay, but the tensions that underlie processes of hybridization in Cuetzalan have played out historically in the tenuous relationships between the Nahua and mestizos of the region. Moreover, to recognize the hybrid culture of Cuetzalan from the perspective of the Nahua Indians — from the bottom up, outside the confines of an all-encompassing Mexican national culture — might lead to a decolonization of existing mestizaje narratives.

In Latin America, hybrid practices have often been an outcome of colonization — “imposed rather than willed” — and have therefore at times been accompanied by “fracture and fragmentation.”²¹ Despite the attempts of colonizers to view Latin America as a *tabula rasa* on which they could inscribe their utopian projects, they could never entirely erase the past.²² This has produced a temporal mixing, or the notion of “mixed times” — *tiempos mixtos* — in which one may see the “co-existence and interspersation of premodernity, modernity, and postmodernity” in everyday life.²³ Canclini has referred to this condition as “multitemporal heterogeneity” — in which many pasts and the present can be witnessed at once. In a related vein, Duanfang Lu, in her reading of ethnic identity and urban form in Vancouver, has stressed the importance of the temporal dimension in studies of hybridity, an approach that may help bring out the “complexity of opposites and dominations in a specific place.”²⁴ To privilege only the spatial dimension in the study of hybrid places is to overlook history as well as how the past permeates the present. For example, in examining the lived space of the *tianguis* in Cuetzalan, it may not only be the collision of visual difference in space that is constitutive of hybridity; hybridity may also be constituted by the history of political struggle between the Nahua Indians and mestizos, especially if hybridity is seen as a long historical process. Indeed, the construction of hybridity, I claim, is not a phenomenon that can be achieved instantly.

Linguistic hybridization involves conscious, intentional acts as well as unconscious, organic processes. Pnina Werbner has observed that this is a long historical process by which all languages evolve.²⁵ And she wrote that if we were to apply this logic to culture, or architecture, “we may say that despite the illusion of boundedness, cultures evolve historically through unreflective borrowings, mimetic appropriations, exchanges and inventions.”²⁶ Hybrid artifacts, or hybrid buildings, born from an unconscious or organic hybridization, serve as a substrate on which intentional, de-

liberate acts can thus “shock, change, challenge, revitalize or disrupt.”²⁷ Yet, hybrid buildings, as Andrzej Piotrowski has shown in his study of historical churches in Armenia, Turkey and Greece, are also the outcome of “suppressed or unconscious processes of cultural negotiation.” Hybrid buildings, he thus argued, are not the product of creative genius, or “conscious expressions of symbolic intentions.”²⁸ Instead, they carry subtle signs that project conflicted values that are “too complex or nascent” to find explicit expression, and are often “idiosyncratic manifestations of cultural negotiation.”²⁹

As I will demonstrate, the distinction between conscious and unconscious acts of hybridization, and their idiosyncratic display, provides a useful way to understand the hybridity of buildings in Cuetzalan, especially the Santuario de Guadalupe.

CUETZALAN — PAST AND PRESENT

Cuetzalan gets its name from a bird with red feathers, the *cuezali* — which is also a Nahuatl word meaning “red bird.” The suffix *lan* denotes place — much as the originally Persian word *abad* does in South Asia (as in Islamabad, Ahmedabad). The name of the town thus designates the place of the red bird, or the “place where the red bird abounds.”³⁰ And for some, it has also come to mean “handful of precious feathers” — or, more plainly, just “beautiful place.”³¹ From 2010 data, there were only about six thousand residents in the main town of Cuetzalan.³² In the last few decades, though, the town has grown beyond its initial historic core, as newer, generic, brick and concrete buildings have crept into the surrounding landscape. The municipality of Cuetzalan del Progreso, of which the town of Cuetzalan is the main seat, covers an area of 735 square kilometers, with a population of about 47,000 in numerous villages and towns spread across a neighboring expanse of mountains and forest.³³

Cuetzalan, from its very founding in the late nineteenth century, has been both a mestizo and a Nahua town. Hybridity runs in its roots. Before the Spanish conquest, the Totonacs, an older indigenous groups who made the Sierra Norte their home, had been pushed to the north and central parts of the state of Veracruz, as Aztec dominance spread outward from Tenochtitlan (present-day Mexico City).³⁴ The people who took over the lands of the displaced Totonacs were the Nahua, the group that occupies the lands of Cuetzalan del Progreso to this day. The Nahua are linguistically Nahuatl, with Aztec ancestry, but still share some cultural traits with the Totonacs in terms of family structure, dress, and ritual life. This may be seen, for instance, in the dance of the *voladores* that is enacted in front of the main church on the *zócalo*.³⁵

