1

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

MILAN KOVÁČ

Department of Comparative Religion,
Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia
milan.kovac@uniba.sk

ABSTRACT

This article deals with the Lacandon cosmology, one of the few Maya cosmologies which has been exceptionally structured and until today, very well preserved. The present study is based mainly on associations related to stone. There are investigated the emic classifications of the Lacandon. Their classification of divine beings according to their location, and their connection to the stone houses, whether of natural or cultural origin. In the article are analyzed the most sacred Lacandon sites such as the rock shelters, cliffs and caves around the Lake Mensäbäk and Lake Yahaw Petha, as well as Yaxchilan, the archaeological site with the long tradition of Lacandon pilgrimages. The Lacandon believe in different types of transfer of spiritual energy through stone. The stones could be considered on different levels as the seat, heart or embodiment of deities. These relationships and contexts are very complex. The article tries to identify it and to offer some linguistic and theoretical approaches.

KEY WORDS: cave, cosmology, Lacandon, Maya, stone

Introduction

Today the total number of remaining Lacandon people is around 1,000 persons and they represent a very small but well-known Maya community whose language belongs to the framework of the Yucatec Maya linguistic family. The community, in general, is divided into Northern and Southern groups which are very different from each other, both in physiognomy

2

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

and dialect (BRUCE 1976:7-8; BOREMANSE 2006:xxx-xxxi). Major part of the ethnographic fieldwork evidence in this contribution comes from my work among the Northern group of Lacandon, especially from my fieldwork in Naha (Figure 1), where two principal clans called *onen* exist, whose clan symbols are associated with animal lineage groups: *Ma´ax*, or spider monkey clan and *K´ek´en*, or white-lipped peccary clan. Other material evidence for this paper comes from northern Lacandon migrants who migrated and resided in the Southern group territory, especially those from the settlements of Betel and San Javier.

Figure 1: *Contemporary Lacandon man from Naha*. Photo: author

In terms of outside religious influence the Southern Lacandon group was heavily influenced by neo-protestant groups after the first half of the 20th century (KOVÁČ 2015). The Northern group of the Lacandon until the end of the 20th century remained independent from the direct influences of Christianity. Even today, part of the inhabitants of the settlement of Naha practices the original Maya religion without much typical syncretism as seen frequently in other Maya regions. Northern Lacandon migrants in the Southern territory no longer appear to practice any traditional rituals but they are keeping various religious practices fresh in their memory. According to many scholars, Northern Lacandon mythology and rituals represent continuity of the Post-Classic Maya cosmovision (TOZZER 1982; BRUCE – ROBLES –

3

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

CHAO 1971), although it is important to emphasize the basic refugee character of the development of Lacandon culture during the last several centuries (ESCOBAR 1841:94). Both communities are important, due to their relative isolation from the surrounding world in the jungle on the one hand, and the possible inclusion of refugees of different origins on the other.

My own fieldwork was realized from 1999 to 2018 and it was divided into several extended research periods in the Northern Lancandon community, as well as among the Northern migrants in the Southern Lacandon territory.

The Cosmology

Northern Lacandon in general divide whole sacred space into three levels: the Sky, the Earth, and the Underworld. The levels of cosmological divisions do not necessarily correspond to each other. The Underworld they know only as *Yalam Lu´um* – "The Lower land" (McGEE 1990:61), and it is a very huge category with apparently no specific divisions as one might expect from a typical Mesoamerican conception. *Yalam Lu´um* is inhabited by two Underworld gods and their families: *Kisin* (the negative Lord of Death) and *Sukunkyum* (the positive Underworld sun bearer). Similarly, to the Underworld realm, Lacandon do not divide the category of the terrestrial world, which also has only one level called *U Lu´umil K´uh* – "Terrestrial Gods" or the earth inhabited by terrestrial gods, the most important of which is probably *Känänk´ax*. The realm of heaven is much more complex and it is inhabited by the largest group of gods. Of these, the most important is supreme god *Hachäkyum*.[1]

From the emic perspective, the Lacandon gods are generally divided into two groups: *U K´uh il Yok´ol K´ax* "Gods of the Jungle" and *U K´uh il Yok´ol Ka´an* "Gods of the Sky". Apparently, for the Northern Lacandon, the sky is the only environment where the universe is divided into different levels:

1) The First Sky, very close to the earth is called: *U Ka´ani Cho´m* – "The Sky of Vultures". The Lacandon idea is that the vultures do not have nests and that their houses are situated in the Sky. The other reasoning behind the relationship with this first level and vultures might have a mythological origin because the Lacandon believe that the first woman

---

[1] This cosmological structure is described in my previous study on this topic in detail (KOVÁČ 2012).

4

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

was a vulture (BOREMANSE 2006:257-262) and by this way Lacandon anthropogony of human-vulture beings was based.

2) The Second Sky is *U Ka´ani K´uh*, "The Sky of the Gods", and it is the realm in which almost all the gods are living very close to the world, in the second level of the sky.

3) Higher up is the Third Sky called *U Ka´ani T´up*: "The Sky of *T´up*", where the Lacandon god known as *T´up* is living alone. He is the younger son of the supreme deity *Hachäkyum*. *T´up* is believed by the Lacandon to be the guardian of the Sun.

4) The Fourth Sky is called *U Ka´ani K´akoch*: "The Sky of the God *K´akoch*". The Lacandon believe that *K´akoch* is the creator of the Gods (not the people!), a progenitor and because the gods evidently have their own supreme god too, he is represented as a single unique god venerated by the gods of the Second Sky.

5) The Fifth Sky called *U Ka´ani Chembel K´uh*: "The Sky of Minor Gods" is occupied by a collective group of minor gods whom the Lacandon denote collectively as a whole group as *Chembel K´uh*.

6) The final Sixth Sky is called *U Ka´ani Akä* – "The Sky of Darkness", because the Lacandon believe there is no visibility, only darkness. This sky is occupied by people from the last destruction of the world and through my own fieldwork I have registered one interesting note that "they are thrusting and running into and against each other and frequently they are falling down" which could be like what happens in the Nahua cosmological age or "sun" called *Ocelotonatiuh* – "The Sun of the Ocelotl" (KRICKEBERG 1994:23).

The major topic here, however, is my focus on dealing with *u K´uh il Yok´ol K´ax* or the terrestrial gods and related sacred topography. It is important to note that in the major part of the cases, that each one of the celestial gods controls or inhabits at least one terrestrial house or sacred space. Terrestrial houses usually take the form of a stone structure: ancient Maya ruins constructed from stone blocks, natural caves or rock shelters. We can divide these stone structures into two specific groups: artificial and natural.

5

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

Figure 2: *The residence of Lacandon god Ah K´in Chob in Yaxchilán*. Photo: author

Houses of Gods of the Ruins

Artificial structures are represented in general by Maya ruins constructed from stone blocks in Pre-Columbian times denominated *U Yatoch Ah Chunex K´uh*, which means "Houses of Gods of the Ruins". The Lacandon considered ruins as very sacred spaces. These include the ruins of Bonampak, Palenque, Toniná, Lacanha and a few other ruins in the area where traces of them were founds (LOZADA 2017:304-447). The most important settlement of the gods, however, represents the ruins of Yaxchilan. Lacandon call this archaeological site *Ch´i Xokla*, probably originally *Ch´i Xokha*, literally: "The Mouth of the Water of Sharks" or "The Bay of the Water of Sharks". Indeed, sharks of the species *Carcharhinus leucas* (bull shark) have penetrated to Usumacinta River (KOVÁČ 2013:151) and it could be the reason for such Lacandon name. The ancient city of Yaxchilan is located at a bend of this river in a quiet bay. For the Lacandon, within these ruins, there are the houses of their principal gods *Hachäkyum, T´up, Ah K´in Chob, Säkäpuk, Kayum, Itzanah*, and other celestial gods – all represented by real ancient Maya architectural structures. Each particular building in this city represents the house of one of the gods (Figure 2,3).

6

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

Figure 3: *The residence of Lacandon god Säkäpuk in Yaxchilán*. Photo: author

Houses of Gods of the Caves

The second kind or type of sacred stone structures is represented by natural rocks such as cliffs, caves or rock shelters. These natural stone structures are denominated *U Yatoch Aktuni K´uh*, which means Houses of Gods of the Caves. There are many caves in the Northern Lacandon area, especially around the Lake Mensäbäk (Metzabok) and Lake Yahaw Petha (Guineo). The inhabitants of these caves and rock shelters are for example the gods *Mensäbäk, K´ak´, Tz´ibatnah, Känänk´ax, Itzanohk´uh* or *Witzinikte* (Figure 4,5).

