

## **A trip to the future past**

### **An eco touristic immersion in the fountain of knowledge of a family from the Sierra de la Laguna in Baja California Sur, México.**

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Cultural differences become apparent when we make Tortillas with them: students, foreigners, intellectual tourists, brains.

Twelve chiles are tied to the roof underneath the palapa, the family is waiting for them to dry together with the cheese inside a cloth bag that hangs opposite to them, covered with salt. Family here means: María Luz López Torres, born in the region of the Sierra Tarahumara in mainland México and her husband Catarino Rosas Espinoza, direct descendant of the witch doctors and folk healers of the Sierra de la Laguna in Baja California Sur, where the ranch is, inside the 112,437 hectares of a mountainous Biosphere Reserve. Their children are: Blanca Estela Rosas Lopez, Rogelio, Catarino, Marco Antonio, Jorge, Rosario Guadalupe, Luz Aide, Santa Isabel, Esteban and María (RIP).

The southern most Sierra in Baja California Península is not just any mountain; it has survived millennia of isolation from its origins as part of the Sierra Madre Occidental, giving this terrain unique biodiversity and endemism conditions.

I work for the Colorado State University Center in Todos Santos, Baja California Sur. My job is the Zero Waste coordination at the center (as a possibility, as a mindset or an impossible dream in the era of omnipresent trash), this means to design strategies that involve local staff members and visitors (students and faculty from international universities) so we can all participate in a waste separation system in which we are able to connect with recycling endeavours, do our own compost and reduce single use plastics as most as we care.

In my opinion our community dump sucks because it has been ignored, left behind and whenever is getting messy they burn it.

Every business in Todos Santos is selling stuff: products arrive and are offered to the newcomers to be consumed delightfully, but... abruptly the capitalist cycle ends; if you haven't

noticed there is no money in recycling!<sup>1</sup> and the Baja, this funnel of Land, gets stuck with a nasty waste problem that we can't ignore;

what a cruel mirror we face as a multicultural/trendy society with  
"orphan" plastic on every corner in town...

and trashcans are a mirage;

and flies, don't freak out!

but they come near our favorite restaurant

attracted by a nearby putrid pile

and waves, we are getting used to waves regurgitating  
plastic at our feet.

The culture of the non new.

In Baja we try, we try to reuse stuff as much as can. Flea Markets or "Segundas" appear North to South from Tijuana to Cabo; it's the culture of the *Non New*: previously own shoes, tired tires, rusty cars, out of date technology, someone else's clothes, ... these products end up here in merchandise's last breath.

A problem with tourism?

During the month of February, 2023, I was invited by professors Maria Timmons and Don Burgess from Western Washington University, to accompany them and their students as an interpreter to "El Refugio", Don Catarino and María Luz's ecotourism ranch, in the San Dionisio canyon just at the border of the Tropic of Cancer. Before the trip, in the planning sessions with Rogelio, our local contact, he told me:

"the biggest problem here is the garbage that tourists bring".

The Tortilla culture shock.

*"With two swift movements her hands shaped the dough into a ball to feed us"*<sup>2</sup>

During María Luz's cooking workshop at the ranch, we told the students about the tradition in México that says: *whoever is capable of creating a fine, inflated corn tortilla will be fitted for marriage.*

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<sup>1</sup> Reciclaje en México: Solo 6% del plástico que se produce en el país se reutiliza.

<https://www.elfinanciero.com.mx/empresas/2022/08/02/reciclaje-en-mexico-solo-6-del-plastico-que-se-produce-en-el-pais-se-reutiliza/>

<sup>2</sup> Rancho El Refugio: A found Poem from Cañon del Dionisio by Maria Timmons and her class.

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AHipY7alyFZG89uDutEh-OK7yMj1nCvPFB4UUUN608U/edit>

Maria and Don's group of students (Abi, Abigail, Grace, Mike, Elliot and Anne) were just playing, enjoying and it is hard for me to think that Tortillas will ever represent a serious adulthood matter for them; but María, their teacher thinks differently and wants the group to participate in activities where they will have to feel and adapt to what is like to be the less represented culture in a place, because they are all studying to become teachers in a bilingual world, up there in the North where Latin American people travel to work the land, the fields, the seeds, the soil, the food, the compost...

But why does south migrate north?

Have you ever thought about Mexico's most prevalent cultural symbols:

*The Totem of the Cactus, the Snake and the Eagle and*

*the Virgin of Guadalupe.*

First think of the symbol in the Mexican flag, it shows animals and plants all together with water and soil; representing what the Aztecs, a culture that was migrating, were looking for: a healthy environment with the required items to establish Home.

Now look for Guadalupe, a "cristian" image representing the virgin Mary and baby Jesus, but not only that, there is subtle sincretism here: Guadalupe is Mother Earth, Tonantzin, Pachamama, fertility, a pregnant woman, the mother of all and the mother of God.

The meaning of México.

Acknowledging both symbols is how I get a tiny notion of a society where fertility and healthy environments are the identity: our past, our culture.

*Nuestro* guild is soil and because we are experts...

we migrate.

Don Catarino's roots.

As a 4 year old boy Don Catarino moved with his father (Hipólito Rosas Rosas) to the mountains where he was born. His dad had inherited the knowledge for curing and was visited by whoever was in need on the isolated nooks and crannies of the Sierra; Catarino became his apprentice and will ride his mule up to the high valleys or wherever his father sent him in the look for the right kind of plants to cure somebody.