The ethnic composition of the Cuetzalan area changed during the mid-nineteenth century, however, when a large population of nonindigenous colonists — mestizos — migrated to the region. In the early 1800s, most of these migrants were maize farmers who cultivated land vacated by the

Nahua or who rented plots from them.³⁶ But this changed in the 1850s when clergymen and other wealthy mestizo families moved into the region, followed by a group of about one hundred Italian families from Calabria. These later migrants had markedly different interests: to own land, raise livestock, and grow coffee. And the pursuit of land — looking for the best pastures in the *tierra cálida* — brought them into conflict with the indigenous Nahua. Land holdings among the Nahua had been communal, not based on individual property rights, and these traditional structures conflicted with the demands of the incoming mestizo migrants in the 1850s. During this period, the government’s goal of bringing economic development to the Sierra Norte through private enterprise thus led to “The Confiscation of Rural Estates and Urban, Civil and Religious Corporations Act” [Leyes de Desamortización de Bienes], commonly referred to as Ley Lerdo, or the Lerdo Law. Enacted in 1856, the law resulted in the confiscation of land from indigenous collectives, promotion of private ownership, and monetary support for the cultivation of tropical cash crops such as coffee, sugar and tobacco.³⁷ These economic and legal reforms, followed by land appropriations, disregarded historical communal landownership patterns, displaced indigenous groups, and produced significant changes in the social and economic structures of the region.³⁸

Cuetzalan was officially founded on March 28, 1861.³⁹ A few months later, in May 1861, *mojoneras*, or markers, were laid down to define the land that belonged to the town.⁴⁰ In the wider area of the municipality of Cuetzalan del Progreso, however, traditional Nahua patterns of communal landownership were harder to disrupt, and cultivation collided with the mestizos’ desire to own land and cultivate coffee. There ensued a thirty-year armed insurrection over property rights that began in the 1860s, led by Francisco “Pala” Agustín Dieguillo, of the Nahua, against non-Indians [*gente de razón*]. For various reasons, however, “Pala” Agustín — who would also serve as president of the Cuetzalan municipality for eleven years in the late nineteenth century — was not intent on entirely expelling the *gente de razón* from the municipality. Neither did the struggle he led turn into an all-out *guerra de castas* [caste war]. However, it did achieve the goal of limiting the privatization of communally held land and protecting the large swathe of territory that the Nahua had carved out against settlement by an ambitious group of mestizos.⁴¹ Ultimately the Nahua struggle between 1868 and 1894 limited access of mestizo coffee planters to the commons of Cuetzalan del Progreso, and it delayed the production of coffee in the area until the late 1890s. And when coffee-production did finally begin there, it would be the Nahua who farmed the coffee plants, limiting the mestizos to coffee processing and trade. The conflict over property rights between the Nahua and the mestizos had the effect of ensuring equal access to the town of Cuetzalan for the Nahua.

By 1875 Cuetzalan had been formally recognized as a town in the state of Puebla and as capital of a municipality,

a change in status followed by a phase of significant urban development. Its “Porfiriato” urban planning and architecture — realized during the rule (1876–1911) of Mexico’s 27th president, Porfirio Díaz (1830–1915) — had distinctive French Neogothic leanings, a style in considerable vogue in Europe during this period.⁴² Eventually the municipality of Cuetzalan also became one of the most prosperous in the state, fueled by its prodigious coffee harvests and by the hard labor of the Nahua coffee farmers. As Guy Thomson has written, “The immense Gothic parish church, the sanctuary to the Virgin of Guadalupe, the imposing town hall with its statuary of noble savages wearing improbable headdresses, the numerous graceful merchants’ residences, and the Gothic coffee warehouses still bear witness to the town’s greatness.”⁴³ Thus, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the *gente de razón* had sunk deep roots in Cuetzalan, and, with the Nahua, they realized a number of goals (agriculture and trade among others), from which they could draw mutual economic benefit. The *tianguis*, now held every weekend, is part of this negotiated, shared culture in Cuetzalan.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the Sierra Norte region was still quite remote, and it was not until the 1950s that a paved road was built connecting Cuetzalan to other nearby towns of the Mexican *altiplano*, and further on to Puebla and Mexico City. However, in the late 1980s, a winter freeze destroyed coffee production in the area, and forced locals to turn to tourism to support themselves. As projects were developed to attract city dwellers, tourists began to trickle in for weekend getaways to explore caves, canoe down waterfalls, visit the nearby archeological ruins, and experience the distinct culture of the Nahua people.⁴⁴ Eventually the town’s architectural uniqueness and proximity to nature then led to it being included in the Programa Pueblos Mágicos initiated by the Secretariat of Tourism (SECTUR).⁴⁵