However, it would be a simplification to consider that *U Yatoch ah Chunex K´uh* represented *K´uh il Yok´ol Ka´an* (or that the houses of the gods of artificial stones are represented by celestial gods) and *U Yatoch Aktuni K´uh* represented *U K´uh il Yok´ol K´ax* (or that the houses of the gods of natural stones are represented by gods of the earth/jungle). In fact, these relationships are more complex. On the one hand because at least *Mensäbäk* is known as a god of storms, thus an atmospherically – celestial god lives in a cave and a god of fire *K´ak´* associated in some way with the Sun is living in a cave, too. On the other hand, these gods of the natural elements are not represented by the typical patterns of celestial gods. The gods of storm and fire possess strong earthly qualities and any simplified division between celestial and terrestrial deities might lead us to wrong consequences.
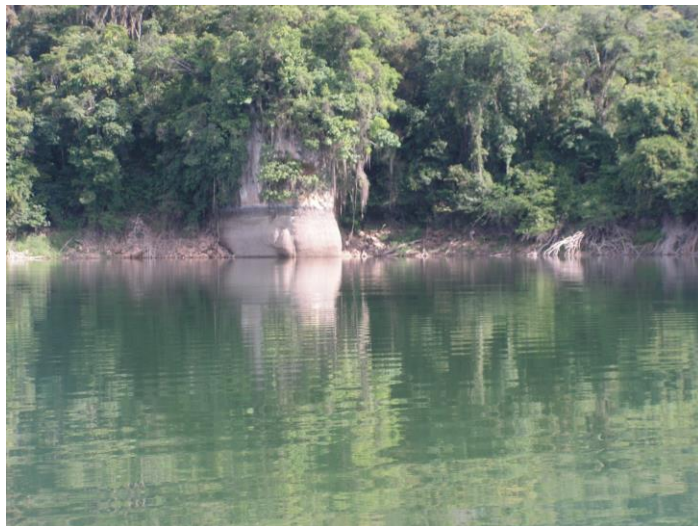
7

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

Figure 4: *Rock cliff on the edge of Lake Mensäbäk as the dwelling of the god Tz'ibatnah.* Photo: author

Stone Portals to the Otherworld

Lacandon believe that ancient Maya ruins represent the houses of Giants and at the same time, they consider these Giants to be their own gods. In the case of the caves, the Lacandon conception is even more complex. In my fieldwork, I have recorded that the Lacandon frequently report hearing sounds coming from the caves. They have described to me these sounds as sounds from other villages: like roosters, hens, children laughing, the laughing of women, the sounds of kitchenware, human steps, even sound of snoring etc. Although caves are generally considered to be an entry into the Maya Underworld (BRADY – PRUFER 2005) in our case there is nothing to say about the dead or mortuary landscape. A little more fitting name would be the Otherworld. It seems they believe that these caves lead to some kind of parallel world.

Still, other Lacandon stories I have gathered further emphasize this difference. During two decades of fieldwork among the Northern Lacandon, I found numerous stories about a giant bear that came from a cave or giant birds from the beginning of times, giant monkeys, thorn peccaries, and other strange animals, all related to the caves or rock shelters. Sometimes the Lacandon believe that these animals have human attributes, like in the story about monkey-like archers coming out of a cave with their bows and arrows. We can see these

8

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

images as a picture from the mythological pre-human period or link to human-animal unity at the beginning of the time. In this case, the cave is a kind of time-lapse, which may be the reason why the gods reside there.

Figure 5: *One of the Pre-Columbian palm-prints on the sacred rocks around Lake Mensäbäk*. Photo: author

Worshipers of Stones

Traditionally the Lacandon are known by Tzeltal neighboring Christianized communities as "the worshipers of stones" (PERERA – BRUCE 1985:8), although the origin of this ethnonym could be based on folk etymology. The Lacandon area was designated already in the early map of Diego de Landa as "Lacandon" (LANDA 1993:8), perhaps the toponym is inherited from the Classic era when the wider area of the Palenque city-state *Baakal* (MARTIN – GRUBE 2008:155) was called *Lakamha* (STUART – HOUSTON 1994:31), likely from the eponymous river. The root *lakam* (great, wide) was used (maybe only accidentally) to name the island on a Lake Miramar *Lakamtun* in the same region. Joel Palka argues that it was the Pre-Columbian site on this island (from Classic as well as from Post-Classic period) originally called *Lakamtun* who later gave the name to the entire *Ch´olti´* population of that territory (PALKA 2014:23). It seems to be clear that early Spanish

9

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

explorers had to borrow this original name when they called the site the Great Rock (*Gran Peñón*) (VOS 1988:15), which is a literal translation of *Lacam Tun*. Then the same name was inherited by the Yucatec-speaking Lacandon, who appeared on the scene much later.

Contemporary ethnonym "Lacandon" is definitely not derived from Lacandon words *läka'n* (taken off) – *tuun* (stone) (HOFLING 2014:286, 342), but it could be the reason why contemporary Lacandon are considered as "worshipers of stones", perhaps a result of secondary etymologization. It is also possible this ethnonym is related to cult of stelae that we know were named by generic term *lakam tuun*. This expression survived in in colonial Yucatec Maya as "piedra enorme" and served a place name Lacantun, or Lacandon (STUART 2010:285). Nor can we totally exclude Lacandon derivation from *äh akantunoob* *"*those who set up (and worship) stone idols" (PERERA – BRUCE 1985:8). The neighboring Tzeltals, however, explained this to me from different perspective of folk etymology, based on quite real observation claiming that their neighbors are "followers of a devil because of worshiping the rocks and stones".

Figure 6: *Stalactite known as Stela 31 in front of the Temple 33, Yaxchilán, understood by the Lacandon as the world-tree*. Photo: author

10

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

Divine Stones

The exceptional status of stones in Lacandon culture is not unique and we can put it in the wider context of stone worshipers from ancient times to nowadays. There is no need to write about *menhirs* from the European middle Bronze Age, or biblical Bethel stones. It was not a coincidence what happened when *Zeus* was born; *Rhea* gave to *Cronos* a stone wrapped up like an infant (GRAVES 1996:37). The stone and divine child were interchangeable. From the other side of the world, we know of Australian stone or wood objects *tjurunga*, considered a "supreme sacred thing" (HALBWACHS 1997:43). In world mythologies there are also sacred beings which were born directly from the stone such as Caucasian divine hero *Soslan/Sosruk* (Nartský epos 1983:42). In the steppes from Baikal to Mongolia we can encounter thousands of erected worked stones known as "deer stones", and in Canadian arctic area very special stone structures or stone creatures called *inuksuit* are present, too (FITZHUGH 2017). Stelae-like flat erect stones called *baba* often occur on vast plains of Kazakhstan (KŠICA 1984:157, 190-191). The reason to create these objects from stone material could be the maintenance of collective memory (FITZHUGH 2017). On the other hand, it seems quite clear that reason for using this material is the immutability of the stone in time (in contrast to the decay and death to which the human and organic world are subject). This quality predetermined it to be religiously associated with the divine or holiness.

Religious valorization of stone in the American continent is well known in the cult of *huaca* (natural rocks, carved rocks, platforms, horizon pillars and caves) in the Inca Empire (MALVILLE 2009:263). "It was through these shrines that the Inca transformed their capital city, its environs, and the whole nuclear area of Tahuantinsuyu (Inca Empire) into a type of mega-Holy Land, one where the Sun God and the *huacas* continuously manifested their presence." (CURATOLA 2020:292). We see something similar in Maya religious thought and practice. Numerous pictures from Classic times show us so-called stones of creation, stone altars, stone stelae, stone thrones, and a wide range of animated stones. David Stuart says Classic Maya inscriptions make constant use of the Maya word for "stone" in various terms that refer to stelae and altars of various types. Most common is simply *tuun* or *lakam tuun*, both generic terms used for stelae. Other smaller types of stones mentioned in the inscriptions took a variety of names that are more descriptive of the sorts of ritual actions associated with them, including *sibik tuun* ("soot stone"), *kuch tuun* ("carrying stone"), or *taj tuun* ("torch stone"). These terms probably describe certain forms that we would class as altars. Stuart argues the stone is an inherently powerful and timeless substance, a permanent material both earth and transcendent (STUART 2010:285-286). Stuart goes on to claim that animate spirit of stone appears with great frequency in Maya iconography, where it assumes the form of a so-called "*cauac monster*". Some of the best examples of the stone entity appear

11

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

on the pedestal stones of Piedras Negras Altar 4, as supports for a larger tabletop. These pedestals are literally the faces of animate stone, seen throughout much of Maya art and hieroglyphic writing. In other examples, we see how more subtle stone elements take on a living form, as in the large molar teeth that flank the cave-doorway on Temple 22 at Copan. Even the teeth of a mountain are considered alive. Curiously, this animate *tuun* entity in Classic Maya art bears a very strong resemblance to *Chahk*, the animate force of rain and storms (STUART 2010:288-289).