-Imagine breaking your femur in the 1950's- said Catarino to us and to the fire during our first night camping -my father will treat the patient of a broken leg, for a month, with bitter

medicinal teas that come from plants that provide enough nutrients so the body will be able to heal with out movement, with out having to go to the “real” bathroom task, only pee.

-Excuse me- said Mike, our own medical expert who also studies to be a firefighter which comes with a degree on paramedical skills- if a bone is broken you have to put it in its right position first. What did your father do about that? and how, with zero pain killers?

-Ok, you got me, let me go into further detail then- said Catarino, while realizing this crowd was tougher than usual tourists. -The fig tree, we call it *Salate*; a native relative of the middle east one, part of the *Moracea* family which scientific name is *Ficus crocata*-

[Author’s note: In the last sentence, I gave myself the liberty of adding to Don Catarino’s character the voice of his son Rogelio, our guide in la Sierra, with major studies in Philosophy and specialized in the identification of flora and fauna]...

-First: if you are treating a broken bone, we use *Salate* leafs in boiling water and pieces of cloth to make a hot compress. You need to heat the patients leg to the point in which touching the injury is not painful anymore and then you can straightened the bone. Second: before putting a bandage you have to grill a big piece of Aloe Vera with salt and apply, for three days in a row to help old particles of purple blood escape the organism.- After that Catarino felt silent and everybody stayed quiet like if some magician had revealed a trick... but this wise man had more under his sleeve.

-Now imagine having Covid as a tourist in the High Sierra?- he said, and the awe was doubled -your lungs are filled with mucus and you cough and cough.- Catarino and his family had to deal with people getting sick during the pandemic, travelers from all around that end up as sick and afraid as children; but Catarino was ready, his father had taught him well and he knew which plant will help him treat the lungs: the wood of the Ocote Pine tree (*Pinus montezumae*) a resinous plant that grows in the high valleys. -We have identified over ninety wild edible and medicinal plants in the *zona de amortiguamiento*, where the ranch is and at least other twenty in the upper region.-

The conversation arises like flames and it’s time for the students to show their cravings: Smores<sup>3</sup>, the one and only American camping candy; culture covered in sugar, and brands, and ingredients, and formulas, and plastic wrappings, and factories, and mileage of carbon footprint. BUT NOT THIS TIME! At least not this time, because we are not dealing with the habitual trash made by tourists here, this people are more than consumers, they are not tourists, they are assets, they are minds... much more than whimsical fellows.

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<sup>3</sup> Un s'more (a veces escrito "smore") es un postre tradicional de Estados Unidos y Canadá, que se consume habitualmente en fogatas nocturnas como las de los exploradores (Boy Scouts o Girl Scouts) y que consiste en un malvavisco tostado y una capa de chocolate entre dos trozos de galleta Graham.  
<https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%27more>

Surprise! cookies appeared at the fire instead of Smores, “zero waste” home made treats brought by the especial travelers.

**The River.** (In Spanish River (Rio) and Laugh are spelled the same way)

Water.... aaaaaahhh, finally.

Cold and embracing silver crevice flows among the granite rocks. Water, water, water! A feeling that comes from who knows where? We live on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, in front of so much water in an arid place; alien water from a submerged World, but this water now, in which I swim, is from the mountain and it's mine.

An Arid place full of whims.

Every time I see a golf course or a new multi bedroom building with abusive prices that belong to another place, to another money, to another income: I tend to imagine the people that own these places, they are not really inhabitants, they are runaway seagulls that escape when the Sun starts to heat, so eager, so fast that they leave their trash behind; caprichosos.

Gold Mine in the Sierra where the thunder strikes.

A blind threat? from someone who is not drinking water, or doesn't need it? just a senseless corporation.<sup>4</sup>

What is Gold for? Jewels, electric conductivity...

What is mining for?

Is the present we all live in only here because of the mining operations?

At first glance Don Catarino and his family and their goats and trees look more resilient (self-sufficient) than the students who come from the “empire” in the North, or myself that seem to be trapped in between.

Cultural Community Wealth.

People that historically escaped the magnetic attraction of cities have the need of creating resources, solutions and certainties from the patient observation of nature and the heritage of oral tradition.

So much time to think inside this silence.

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<sup>4</sup> Las Áreas naturales protegidas la Investigación Científica en México (página 483)  
<https://cibnor.repositorioinstitucional.mx/jspui/bitstream/1001/1131/1/PUB-CAPITULOS-LIBROS-981.PDF>

On the last day, Rogelio took us to a strange community center in the middle of the canyon where all the local Rancheros have access. This is the place for celebration of the San Dionisio Annual Festivities (Dionisio, being some sort of God related to grapes and wine in ancient Roman Empire). Rogelio explained how during the missionary first attempts to introduce Christianity in this lands, the natives learned to manufacture wine and copied it using a wild kind of grape which gave the region the connection with some sort of Saint or ancient God figure that now is cherished indirectly in each of the hundreds of Tecate liquor stores around Baja California Sur.<sup>5</sup>

Pure Black.

The voice of the River is present at night and it has the Ocean's voice.

Inside the night's silence its chant finally can be heard.

It is not the water, its the stones croaking like some lunar frogs.

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<sup>5</sup> Baja California Sur (BCS). La entidad ocupa entre el segundo y tercer lugar a nivel nacional en el consumo de alcohol y tabaco  
[http://www.intranet.cij.gob.mx/Aplicaciones/sint\\_info/archivo/20514\\_BCS.pdf](http://www.intranet.cij.gob.mx/Aplicaciones/sint_info/archivo/20514_BCS.pdf)