The intention of the Programa Pueblos Mágicos is to promote domestic and international tourism by showcasing a “real” and “authentic” Mexico, beyond its popular beaches and archeological sites.⁴⁶ Local reactions to it have been mixed since its inception. While many villagers acknowledge the economic opportunities the program has generated, others see the influx of tourists as threatening to local culture, and as reinforcing inequalities and existing social divisions.⁴⁷ Scholars have also pointed out that not only does the program invent traditions and stage authenticity, but it has led to a top-down governmentality, where the identity of places — the continuity and/or transformation of traditions — is now determined by policies emanating from Mexico City, not from local communities themselves.⁴⁸

Studies related to tourism in Cuetzalan, and to the Magical Villages Program, present a complex picture. In the face of ethnic and ecological tourism, they argue that Nahua culture has embraced yet another dimension — as it did when challenged by the mestizo migrations of the nineteenth century. As Luisa Amador-Greathouse has thus written, “Tour-

ism has focused new attention on indigenous people and has provided them with a ‘stage’ where their language, customs, culture and traditions are displayed with pride and esteem.”⁴⁹ Tourism has also ironically been instrumental in preserving minority languages and culture, and has, in fact, paved the way for a rapprochement between mestizo and indigenous populations in the area. Mestizos are thus delighted that tourists come to Cuetzalan to experience Nahua culture and in the process provide them with business. The result has also been to sustain a hybrid identity of place that is equally expressive of Nahua and mestizo traditions.

On the other hand, in her analysis of tourism in Cuetzalan, Gabriela Coronado has argued that historical political struggles and contemporary social conciliations are processes that “may simultaneously bring collaboration, conflict and negotiation, none of which are easily recognized when the sanitized terms such as ‘authenticity’ and the ‘host-guest paradigm’ are used.”⁵⁰ Her observations underscore the superficial bent of the Magical Villages Program and its inability to reveal the historical social divisions or cultural conflicts and negotiations that are at the center of the hybrid experience of the town.

THE SUNDAY TIANGUIS

Tianguis are temporary markets that can be found in many cities across Mexico. Their origin lies in the practice of barter, *el trueque*, that dates back to interactions between Spanish colonists and indigenous groups. The *tianguis* are today packaged as a selling point in the Magical Villages Program and exoticized in the popular press.⁵¹ Yet they still also represent a living practice that is internally focused — in other words, one that is not “staged” for tourist consumption.

The word *tianguis* is a Spanish-Nahuatl hybrid derived from the Nahuatl word *tiyanquitzli*, or “place for trading.”⁵² In his study of Mexico City’s *tianguis*, Joseph Heathcott observed that these temporary markets “survived the otherwise brutal [Spanish] conquest relatively intact, providing a space of exchange between indigenous and Spanish communities.”⁵³ During the Porfiriato, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, especially in Mexico City, the *tianguis* likewise withstood attempts by authorities to clear them away as an archaic practice no longer in keeping with a modernizing republic. Then, in the twentieth century, as cities expanded rapidly and authorities were no longer able to keep pace by building formal markets, or *mercados*, *tianguis* were once again seen as viable alternatives. Today, in most cities across Mexico, *tianguis* operate within the regulatory regime of city municipalities and serve as a vital resource for residents looking to buy everything from food to household goods.

In Cuetzalan, the *tianguis* takes place on the edges of the *zócalo* and along its adjacent streets (FIG. 6). The Iglesia de San Francisco de Asís, a Renaissance-Gothic hybrid church,



FIGURE 6. *The tianguis on the zócalo. Photo by author.*



FIGURE 7. *Nahua women at the tianguis selling beans, flowers, and fresh vegetables. Photo by author.*

built in phases between 1905 and 1962 as a renovation of an earlier chapel, serves as a backdrop to the *tianguis*. Adjacent to the church is the Palacio Municipal, which was first built in 1875, but then significantly renovated between 1937 and 1941 with funds from taxes imposed on coffee. The building's plain, white, Neoclassical exterior is similar to the 1735 Basilica of Saint John Lateran in Rome, on which it is based.