Figure 7: *Carved part of the same stalactite*. Photo: author

There are also many connections to contemporary Maya narratives, such as Ixil story about the primordial stone repository (a rock or cave) of all seeds, finally broken by the lightning of *Saint Cherub* and *Saint Gabriel* (ASICONA – BANACH – ROMERO 2019:316-317). We know very well similar pictures from ancient Maya times with pivotal role of the god *Chahk* or *K'awiil* (VALENCIA 2019).

12

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

Figure 8*: Lacandon incense censer (god pot) in which under the ashes hides a small stone from the house of the god (the same who is represented by the vessel).* Photo: author

The Lacandon associate stone elements with divinity also in other contexts, but the connection with ancient ruins still dominates. The Second Sun created in Toniná by the god of rain *Mensäbäk* has been transformed into a stone altar (KOVÁČ 2014:14). A world-tree called *tutz´* that will serve at the End of the World as a connection with heaven and the place where the gods will descend to the earth, has petrified and today is known as stalactite or speleothem (also known as Stela 31) in front of the Temple 33 in Yaxchilan (KOVÁČ 2017) (Figure 6,7).

Even more remarkable is a ritual when the Lacandon place a piece of stone to the bottom of each god-pot as a bearer of the spirit of that specific god represented by this sacred vessel (KOVÁČ 2004). These pieces of stone come from the natural or artificial stone houses of each specific god. Then each god-pot or incense burner contains a piece of stone, which the Lacandon believe causes the god to be truly present in the god-pot/incense burner as in his new residence (Figure 8). In this manner, Lacandon god-pots can be considered as microcosmic counterparts of the great stone houses of the gods.

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

Figure 9: *"Bones of the gods" in their stone houses around Lake Mensäbäk.* Photo: author

Stone Embodiments of Gods

We can find still other images of Lacandon sacral landscape around the sacral lakes Mensäbäk and Yahaw Petha. There are huge rocks and ancient Pre-Columbian caves filled with human bones around these lakes. Our C^{14} analyses identified two of them for the period 1425-1500 AD. The deformed skulls and the absence of European elements show that it is probably the last burial site of a large group, likely the Tzeltal, who lived there. The dating of two random samples (near the last phase of settlement), and very close to the early contact period might point to a smallpox epidemic that just few years later could come here and depopulate this area before the Spaniards' foot entered. Due to its sacred attractiveness, it is probable that this area had an even older history. The evidence, such as C^{14} of bones and images of bows (unknown during the Classic period) shows us the basis of this settlement in the Late Post-Classic period.

14

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

Figure 10: *Post-Classic (due to mexicanized motive) rock painting on a sacred cliff (a house of Lacandon god) on the shore of Lake Yahaw Petha*. Photo: author

The Lacandon found these abandoned places much later, maybe in the second half of 19th or more likely at the beginning of the 20th century. Impressed by rock paintings and freely stored skeletons with ancient Maya objects in the caves, they identified these places as the houses of their own gods. They adopted intimately these ancient Maya ossuaries as their own sacral places where specific gods reside. Practically every such place has been identified with a particular god and his sacred house. The bones are considered to be the remains of the gods – owners of these stone houses (Figure 9). Their apparent lifelessness is not an obstacle, as is the fact that multiple bones or skulls represent frequently just one god. Each god has the ability to divide into more persons, defined as *u buhik u bäh* (BOREMANSE 2006:100), literally "split oneself".

15

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

Figure 11: *Post-Classic (due to schematic representation of the bow) rock painting on the sacred rock (a house of Lacandon god) on the shore of Lake Mensäbäk.* Photo: author

However, it is even more demanding concept than it seems at first glance. The same god represented by the skeleton is at the same time represented by the whole cave, cliff or by the rock shelter. Some caves even do not have skeletons, yet they are considered not only as god's house but as the god himself. In this sense, when Lacandon speak of the house of god in general, they always mean the god himself. In this way, in the case of *U Yatoch Aktuni K´uh* (Houses of Gods of the Caves) there are different cliffs and rocks, some with old paintings, some without them, some with caves, and other without them, but what they have in common is that each of them represents a god, such as *Tz´ibatnah, K´ak´, Mensäbäk, Sak Tet, Känank´ax, Noh K´uh*, etc. As if the cliffs and large rocks scattered around the sacred lakes were huge stone bodies of gods resting around the water (Figure 10, 11).

And we know that it was not just ordinary water, but in the case of Lake Mensäbäk and also in the case of Lake Yahaw Petha it was the realm of the dead. Some of the Lacandon still believe that after death they will go to the lake (Figure 12), where the storm god *Mensäbäk* rules and receives them into water paradise (KOVÁČ 2016:48).

16

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

Figure 12: *Lacandon paddler on Lake Mensäbäk, at the bottom is the water realm of the dead*. Photo: author

A similar pattern is applicable to *U Yatoch Ah Chunex K´uh* (Houses of Gods of the Ruins) – any particular building in Yaxchilan is not only the home of a particular god but of that god himself. The center of the pantheon is Temple 33 (Figure 13), identified with *Hachäkyum*. Even more interesting is that another Lacandon name for Yaxchilan is *U Yatoch Hachäkyum* (Hachäkyum's House) (BOREMANSE 2006:99), which not only denominates the Temple 33 itself, but the city (archaeological settlement) as such.

The very essence of *Hachäkyum – u nah tz'uy* (BOREMANSE 2006:100) exists only in heaven. It is worth noting that the essence of god is in Lacandon language called *nah tz'uy*, which means "a solid house". It does not mean only that the other (stone) houses could be understood as temporary embodiments, maybe in the frame of *u buhik u bäh* or split entities, but it is remarkable that even the essence in the sky is defined using the word "house".

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

Figure 13: *Temple 33 at Yaxchilán, the central site of the Lacandon cult. This is the house of Hachäkyum that as well represents him as a whole.* Photo: author

Stone Heart of God

Another important piece of this puzzle concerning the Lacandon sacred stone landscape is the conception of *Hach Biram*[2]. Alfred Tozzer at the beginning of the 20th century discovered the existence of a cult of an ancient, decapitated stone figure in the Temple 33 in Yaxchilan, which the Lacandon called *Hach B´ilam* or *Hach B´iram*. Tozzer identified this sculpture as a representation of their supreme deity *Hachäkyum* (TOZZER 1982:167-168). When Desiré Charnay and Alfred Maudslay discovered the ruins of Yaxchilan in 1882, they found Lacandon incense burners in various buildings, and a large amount was concentrated around this statue. The statue was originally part of the facade of Temple 33, and then it was moved in front of the temple and became the subject of Lacandon pilgrimages (THOMPSON 1982:385). There is mythological evidence that the Lacandon knew this decapitated statue when it still had a head: *"Hach Bilam is a statue in Yaxchilan, whose eyes move. It is said,*

---

[2]   Its meaning and etymology I try to explain below.

18

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

that it looks one day to the south, and when the sun goes down its eyes turn to the north. When it dawns another day, its eyes are turned east and another day west" (BOREMANSE 2006:137-138). The same source mentions other details of the original cult. The statue originally had its guardian of the *Haaw*[3] clan, who, due to its presence, did not recognize physical suffering: *"Whatever went wrong, cramps or vomiting, the statue caught it and got rid of it"* (BOREMANSE 2006:138).

Researchers originally attributed the decapitation of the statue to a turbulent time in the period of collapse at the very end of the Classic period. After comparison with the earliest records and images, it appeared that this act of vandalism apparently occurred much later. Maybe it was caused by Christian converts, who identified a worship of devil in this extraordinary Lacandon cult. The Lacandon themselves then re-interpreted the incident as a killing of their supreme god by the god of death *Kisin* (BRUCE 1974:165), and at the same time a prophecy was postulated that at the End of the World *Hachäkyum*'s head would be returned to the statue on his neck. Thus, the already strong Lacandon cult of *Hach B´iran*, even intensified and has acquired an eschatological dimension (Figure 14).