The Nahua come to the Sunday *tianguis* from nearby villages carrying goods wrapped in large cotton sheets on their backs. Even before the inception of the town, the Nahua would come to the same location where the *tianguis* is now held to exchange their products. It is almost as if the town grew around the *tianguis*. For years, *el trueque* mostly took place with regard to local products such as coal and wood; turkeys, chickens and pigs; spices and dried fish; chili peppers, corn, beans, tomatoes and squash. However, over the last several decades traditional market practices have grown to accommodate more standard forms of buying and selling, with barter continuing marginally. Vendors from surrounding towns come to Cuetzalan, set up their stalls with temporary tarp awnings, and stock their tables with all sorts of wares.

Almost anything one needs can be found at the *tianguis* — vegetables, fruit and meat, household goods, personal items, fresh-cut flowers, and cooked food (FIGS. 7, 8). While many products are local, Chinese-made goods have also made their presence, much to the dismay of some observers who see the older traditions of the *tianguis* being replaced by a generic globalized marketplace.⁵⁴ The cultural differences between the mestizo merchants who live in Cuetzalan and the Nahua who live outside are stark, and have been part of the underlying friction between the groups that continues to this day (FIG. 9).⁵⁵ Yet the *tianguis* functions as a negotiated space of commerce, facilitating a condition of cultural intermingling. This can be witnessed in the simultaneity of barter with more regular forms of buying and selling; in the Nahua dressed in traditional attire often mixed with contem-



FIGURE 8. *The tianguis spreads out on the neighboring streets; flower vendors. Photo by author.*



FIGURE 9. *Nahua woman (facing) selling local fruit (zapote and guayaba) and carved bamboo mugs; mestizo woman with back turned selling purses, belts, and other mass-produced personal goods. Photo by author.*

porary clothing and the mestizos in their modern apparel; in the sounds of spoken Nahuatl and Spanish; in the diverse tapestry of merchandise and food; and in the informal architecture of the *tianguis* against the backdrop of the town's formal Neocolonial architecture. But these visual and aural signs of cultural hybridity that come together in the *tianguis* are evident today only because of the historical political struggle of the Nahua, which gave them a claim to the town and to political representation in the municipality.

The very presence of the Nahua and their historical traditions of exchange are a crucial reminder of the origins of the *tianguis*, and how it has functioned, and continues to function, as a negotiated space. The past of the Nahua Indians and their complex relationship with the mestizos permeates the present, producing the sense of mixed times — of past and present — where, as Canclini has put it, “traditions have not yet disappeared and modernity has not completely arrived.” The *tianguis* thus functions as an “interstitial” space — between times — and as a “third space” outside colonial, national discourses (the Porfiriato) or those of the state (the Magical Villages Program). As Felipe Hernández has pointed out, “hybrid synthetic manifestations imply the existence of another dimension in which synthesis never occurs, in which elements remain apart, and, perhaps, not in a harmonious coexistence but in a permanent struggle for survival.”⁵⁶

The staged authenticity that the Magical Villages Program seeks to promote to tourists cannot be equated with such deeper forms of hybridization. And neither can a pastiche of different elements and styles, brought instantly together in lifestyle malls, theme parks, or nostalgic places, reflect hybridity. The reality is that hybridization is a longer, sometimes difficult process that does not always produce a synthesis of two or more cultural or aesthetic practices in a new whole. It may rather represent an ever-present simultaneity reflecting an enduring conflicted relationship.

EL SANTUARIO DE GUADALUPE OR LA IGLESIA DE LOS JARRITOS

Mestizo families and the Nahua Indians built the Santuario de Guadalupe at the end of the nineteenth century, at a time when economic prosperity came to the region under the Porfiriato. According to Emma de Los Angeles Gutierrez-Manzano, the *cronista*, or local historian, of Cuetzalan, a powerful group of mestizos wanted to make something significant to announce Cuetzalan's importance in the region.⁵⁷ And after the parish church on the *zócalo* was severely damaged, the town needed another place for worship.⁵⁸ An influential group of women, wives of mestizo coffee plantation owners, raised funds for the construction of the sanctuary church.⁵⁹ The Nahua also contributed money and labor, as did the residents of four towns surrounding Cuetzalan.⁶⁰ Leading the construction effort was Jesus Flores, the mestizo presi-

dent of the Cuetzalan municipality between 1887–1899 and 1901–1904, and a coffee plantation owner who also donated considerable sums of money to the effort. It bears noting also that during the 1890s Cuetzalan had become a “Flores fiefdom,” and that Manuel Flores, a relative of Jesus Flores, was central to the seizure of communal Nahua lands that led “Pala” Agustín and followers to armed insurrection.⁶¹

The construction of the church began on December 12, 1889, its design based on the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, completed in 1866, in Lourdes, France.⁶² The decision to copy this structure was purportedly made by the same influential group that led the building initiative, and was consistent with the prevailing aesthetic of the time, which emerged from cultural connections forged during the late nineteenth century between Mexico and France. G. Marcos Barrios Bonilla, a former *cronista* of Cuetzalan, has suggested that the style of the sanctuary was also a way for the mestizos to assert their influence over the indigenous population.⁶³ The construction was completed in six years, and the first holy mass was held there on December 15, 1895.

The Santuario is located at the end of a long street, the Calzada Guadalupe, and one enters the church grounds through a portal there that houses a small parish office. Within the church compound is a generous central walkway flanked by cemeteries on both sides. The church is unmistakably Neogothic in style, with an outwardly light and slim mass (FIG. 10). It is built entirely of stone, embellished with stucco and paint. Its soaring central steeple rises fifty



FIGURE 10. *The Santuario de Guadalupe or the Iglesia de los Jarritos.* Photo by author.



FIGURE 11. Interior view of the Santuario de Guadalupe. Photo by author.

feet above a modestly scaled front facade featuring eight pointed arches, and is capped by a belfry and spire flanked by significantly lower complementary pinnacles. Inside, the nave is split by a single aisle (FIG. 11). And this structure is expressed on the facade by the steeple, which produces a distinct and singular verticality. Stone flying buttresses, underscoring the structure's Neogothic pedigree, provide the nave with its structural integrity.

A striking feature of the church is the ornamentation on its spire, which is entirely anomalous to its otherwise consistent Neogothic style. Stone crockets adorning the spires of Gothic churches are usually carved in the form of foliage or floral elements. But this ornamental detail is here oddly replaced by strings of clay pots (FIG. 12). Numerous Neogothic churches across the world do not employ crockets as decorative elements, but the spire of the basilica in Lourdes does feature them (FIG. 13).⁶⁴ And during construction of the Santuario, strings of clay pots were ingeniously attached in place of them, using metal wires attached at the base



FIGURE 13. Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, Lourdes, France. Notice the main steeple with crockets. Photo from Wikimedia commons.



FIGURE 12. The spire of the Santuario de Guadalupe with its clay pots, or jarritos. Photo by author.

and tip of the stone spire, further attached with slim metal brackets. The result are eight vertical lines of ornamentation, each occupying a facet of the octagonal spire, which appear like beads on a string, decreasing in size as the spire tapers toward its summit (FIG. 14). In addition, the strings



FIGURE 14. View of the spire of El Santuario de Guadalupe, showing how its clay pots diminish in size toward the top. Photo by author.



FIGURE 15. Detail of a complementary pinnacle with jarritos motif. Photo by author.



FIGURE 16. Inside the church, behind the altar, a replica of the steeple made in wood with the jarritos motif. Photo by author.

of pots are repeated on the smaller complementary pinnacles, forming a distinct repetitive motif (FIG. 15). And inside the church, at the altar and along the retablo, are replicas in wood of the spire itself (FIG. 16). The decorative feature of the clay pots, used as substitutes for floral crockets superimposed on the steeple, give the church its other name: Iglesia de los Jarritos, or “Church of the Clay Pots.”

How this strange superimposition of local elements found its way on the steeple, who made the decision to do it, and why, are questions with only provisional answers.⁶⁵ According to Gutierrez-Manzano, the decision to use clay pots was a practical one. The pots were readily available and were extensively used in the region during the nineteenth century for storing water and food. Furthermore, the laborers who built the church were mostly Nahua, and they were able to engineer this adornment to the steeple using their own traditional expertise. The use of floral crockets, made out of stone or plaster, was thus simply abandoned in favor of them, she believes. Nonetheless, as an acknowledgment of the original from Lourdes, crockets with a leaf motif *were* used to ornament a miniaturized replica of the steeple, built from wood, located on the pulpit inside the church (FIG. 17).