Since then, this record was the only known case of an object that the Lacandon referred to by this strange expression *Hach B´iram*. During my fieldwork, I spent a lot of time and effort in order to try to understand this singular conception. Decapitated stone figure from Yaxchilan, in fact, represents king *Yaxun Bahlam* (Bird Jaguar IV) who ruled in 752-768 AD. The high importance of this king in Yaxchilan´s dynastic history is well known (MARTIN – GRUBE 2008:128-133) but the exceptional position of this sculpture in Lacandon religion and mythology remained obscure.

For the Lacandon, the word *hach* means „true" (BOOT 1997:10). The problem, however, is to interpret the word *b´iram*, due to the frequent fusion of r/l it can also be read as *b´ilam*. During my research, it became clear that the Lacandon themselves did not clearly understand its meaning, because they translated it as the concrete decapitated figure of *Hachäkyum* from Yaxchilan or some time just as a "stone". However, no expression for rock or stone has such a basis. Moreover, it does not occur in another context only as a supposed "true stone". The word *b´ilam*/*b´iram* is so unusual and rare in the common Lacandon language that it does not even get into Lacandon dictionaries. It seems to be a very old expression, used only for

---

[3]   The Lacandon have many stories about the single ancestor Haaw (Raccoon) or people Haawo' (plural), which is the name of an extinct clan (onen) usually associated with the origin of various important things and the cosmology.

19

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

special ritual occasions. Therefore, we should look at the Lacandon language as a branch of Yucatec family and look for a suitable association there. Something may be suggested by a brief reference in the Motul Dictionary, which states that the term *b´il hool* means "healing" (ARZÁPALO 1995:86). Because *hool* (*ho´l*) means "head", healing is defined as doing some process with the head. As we know from Ritual of the Bacabs (ROYS 1965), the nature of healing was originally considered cosmological and magical. The so-called Dictionary Cordemex offers us the root *bil* as "calcified bones", but also as the verb "to serve", "to be useful". *Ah bilal* means "useful" or "needed" (BARRERA VÁSQUEZ 1995: 53-54). A Dictionary of the Maya Language As Spoken in Hocaba, Yucatan brings even more light, where *b´iil* is explained as a "saint", with examples: *yuum b´iil* – holy father, *kó´oleh b´iil* – holy woman or *mehen b´iil* – God the Son (BRICKER – PO´OT YAH – DZUL DE PO´OT 1998:33). On this basis, it seems likely that this term, possibly originally referring to the calcified ancestral bones, acquired the meaning associated with a saint or holiness. Then the expression *b'il-am* having its base in meanings such as magical, holy, sacred. *Hach B´ilam* likely means "true holiness".

Figure 14: *Hach Biram/Bilam* of *Hachäkyum.* Photo: author

20

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

We still do not know why this term was used for an ancient broken stone figure, even if it was a representation of a supreme god. The key to solve the mystery was a note from one old man who told me that there were more objects called *Hach B´iram*. Gradually, I discovered that there have existed not only *Hach B´iram* of *Hachäkyum*, but in one cave resides *Hach B´iram* of *Mensäbäk* and in another one *Hach B´iram* of *Känank´ax* and so on. In all of these cases, these *Hach B´iramo´* were always represented by stones, sometimes by carved stones like altars, broken figures, sometimes just by natural stones in the caves or rock shelters. The question is why they need to refer to the "true holiness" if as we have shown above, the gods are represented by their houses themselves, regardless of whether it is a natural or artificial stone (Figure 15).

Figure 15: *One of the houses of minor gods close to Lake Yahaw Petha.* Photo: author

Maybe we should go for Maya concept of *quincunx* where, in addition to the well-known symbol of the four cardinal points, a fifth point is placed in the center to show the sacred space in its entirety. The number five was the number of the center and the sacred principle, as we can see in many examples of Maya (and Mesoamerican) art and religion. The cult of

21

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

the center can be the key to understand the central position of the stone artifacts in these sacred objects. It might be a good idea to compare this conception with the small pieces of stones, which the Lacandon believe are needed to move the gods into their clay pots. Then a small stone in the middle of the vessel, a stone statue in the middle of a building, a stone altar in a cave or a raw stone under a rock shelter can have the same meaning. The Lacandon know the expression *u yor/u yol i k´uh* or the "heart of god" but in fact, they never used it in this context. Perhaps the best approach would be to regard the "true holiness" or *Hach B´iram* as a sacred center of communication between the metaphysical entity and its terrestrial materialization.

Concluding remarks

The stone stands out among the Lacandon as the most important medium for the storage or transmission of transcendent forces. Their gods are clearly divided into those who live in rocky natural houses, such as caves, rock shelters and cliffs (*U Yatoch Aktuni K´uh)*, and then those who live in the ruins of stone houses of Pre-Columbian origin (*U Yatoch Ah Chunex K´uh)*. Both groups live in these dwellings only in a substitute manner, while the first have their real seat on the earth, the latter live in the heaven. However, they have one thing in common, their seat – a stone house of any type at the same time personifies them as persons. It is remarkable that a part of this body-house, such as a piece of rock from a cave or cliff, or a fragment of stone block from a Pre-Columbian building can be transferred to an incense burner or god-pot, where a particular deity moves. It is thus already his tertiary manifestation and again in the connection with the rock, which attaches his entity to his clay god-pot.

The etymology tells us that even the primary, celestial manifestation of the supreme god *Hachäkyum* is associated with the expression for the solid (it means made by stone blocks) house *u nah tz'uy*. In the case of this god, we have also reached the next stage of mediation between the heavenly essence and the earthly essence. It is called *Hach B´iram* – "true holiness", and in the case of *Hachäkyum*, which himself is represented by the ruins of Temple 33 in Yaxchilan, his *Hach B´iram* is a headless statue of ancient local king *Yaxun Bahlam*.

My research has shown that other Lacandon gods also have their *Hach B´iram*. They do not have to be in one place. The concept of the split representation *u buhik u bäh* allows the gods to live in several places at the same time. However, it turned out that their *Hach B´iram*, represented by a stone statue, altar, or natural, centrally located stone, is the decisive medium for connecting the transcendent world of the gods with their earthly, stone representations.

22

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

Living and acting stones and rocks apparently have different kinds of mediation of divine forces, but at the same time they act as persons. The huge rock formations around the Lake Mensäbäk not only represent the gods, but they are living gods, as well as the buildings in the ruins of Yaxchilan are the homes of the gods as well as they are gods themselves.

In this case Taylor´s animism is no longer a sufficient tool to explain such subtle hierarchies and relationships between living and not-living objects. In Mesoamerican context we often hear about the "co-essence". For example, in the case of Classic Maya, they apparently methodically mutilated stone portrait statues of their leaders, often through decapitation, defacement, and the erasure of identifying features such as name glyphs or headdress motifs (COE 1977: 186, COE – DIEHL 1980). Instead of assuming vandalism of enemies some researchers assume in these systematic activities the local "ending ceremony" of the power of a dead ruler who was connected with the stone image in a "consubstantial" manner (GROVE 1981:63).

Sometimes the terms as "ensouled" and "animated" stones are suggested which may seem to form rough cognates, but these terms bump up against the limits of the English lexicon (McANANY 2020:74). We should note that Tim Ingold prefers term animacy, "which prioritizes the experience of living in a word rather than a way of believing about a world" (INGOLD 2011:67-68). Irving Hallowell argued that among the Ojibwe, stones have a potential to be animate and, thus, can have social agency when treated as persons (HALLOWELL 1960:25). This argument reframes anthropological notions of animacy, moving beyond studies concentrating on cultural definition of "life" or "personhood" (KOSIBA 2020:10-11). In the Maya area Kintz observes that the present-day Yucatec Maya of Coba acknowledge the existence of spirits called "tun" that inhabit large sones found in the forest (KINTZ 1990:15, 38). The summary of such and similar data introduces us to the currently much discussed "Maya ontologies" (McANANY 2020:99).

We have seen a hierarchy between the functions of different types of Lacandon stone objects and a hierarchy of relationships between these objects and the people. The stone could be a god, an ancestor, a spirit, a representative of god, or a mediator of god, or it could even be itself as a living subject, not representing anything else. Our language, and in particular the cultural background on which our language originated, cannot properly describe the reality we are studying. Maybe a better option is to use local terms and try to understand their meaning in the context.

We have seen that the term "god" does not help us in these cases. We see that the subjects of our interest are living objects with an extremely long memory and the ability to survive the lives and destinies of everyone and everything around them. We know how important "deep

23

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

time" for the Maya was (McANANY 2020:79). Maybe it was the reason why already in very early Maya history the stone monuments began to be embodiments of the principal temporal units (STUART 2010:289-290). And it was the stone beings (including ruins of stone houses, temples and pyramids) that were the living representatives of so-called "longue durée". In addition, they have been perceived for generations as alive and active as part of collective memory (FITZHUGH 2017) and community life.