What we see in the Santuario is a process of “appropriation and adaptation” — the appropriation of the Neogothic church from Lourdes and its adaptation to Cuetzalan with the use of unusual decorative features. Yet the question lingers: was the use of the clay pots a deliberate act to achieve a



FIGURE 17. The spire of the pulpit inside the church with crockets similar to the Gothic foliage motif seen at the church in Lourdes. Photo by author.

kind of syncretism on the part of the Nahua, or merely one of “making do”? The anthropologist Richard Haly has pointed out, following extensive fieldwork with the Nahua in the Sierra Norte de Puebla, that “the political and economic hegemony enjoyed by the Cuetzaltecos [the mestizos of Cuetzalan] has been gained at the expense of the Nahuas — as *prima materia*: land and labor — consequently anything marked ‘*indio*’ [Indian] is, by definition, inferior.”⁶⁶ Therefore, were the clay pots a lesser option? And was it through the *jarritos* that the Nahua were trying to achieve a “representative” stake in the church?

Cuetzalan’s *cronista* disavows the significance of the clay pots as a sign of resistance, and believes they were used for more practical reasons. But it is here that Andrzej Piotrowski’s observation about hybrid buildings may be relevant: that complex design decisions are “far more than the pure pragmatics of problem solving or the conscious expression of symbolic intentions.”⁶⁷ They are instead often the result of conflicts and negotiations that are too complex to explicitly convey in well-constructed narratives. This is why, he believes, they may take on such idiosyncratic forms. Writing on Spanish-Nahua interaction after the conquest, Richard Lockhart has also pointed out that “whenever the two cultures ran parallel, the Nahua would soon adopt the relevant Spanish form without abandoning the essence of their own form.”⁶⁸ Therefore, what we see is hybridity constituted through a taut opposition of elements. The meaning of the *jarritos*, one can conclude, hovers somewhere between a conscious act of representation and that of practicality or making-do.

In Mexico, the question of cultural mestizaje must also be framed in the context of an imagined national culture. Mestizaje, particularly from a cultural perspective, according to Haly, is “a syncretism of Spanish institutions: Roman Catholicism, literacy and constitutional government with indigenous *prima materia*.”⁶⁹ Thus the “Spanish” is dependent on the “other” of the Nahua to forge a viable mestizaje — just as much as the Nahua is dependent on the Spanish. However, this union becomes problematic in the context of national culture, where the scales tilt invariably toward a dominant Spanish identity in constituting mestizaje, given the status of Spain as an independent nation compared to the marginal position of the Nahua Indians. It is within this “somewhat one-sided discourse on acculturation,” Haly has argued, that the Nahua might adopt Spanish practices to resist a dominant national culture without abandoning their own. And, while nationalists are keen to identify the faithfulness to Spanish practices, within mestizaje the Nahua would interpret these signs “from their own, equally ethnocentric, point of view.”⁷⁰ This could well be another possible reading of the clay pots against the Neogothic style of the Porfiriato — a style that tended toward the construction of Mexican national culture in concurrence with modernity.

HYBRIDITY AS AN EXTENDED PROCESS

Hybridity in Cuetzalan finds expression in the Sunday *tianguis* held on the *zócalo* and in the Santuario de Guadalupe or Iglesia de los Jarritos. The *tianguis*, as a hybrid practice, was constituted historically through political struggle. Thus, the armed insurrection during the second half of the nineteenth century, led by Agustín “Pala” Dieguillo ensured property rights for the Nahua, kept the private landownership of the *genté de razon* at bay, and most importantly, provided access to the town of Cuetzalan where the Nahua could come to buy, sell and exchange goods. The Iglesia de los Jarritos, as a hybrid artifact, with clay pots strung along the spire of an otherwise Neogothic church, likewise presents a powerful sign of the interaction of the Neocolonial, Porfiriate aesthetic leanings of the mestizos with the indigenous material sensibilities of the Nahua. As a whimsical choice and application, the meaning of the strings of pots hovers somewhere between rational problem solving and symbolic representation.

The Nahua possessed a centuries-old political consciousness around ideas of communal property — the commons — supported through the agency of gods, supernatural beings, and ancient rituals. They were an integral part of the nineteenth-century modernity that produced the town. What may be concluded, therefore, is that hybridity in Cuetzalan is not the facile outcome of a superficial intermingling of premodern Nahua culture and the positivist modernity of the mestizos with their allegiances to the Porfiriato. Hybridity here must be seen as the outcome of a long process of political struggle, realized in the negotiated space of the *tianguis* where oppositions and differences may remain un-synthesized.