Acknowledgments

Bibliography

ARZÁPALO Marín Ramón (1995): *Calepino de Motul. Tomo I.* México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

ASICONA, Lucas – BANACH Monika – ROMERO Sergio (2019): *Inq´a iyoltzil inq´a o´tla xaol: Historia, los ancestros y cosmovisión oral ixil.* Workshop book. Lecturas de 24th European Maya Conference "Contact and Conquest in the Maya World and Beyond", Cracow, November 11th-16th, 2019.

BARRERA VÁSQUEZ, Alfredo (ed.) (1995): *Diccionario Maya.* Tercera edición. México: Editorial Porrúa.

BOOT, Erik (1997): *Vocabulario Lacandon Maya – Español. (Dialecto de Naja´).* Accessed on November 12, 2019:

http://www.famsi.org/spanish/mayawriting/dictionary/boot/lacandon-de-naja_based-on_bruce1968.pdf.

BOREMANSE, Didier (2006): *Cuentos y mitología de los lacandones.* Ciudad de Guatemala: Acacdemia de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala.

BRADY, James E. – PRUFER M. Keith (2005): *In the Maw of the Earth Monster. Mesoamerican Ritual Cave Use.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

24

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

BRICKER, Victoria – PO´OT YAH, Eleuterio – DZUL DE PO´OT, Ofelia (1998): *A Dictionary of the Maya Language As Spoken in Hocaba*, *Yucatán*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.

BRUCE, Robert D. (1974): *El Libro de Chan K´in. Coleccion científica lingüística 12.* México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

BRUCE, Robert D. (1976): *Textos y dibujos de los lacandones de Naja. Coleccion científica lingüística 45.* México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

BRUCE, Robert D. – ROBLES, Carlos – CHAO, Enriqueta Ramos (1971): *Los Lacandones 2. Cosmovision maya*. *Proyecto de estudios antropológicos del sureste.* México: Departamento de Investigaciones Antropológicas INAH.

COE, Michael, D. (1977): Olmec and Maya: A Study in Relationships. In Richard E.W. Adams (ed.): *The Origins of Maya Civilization.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, pp. 183-195.

COE, Michael, D – DIEHL, Richard, A. (1980): *In the Land of the Olmec: The Archaeology of San Lorenzo Tenochtitlan.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

CURATOLA PETROCCHI, Marco (2020): On the Threshold of the Huaca. Sanctuaries of Sound in the Ancient Andean World. In Steve Kosiba, John Wayne Janusek, and Thomas B. F. Cummins (eds.): *Sacred Matter. Animacy and Authority in the Americas.* Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, pp. 267-298.

ESCOBAR, Alonso de (1841): Account of the Province of Verapaz in Guatemala and of the Indian Settlements or Pueblos Established Therein. In *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, No. 11, pp. 89-97.

FITZHUGH, William, W. (2017): Mongolian Deer Stones, European Menhirs, and Canadian Arctic Inuksuit: Collective Memory and the Function of Northern Monument Traditions. In *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, Vol. 24, pp. 149-187.

GRAVES Robert (1996): *Řecké mýty* I. Plzeň: Mustang. (Original edition: The Greek Myths. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books 1972).

GROVE, David, C. (1981): Olmec Monuments: Mutilation as a Clue to Meaning. In Elizabeth Benson (ed.): *The Olmec and Their Neighbors: Essays in Memory of Matthew W. Stirling*. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, pp. 49-78.

HALBWACHS, Maurice (1997): *Pôvod náboženského vedomia podľa E. Durkheima*. Chronos: Bratislava. (Original edition: Les origines du sentiment religieux d´apres Durkheim, Paris 1925).

25

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

HALLOWELL, A. Irving (1960): Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View. In Stanley Diamond (ed.): *Culture in History: Essays in Honor of Paul Radin*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 19-52.

INGOLD, Tim (2011): *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge, and Description.* New York: Routledge.

HOFLING, Charles A. (2014): *Lacandon Maya-Spanish-English Dictionary*. Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press.

KINTZ, Ellen R. (1990): *Life Under the Tropical Canopy. Tradition and Change Among the Yucatec Maya*. New York: holt, Rinehart and Winston.

KOSIBA, Steve (2020): The Nature of the World, the Stuff of Politics. Exploring Animacy and Authority in the Indigenous Americas. In Steve Kosiba, John Wayne Janusek, and Thomas B. F. Cummins (eds.): *Sacred Matter. Animacy and Authority in the Americas*. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, pp. 1-35.

KOVÁČ, Milan (2017): Lacandon Pilgrimages to Yaxchilan. Mythological Reinterpretation of an Ancient Maya City. Unpublished presentation at the 6th Cracow Maya Confernece „On the Road Again: Migration, Pilgrimage and Movement in Mesoamerica", Cracow, February 16th-19th, 2017.

KOVÁČ, Milan (2016): Lacandon Paths to the Underworld. In *Contributions in New World Archaeology*, Vol 10. Special issue: Into the Underworld: Landscapes of Creation and Conceptions of the Afterlife in Mesoamerica (edited by Jaroslaw Zralka and Christophe Helmke), pp 43-53.

KOVÁČ, Milan (2015): Druhá duchovná conquista a Lacandónci. In Milan Kováč, Radoslav Hlúšek: *Slnko zemetrasenia. Spiritualita súčasných mexických Indiánov*. Chronos: Bratislava, pp. 31-50.

KOVÁČ, Milan (2014): The Maya Myth about Two Suns. In *Axis Mundi*, Vol. 9, 1/2014, pp. 13-21.

KOVÁČ, Milan (2013): Ah Xok, Transformaciones de un dios acuático: Del tiburón olmeca a la sirena lacandona. In *Contributions in New World Archaeology*, Vol 5. Special issue: Water Management in Ancient Mesoamerica (edited by Jaroslaw Zralka and Christophe Helmke), pp. 151-164.

KOVÁČ, Milan (2012): Klasifikačné modely a typológia reprezentácií bohov u súčasných Mayov-Lacandóncov (Chiapas, Mexiko). In *Ethnologia Actualis Slovaca*, No.12, 1/2012, pp. 9-32.

KOVÁČ, Milan (2004): Život a smrť ceremoniálnych nádob u kmeňa Lacandóncov. In Eduard Krekovič, Tatiana Podolinská (eds.): *Kult a mágia v materiálnej kultúre*.

26

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

Bratislava: Ústav etnológie SAV, Slovenská archeologická spoločnosť pri SAV, Bratislava, pp. 95-99.

KRICKEBERG, Walter (1994): *Mitos y Leyendas de los Aztecas, Incas, Mayas y Muiscas*. México: Fondo de cultura económica.

KŠICA, Miroslav (1984): *Výpravy za pravekým umením*. Obzor: Bratislava.

LANDA, Diego de (1993): *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* (edited by Héctor Pérez Martínez). Mérida: Editorial San Fernando.

LOZADA Toledo, Josuhe (2017): *El arte rupestre y la temporalidad del paisaje en laguna Mensabak y laguna Pethá, Chiapas.* Tesis doctoral. Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia, México.

MARTIN, Simon – GRUBE, Nikolai (2008): *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens*, Second Edition. London: Thames and Hudson.

Nartský epos (1983): Z osetínksych a ruských originálov preložila Eva Malievová. Mladé letá, Bratislava.

MALVILLE, John McKim **(**2009): Animating the Inanimate: Camay and Astronomical Huacas of Peru. In José Alberto Rubiño-Martín et al. (eds.): *Cosmology Across Cultures*. ASP Conference Series, Vol. 409. San Francisco: Astronomical Society of the Pacific, pp 261-266.

McANANY, Patricia, A. (2020): Soul Proprietors. Durable Ontologies of Maya Deep Time. In Steve Kosiba, John Wayne Janusek, and Thomas B. F. Cummins (eds.): *Sacred Matter. Animacy and Authority in the Americas*. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, pp. 71-104.

McGEE, Jon R. (1990): *Life, Ritual, and Religion Among the Lacandon Maya*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company.

PALKA, Joel W. (2014): *Maya Pilgrimage to Ritual Landscapes*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

PERERA, Victor – BRUCE, Robert D. (1985): *The Last Lords of Palenque. The Lacandon Mayas of the Mexican Rain Forest*. Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press.

ROYS, Ralph L. (1965): *Ritual of the Bacabs*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

STUART, David (2010): Shining Stones. Observations on the Ritual Meaning of Early Maya Stelae. In Julia Guernsey, John E. Clark and Barbara Arroyo (eds.): *The Place of Stone Monuments. Context. Use and Meaning in Mesoamerica´s Preclassic Transitions*. Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, pp. 283-298.

27

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Milan KOVÁČ

The Worshipers of Stones. Lacandon Sacred Stone Landscape

STUART, David – HOUSTON, Stephen (1994): *Classic Maya Place Names.* Series: Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology, No. 33. Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks.

THOMPSON, J. Eric S. (1982): *Historia y Religión de los Mayas*. México: Siglo XXI Editores.

TOZZER, Alfred M. (1982): *Mayas y Lacandones. Un Estudio Comparativo*. México: Instituto Nacional Indigenista.

VALENCIA Rivera, Rogelio (2019): Maíz y atole son su trono: K´awiil y la Montaña del susteno. In Milan Kováč, Harri Kettunen, and Guido Krempel (eds.): *Maya Cosmology. Terrestrial and Celestial Landscapes*. Munich: Verlag Anton Saurwein, pp. 131-144.

VOS, Jan de (1988): *La paz del dios y del rey: La conquista de la selva lacandona (1525-1821)*. México: Fondo de cultura económica.

Milan Kováč (1967) is a Professor and a Chair of the Department of Comparative Religion at the Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava (Slovakia). He holds an M.A. (1994) and a Ph.D. (1998) in Academic Study of Religions. Professor Kováč has published more than 300 articles and various books dealing with Mesoamerican religions, anthropology, archaeology and history. As the co-editor, he recently published the book *Maya Cosmology. Terrestrial and Celestial Landscapes* (Munich 2019). His previous books include: *Myths and Tales of the Lacandon* (Mitos y cuentos lacandones, Mexico City 2012); *Sun of the Jaguar. Religious World of Olmecs, Maya and Aztecs* (Slnko jaguára. Náboženský svet Olmékov, Mayov a Aztékov, Bratislava 2002); *Lacandon – the Last True Maya* (Lacandónci – poslední praví Mayovia, Bratislava 2001) etc. He translated into Slovak: *The Report of the Affairs of Yucatan by Diego de Landa* (2010). He is a chair of the Center for Mesoamerican Studies at the Comenius University and a long-time director of international excavations in the forest area of Peten, Guatemala, where he works to uncover various pre-classic Maya cities. His most influential articles include the one he co-authored for Science Magazine: *Ancient Lowland Maya Complexity as Revealed by Airborne Laser Scanning of Northern Guatemala* (Science 361, 2018).

28

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

MARIA FELICIA REGA

Department of Comparative Religion,
Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia

Department of Ancient World Studies,
Spienza University of Rome, Italy
miariafelicia.rega@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Ballgame is one of the primary patterns used to describe Mesoamerica as a cultural area. From the first Spanish chroniclers until recent academic research, the study of ballgame and ballcourts has always been an important topic. Many studies focused on the urban and regional distribution of ballcourts, using ballgame as a pattern to understand the political organization of a specific territory. Through a comparative analysis of the main sites of North-East Petén, in Guatemala, starting from Uaxactún territory, and other region in the Maya area, this paper will try to show the differences in social and political dimension of ballgame across the centuries, especially between Late Preclassic and Early Classic.

KEY WORDS: ballcourts, ballgame, Guatemala, Maya, Petén, urbanism

Introduction

The Mesoamerican ballgame had a great importance from religious, political and social point

29

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

of view, being one of the greatest institutions in Mesoamerica, surviving for thousands of years.

Many scholars, especially Eric Taladoire, focused on the architectural features of ballcourts and the changes these had across the centuries, in order to determine a scheme which can help to reconstruct a chronological and regional evolution (TALADOIRE 1981, 2001, 2017). On the other hand, the great part of the studies focused on the ritual and religious importance of ballgame, using as main source mythological tales, such the Popol Vuh, the sacred book of the Maya Quiché written in the 16th century, or many iconographic representations which connected ballgame to sacrifice or to the élite ritualism, relating the ballgame practice to the Underworld, to the fight between the opposite such light and dark, day and night (SCHELE – MILLER 1986; SCHELE – FREIDEL 1991; AGUILAR 2003; COLAS – VOSS 2012; VELASQUEZ GARCIA 2016).

Recently, scholars also started to highlight the political and social role that the ballgame had in all Mesoamerica (DANEELS 2008, 2016; MOODIE 2013; STOLL – ANDERSON 2017). A great interest is addressed to the presence of ballcourts in small sites, starting from the studies conducted by John Fox in the Cuyumapa Drainage in Honduras (FOX 1996) and Olivier de Montmollin in the Grijalva Basin in Chiapas (DE MONTMOLLIN 1997). The analysis of regional distribution of ballcourts can be a good pattern to understand political and hierarchal relations among various sites inside a territory or social bonding inside a community, according to the presence of ballcourts and their characteristics.

This analysis will be now applied to a specific region of the Maya Lowland, the Northeast of Petén, in Guatemala, starting from Uaxactún territory, where recent research led to a better understanding of the area surrounding the main city and confirmed the presence of several complexes, including ballcourts.

Ballgame as a Cultural Pattern

In his publication of 1943, Paul Kirchhoff defined the main characteristics, still useful nowadays, to describe Mesoamerica as a cultural area with specific limits (KIRCHHOFF 1966 [1943]). The ballgame was one of the primary cultural patterns which Mesoamerica had in common with other areas – for example the Southwest of United States or the Caribbean area – and, at the same time, is a fixed element across the centuries, from Early Preclassic to current times.

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

The first information about the ballgame come from the Spanish chroniclers, especially members of the various religious orders who tried to understand the local religious practices, in order to convert the population to the Christian religion. One of the best examples is one of the books written by Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* (General History of the Things of New Spain), which gave us information especially about the Nahua area[1].

Putting together this information, it is possible to understand that, by the end of the Postclassic Period and the beginning of Colonial era, the ballgame was used not only for ritual purposes, but also as amusement. Comparing the historical sources with some modern practices – *Ulama*[2], *Pelota mixteca* (Mixtec ballgame), and others – it is possible to reconstruct the way the game was played (MILLER 2001:81; BARROIS 2006:21; FASH – FASH 2007:267), even if it is possible that the practice had different meanings and uses across the centuries.

In Sinaloa, for example, it is possible to document three different kind of rubber ballgame: *ulama de brazo* (arm ballgame), *ulama de cadera* (hip ballgame) and *ulama de palo* (stick ballgame) (LEYNAAR 2001:122) Recently a new interest on the ballgame has spread thanks to researchers of the Nacional Autonomous University of Mexico, in order to preserve the ancestral practice and to consider it as World Heritage. The Mexican university has also started a championship among the students, while other competitions already existed in many areas of Mexico and Guatemala. The ballgame, even in modern times, is not just simply a sport or, in some cases, an attraction for tourists, but it also has a deep religious meaning and could be consider a retrieval of an ancestral tradition (PANQUEBA CIFUENTES 2015:171-172).

Ritual and religious dimension of ballgame, both in ancient and modern times, is undeniable. Indeed, it is possible to relate ballgame to sacrifice, especially through decapitation, which implies a strong relation with fertility and abundance (TALADOIRE 2017:32; TAUBE 2017:264; GARCIA – REGA 2019:38-40). From this point of view, it is possible to see a

---

[1] "[…]Otras veces por su pasatiempo jugaban a la pelota, y para esto teníanle sus pelotas de ulli guardadas. Estas pelotas eran tamañas como unas grandes bolas de jugar a los bolos y eran macizas, de una cierta resina o goma que se llamaba ulli, que es muy liviana y salta como pelota de viento, y tenia de ellas cargo algún paje" (SAHAGÚN 1938:297-298).

[2] Ulama comes from the world ullamaliztli, which was the world used in the Nahua area to describe the ballgame played by the Aztecs and other people of Mesoamerica (AGUILAR-MORENO 2015:83).

31

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

strong connection with the flooding and the rain, going back to El Manatí rubber offerings in the Olmec area, which date around 1600 BC (ORTIZ et al. 2015:76; TAUBE 2018:264).

In addition to its ritual and sporty role, the ballgame was used as a vehicle to increase the power, wealth and prestige of the elite (STANLEY et al. 1991:14). This is not difficult to understand looking at various iconographic representations with elite members represented while engaging a ballgame or simply dressed as ballplayers. One of the many examples could be the so-called Element 13, from La Corona in Petén, which once was probably part of a great hieroglyphic stairway (STUART *et al.* 2015:9). The larger figure is the local ruler of La Corona, *Chak Ak' Paat Kuy*, playing the ballgame against a "spokesperson" of another ruler, undoubtedly *Yuhkno'm Yich'aak K'ahk'*, the contemporary king of Calakmul (ZENDER 2004:12; HELMKE *et al.* 2015:10).