Hybridization in place-making, or the hybrid identity of places, thus produces a resiliency in the very tensions it supports. To use a botanical analogy (not completely unbecoming in Cuetzalan because of its agricultural history), hybridization ensures the survival of marginal cultures in places — just as the hybridization of flowers, coffee, cereals, and other products expands their genetic composition to ensure survival in the face of changes in climate and habitat.⁷¹ And it is with this in mind that I have alluded to an organic relationship between the lived spaces of the *tianguis* and the architectural adornments on the Iglesia de los Jarritos, as these have been produced out of the contentious socio-political history of Nahua-mestizo interaction.

REFERENCE NOTES

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2. Mestizos are a mixed-race people, typically a mix of Spanish and American Indian.
3. *Program Pueblos Mágicos*; retrieved from www.visitmexico.com/pueblosmagicos and <http://www.gob.mx/sectur/>.
4. N.G. Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
5. R. Rosaldo, "Foreword," in Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*, p.xi.
6. See H. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994).
7. M. Juergensmeyer and H.K. Anheier, *Encyclopedia of Global Studies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2012), p.327.
8. N. AlSayyad, *Hybrid Urbanism: On the Identity Discourse and the Built Environment* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 2001), p.ix.
9. See, for example, C.R. Giordano, "Anthropological Notes on the Sierra de Puebla," *Artes de México*, Vol.192 (1976/1977) pp.110–11; M. de Orellana, "The Municipality: Cuetzalan," *Artes De México*, Vol.155 (1972); R. Haly, "'Upon This Rock': Nahuas and National Culture, a Contest of Appropriations," *American Indian Quarterly*, Vol.20 No.3/4, Special Issue: "To Hear the Eagles Cry: Contemporary Themes in Native American Spirituality" (Summer–Autumn 1996), pp.527–62;
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12. Juergensmeyer and Anheier, *Encyclopedia of Global Studies*, p.327. See also P. Werbner, "Introduction: The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity," in P. Werbner and T. Modood, *Debating Cultural Hybridity: Multicultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism* (London: Zed Books, 2015), pp.1–26.
13. H. Bhabha, "Foreword," in Werbner and Modood, *Debating Cultural Hybridity*, p.x.
14. Charles Stewart has called for studies that focus on the "politics of hybridity" as opposed to "descriptive taxonomies of hybridity." C. Stewart, "Creolization, Hybridity, Syncretism, Mixture," *Portuguese Studies*, Vol.27 No.1 (2011), p.52.
15. J. Arroyo, "Transculturation, Syncretism, and Hybridity," in Y. Martínez-San Miguel, B. Sifuentes-Jáuregi, and M. Beluasteguigoitia, eds., *Critical Terms in Caribbean and Latin American Thought: Historical and Institutional Trajectories* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); and C. Stewart, "Creolization, Hybridity, Syncretism, Mixture."
16. Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*, p.xxv.
17. P. Burke, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), p.13.
18. Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*.
19. B. de Souza Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2014), p.66.
20. *Ibid.*, p.65.
21. Juergensmeyer and Anheier, *Encyclopedia of Global Studies*, p.327.
22. J.F. Lejeune, ed., *Cruelty and Utopia: Cities and Landscapes of Latin America* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2005).
23. Juergensmeyer and Anheier, *Encyclopedia of Global Studies*, p.327.
24. D.F. Lu, "The Changing Landscape of Hybridity: A Reading of Ethnic Identity and Urban Form in Vancouver," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, Vol.11 No.2 (Spring 2000), p.26.
25. Werbner is referring here to Mikhail Bakhtin's writings about linguistic hybridization. See P. Werbner, "Introduction: The Dialectics of Cultural Hybridity," p.4.
26. *Ibid.*, p.4.
27. *Ibid.*, p.5.
28. A. Piotrowski, "Heresy, Hybrid Buildings, and a Geography of Architectural Traditions," *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review*, Vol.27 No.1 (Spring 2015), p.8.
29. *Ibid.*, p.18.
30. Casa de la Cultura, "Cuetzalan . . . A Living Past," exhibition catalogue (Cuetzalan: Mexico, June 26, 2016).
31. Greathouse-Amador, "Ethnic, Cultural and Eco-Tourism."