Another panel also mentioning *Yuhkno'm Yich'aak K'ahk'* comes from Waka'-El Perú. It was found as part of a hieroglyphic stairway that leads to the Northwest Palace Complex (Figure 1). The ruler of Calakmul is represented playing the ballgame against the king of Waka' (LEE – PIHEL 2014:95-98). Both monuments, because of the presence or simply mentioning of *Yuhkno'm Yich'aak K'ahk',* could be dated during his kingdom, which was from 686 to 695 (MARTIN – GRUBE 2008:108).
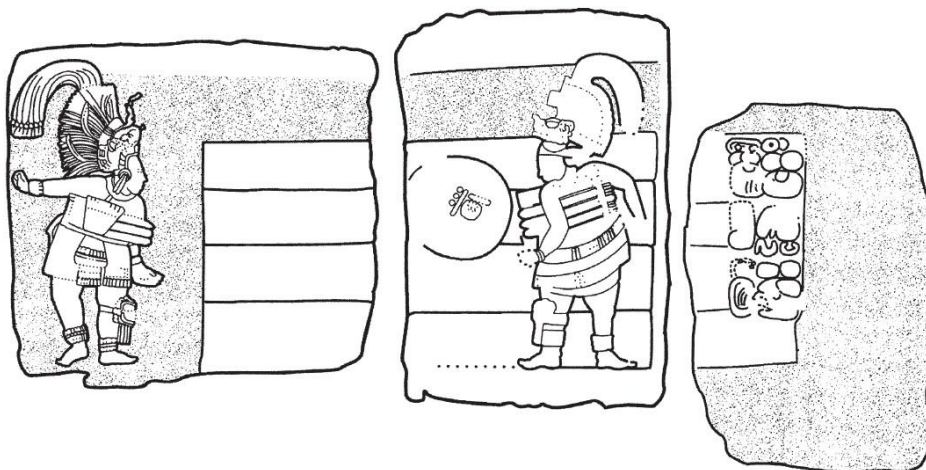
Figure 1: *Panel from the Northern Palace Complex of Waka'.* Drawing by Sarah Sage, from Lee and Piehl 2014, Fig.ure 5.5

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

What is very interesting about the panels coming from La Corona and Waka', is the representation of the game involving a stairway. In the first case, the ball is directly bouncing on the stairs. This kind of representation is common during the Late Classic and can be seen on other panels – one interesting example comes from the site Zapote Bobal (TUNESI 2007:1) – or on many vessels documented by Justin Kerr starting from the 1989.

The presence of stairways in ballgame representation is interesting and can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the ballcourt itself or as a different kind of game, involving a high stairway, played especially by the elites to express war events or political relations in general (MILLER – HOUSTON 1987; CHINCHILLA 1992; HELMKE et al. 2015).
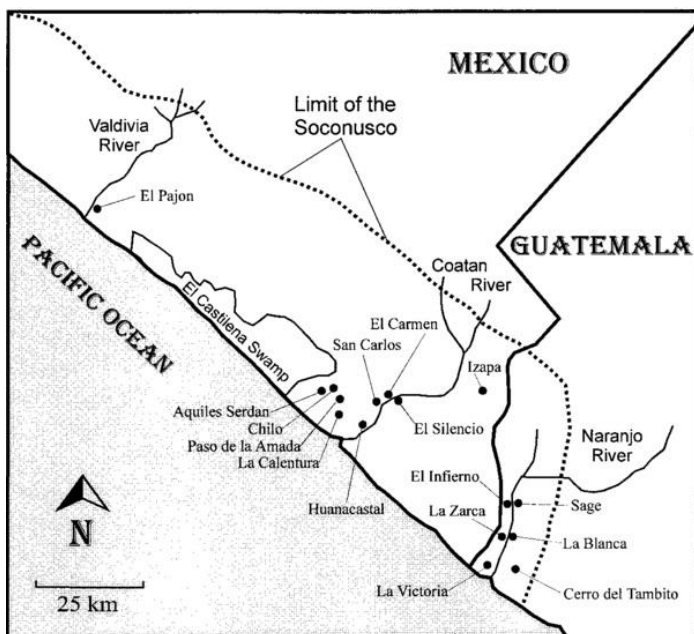
Figure 2: *Map of the Mazatan region, Mexico, showing the location of Paso de la Amada*. Map from Rosenwig 2000, Figure 1.

Political and Social Dimension

The ballgame's popularity across the centuries proves that it involved not just elite groups, but a larger part of the population. It is proved that, in some cases, ballgames were related to

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

festivities which possibly brought small communities together with opportunities of connection or trade (STOLL – ANDERSON 2017:220). In addition, the material and iconographic evidence indicates that ballgames were connected to the external and internal socio-political relationships of elites and their ability to consolidate political power through ritual performance (MILLER 2001:87; FASH – FASH 2015:42).
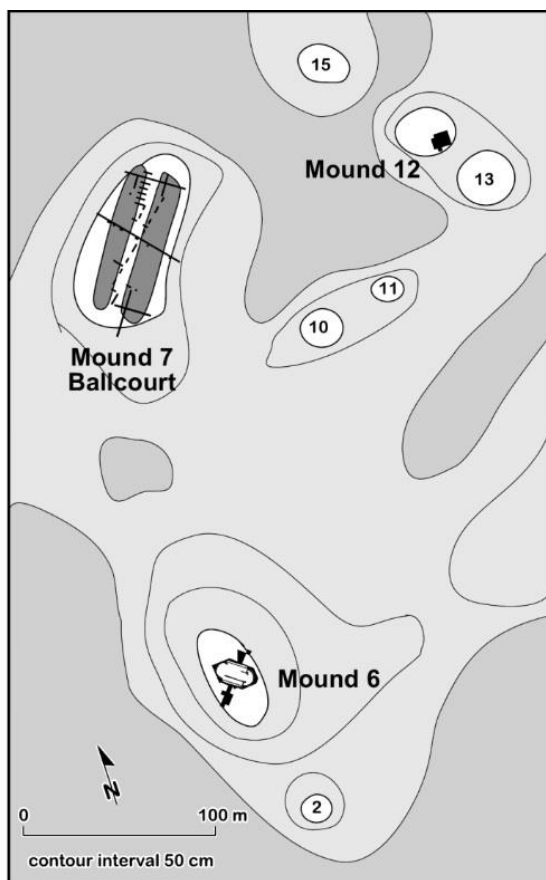
Figure 3: *Map of Paso de la Amada showing the excavations of 1995 in the ballcourt (Mound 7) and the Mound 6.* Map from Blake et al. 2006, Figure 7.2.

The idea of competitive dimension of ballgame, and its relation to the emergence of complex societies, was developed by Warren Hill, starting from his analysis of ballcourts development in the Mazatán region in Chiapas, Mexico (Figure 2) (HILL 1999). In this area, during

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

excavations conducted first in 1990 and then in 1995, was possible to reconstruct the chronology of a ballcourt in Paso de la Amada (Figure 3). According to the radiocarbon analysis, the first occupation of the area can be put around 1850 BC, while the first permanent construction started in 1650 BC (HILL 1999:78-100). In fact, this makes the ballcourt in Paso de la Amada the most ancient known so far. The author also tries to relate the presence of competitive games with the emergence of local political power. The excavations started in 1990 also interested the area of the so-called Mound 6, south of the ballcourt, confirming that this should be an élite residence, built in the same chronological sequence of the ballcourt (HILL 1999:74-78). This could lead to the idea of the élite sponsorship related to the beginning of the permeant construction of ballcourts starting from the Early Preclassic (HILL 1999:7).

The permanent construction of ballcourts in a specific territory could be a key to understand its political evolution. Competitive games and sports in general are a way to maintain and hide inequalities in a society (GRUNEAU 1975; McLANCY 1996:4-5) and to create boundaries inside and outside the community (ZAMORA 2017:48-49; TALADOIRE 2017:14). The construction of ballcourts is part of elite sponsorship, which reinforce the idea of social connection of ballgame, confirmed by different kind of sources. First, the ballcourt position in the urban scheme of a city, usually in connection with large plazas and important ways of connection, could reveal the participation of a high number of people to the game. It is possible to imagine this crowd of people and the noise of the game, looking at some scene represented on vessels dating during the Late Classic, which depict people watching the game and musicians. Archaeological evidences sometimes confirm the presence of social events connected to the game, which implies the presence of feasts, revealed by smashed vessels or discarded shells and bones found during the excavations (ZENDER 2004:10).