32. INEGI (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía); retrieved from <http://www3.inegi.org.mx/sistemas/mexicocifras/> (2010).
33. *Ibid.*
34. Giordano, "Anthropological Notes on the Sierra de Puebla."
35. In this ancient Mesoamerican ritual, perhaps originating to ward off a persistent drought, five men dance barefoot around a thirty-meter-high pole, circling it seven times before climbing up. The four dancers represent the four cardinal points, and the fifth the center. Balancing off a square wooden frame connected to the top of the pole, four of the men launch themselves, head first, like birds, suspended from ropes, and gradually spiral down, as a soothing melody on a two-tone flute, accompanied by a tiny drum, plays along. In pre-Columbian times the men would be dressed as eagles and macaws, representing sunbirds. The man at the top of the pole, "El Capitán," is sometimes the musician, but he also belays the ropes that ensure the four flying birdmen get safely to ground. See V.B. Kandt, "Fiesta in Cuetzalan," *Artes de México*, Vol.155 (1972), pp.104–7.
36. Thomson, "Agrarian Conflict in the Municipality of Cuetzalan."
37. G.P.C. Thomson with D.G. LaFrance, *Patriotism, Politics and Popular Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Mexico: Juan Francisco Lucas and the Puebla Sierra* (Wilmington DE: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1999).
38. Thomson, "Agrarian Conflict in the Municipality of Cuetzalan"; and Casa de la Cultura, "Cuetzalan . . . A Living Past."
39. E. Gutiérrez-Manzano, *Cuetzalan 1861–1968: Testimonio de un legado documental* (Apoyo al Desarrollo de Archivos y Bibliotecas de México, A.C., 2004).
40. *Ibid.*, p.25.
41. Thomson, "Agrarian Conflict in the Municipality of Cuetzalan," p.258.
42. Porfirio Díaz, Mexico's president, was enamored of French culture and architecture. The Porfiriato was a 34-year period, from 1876 to 1911, during which Mexico was greatly influenced by French culture.
43. Thomson, "Agrarian Conflict in the Municipality of Cuetzalan," p.251.
44. Greathouse-Amador, "Tourism and Policy in Preserving Minority Languages and Culture."
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48. Gross, “Divided over Tourism,” p.52.
49. Amador-Greathouse, “Tourism and Policy in Preserving Minority Languages and Culture,” p.56.
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51. B. Beeson, “Mexico’s Perfect Mountain Town?” special to *The Washington Post*, Sunday, September 11, 2005. Also F. Fabricant, “Northeast of Mexico City, a Market Worth the Climb into the Mountains,” *New York Times*, February 8, 2004; accessed July 20, 2016, at http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/08/travel/northeast-of-mexico-city-a-market-worth-the-climb-into-the-mountains.html?_r=0.
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53. Ibid., p.77.
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55. De Orellana, “The Municipality: Cuetzalan,” p.98; Greathouse-Amador, “Tourism and Policy in Preserving Minority Languages and Culture”; and interview by author with Emma de Los Angeles Gutierrez-Manzano, *cronista* of Cuetzalan, January 13, 2019.
56. F. Hernandez, “Spaces of Hybridization: The House of the Architect,” in Lejeune, ed., *Cruelty and Utopia*, p.111.
57. Interview with Emma Gutierrez-Manzano, January 13, 2019.
58. It was subsequently renovated in the early twentieth century as the Iglesia San Francisco de Asís.
59. G.M. Barrios Bonilla, *Homenaje a G. Marcos Barrios Bonilla* (Cuetzalan del Progreso: H. Ayuntamiento Constitucional, 2002–2005).
60. Ibid.
61. Thompson, “Agrarian Conflict in the Municipality of Cuetzalan,” p.249.
62. Barrios Bonilla, *Homenaje a G. Marcos Barrios Bonilla*.
63. Ibid.
64. See, for example, R. Cleary, “Texas Gothic, French Accent: The Architecture of the Roman Catholic Church in Antebellum Texas,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol.66 No.1 (2007), p.60.
65. During my interview with her of January 13, 2019, Emma Gutierrez-Manzano told me that a notebook documenting the construction of the church had been lost.
66. Ibid., p.539.
67. Piotrowski, “Heresy, Hybrid Buildings, and a Geography of Architectural Traditions,” p.8.
68. J. Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the Conquest* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), p.243.
69. Haly, “‘Upon this Rock,’” p.528.
70. Ibid., p.529.
71. Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures*, p.xvii.