Excavations in the ballcourt in the site La Trinidad de Nosotros (MORIARTY – FOIAS 2007), in Central Petén, documented the existence of feasting confirmed by ceramic and chemical analysis.

The authors compare the contest found in Trinidad de Nosotros with other similar situations found elsewhere. For example, John Fox asserted that, after excavations conducted in PACO 15 and other ballcourts in the Cuyumapa Drainage area, in Honduras, it was possible to confirm the presence of elements connected to feasts in the immediate vicinity of ballcourts (FOX 1996:481). A similar situation was documented in one of the ballcourts excavated in Cancuen, in the Petexbatun region, specifically the so-called Juego de Pelota Norte (TORRES 2010:103-105).

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective
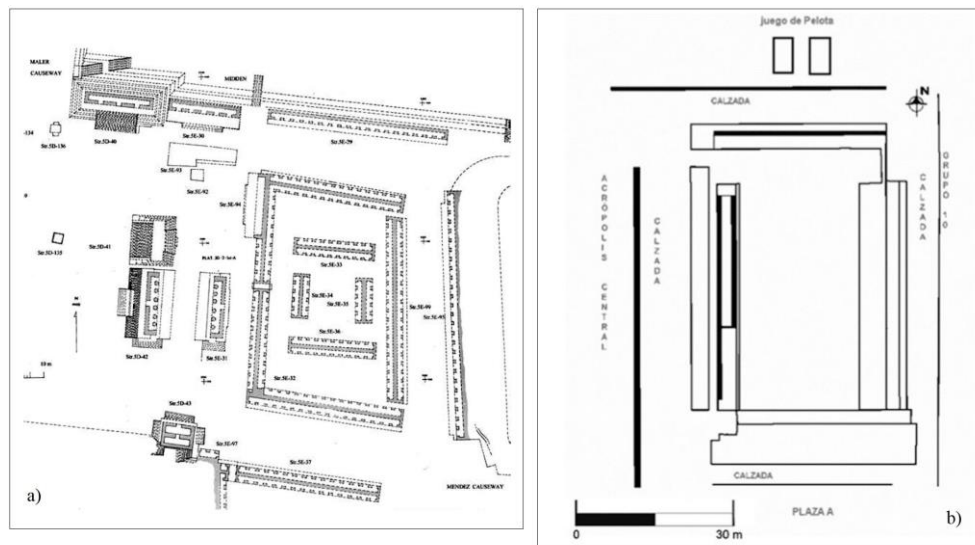

Figure 4: a) *Map of Tikal Market in the East Plaza.* (Jones 2015, Figure 2.1), b) *Map of La Puente Market* (Mejia and Valle 2010, Figure 11).

In general, the connection between ballgame and festival activities is also confirmed by iconographic representation on vessels (ZENDER 2004) and by the relation of ballcourts with marketplace and commerce in general (BECKER 2015). One example could be in Tikal, where the market in the East Plaza is in close relation with a ballcourt (BECKER 2015:101-104; JONES 2015:85-87) (Figure 4a). Other examples are small centres in central Petén, such as La Puente, Ixtutz or Pueblito. At La Puente, for example, the area interpreted as market is very close to important routes and to a ballcourt on the north side, while the excavations revealed platforms very similar to those of the Tikal's market (MEJÍA – GENDRY 2010:597-598) (Figure 4b). In Pueblito, the market area is associated with important groups such as the Plaza C – the so-called *Plaza de las Estrellas* – a ballcourt on the north side and the Plaza B, characterized by the presence of palaces. On the east and west sides, there are important routes, all in an area of 80 m from north to south and 70 m from east to west (LAPORTE – CHOCÓN 2008:698.

Thanks to this great importance from religious, social and political point of view, ballgame can be considered as an indicator for the emergence of the first Mesoamerican states (CLARK

36

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

2007:30). The ballgame was used since the Preclassic Period as an instrument to resolve internal tensions inside a community and a way to express power (TALADOIRE 2017:34).

As Timothy Earle pointed out, there are three kinds of power: economic, military and ideological (EARLE 1997). The last one is at the base of human thought and is possible to reinforce it through rituals and erection of monument. The construction of ballcourts can be part of this mechanism, as an attempt to manipulate and impose an ideology. So, the proliferation of ballcourt can be an attempt to maintain social and political order (HILL 1999:23).

An example is the one proposed by Annick Daneels for Central Veracruz. During the later Classic Period (500-1000 AD) the population was at its high point and organized in four-level of hierarchy. At the same time, she identifies two models of socio-political systems, one centralized and the other segmentary. In the first model, the ballcourt was placed in the capital; in the segmentary model, the second-rank settlements were distributed in all the territory, each one with its own ballcourt and surrounded by tertiary centres (DANEELS 2008:197).

Daneels also notes that during the Early Classic (100-300 AD) or Middle Classic (300-700 AD), a new architectural layout appears. It consists of a pyramid on the north side of a plaza, a ballcourt on the south side and elongated platforms on east and west sides (DANEELS 2008:201).

According to studies conducted by Olivier de Montmollin in the Grijalva basin in Chiapas, Mexico (DE MONTMOLLIN 1997), which then inspired the analysis of regional distribution of ballcourts in Palenque hinterland (LIENDO STUARDO – LÓPEZ BRAVO 2006; LIENDO STUARDO 2015), the presence of ballcourts in various sites can reflect a decentralized and competitive political organization in these territories. The ballgame becomes part of a political and symbolic strategy used by elite groups.

A Regional Perspective

Studies of ballgame from a regional perspective started with John Fox. In the Cuyumapa Drainage, Honduras, the construction and dedication of ballcourts can be documented extensively in the archaeological evidences. The remains of these activities are the buildings themselves, including the remains of plaster floors, stone monuments, such stelas or markers, in addition to the material remains of dedicatory activities, as caches or burials (FOX 1996:485). He also noted the closeness of ballcourts to area with domestic ceramic, which

37

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

indicated the insertion of the ballgame in contest of competitive games among various cities and festive events, especially related with the exchange of food.

In sum, this isolated position of ballcourts outside the main centre, may be an indicator of the segmentation of power inside a region during some specific periods, with the use of ballgame as a way to maintain the social cohesion, implying also pilgrimages from one site to another, but also a way to delimit territorial boundaries (STOLL 2017:62).

Few years later, in 1997, Olivier de Montmollin analysed the regional distribution of ballcourts in the Grijalva Basin, in Chiapas, Mexico, during Late/Terminal Classic, in a regional settlement and political context, focusing on sizes, forms, alignment and position of ballcourts. According to him, variations in the distribution and number of ballcourts may indicate the importance of this kind of complex for the élite both form ritual and political point of view and segmentation of elite power in different groups which used their own ballcourt as an emblem of power (DE MONTMOLLIN 1997:29-30).

Another study that uses the ballgame as an archaeological evidence to understand the political organization of a territory was conducted by Rodrigo Liendo Stuardo in the region of Palenque, Chiapas. Again, the presence of ballcourts in various sites can reflect a competitive political organization in this territory (LIENDO STUARDO 2015:150-151).

Ballcourts are collective spaces in a Maya city and their political importance is testify by being a social identifier which creates a shared social identity; the ballcourt, as the plaza, is a place of relations and collective participation and can be considered as an historical marker (LIENDO STUARDO 2015:137).

Excavations in Palenque hinterland revealed at least 12 sites with ballcourts at 6-8 km intervals (LIENDO STUARDO 2015:139), which confirmed a decentralization of power during the Late Classic, with sites of different rank according to the presence, position and characteristics of ballcourts.

Thanks to comparisons with different areas where the analysis of regional distribution of ballcourts was used, it is possible to recognize two historical moments when the ballcourt construction spreads on a regional level, involving small sites beyond the main cities. This development can be verified in a period such as the Late Preclassic (300 BC-250 AD) or the Terminal Classic (800-900 AD), periods of tumultuous political climate and possible segmentation of power, when new kinds of political relations were born and the ballgame was one of the maximum expression of the Maya ideology (MOODIE 2012:8).

For example, between Middle and Late Preclassic there was a great development of Maya

38

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
**Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative
Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective**

groups in Northwest of Yucatán Peninsula; at moment to build their cities, this groups gave
a great importance to ballcourts. The *Proyecto Costa Maya* (Maya Coast Project) subjected
this area to an intensive archaeological survey (ROBLES CASTELLANO – ANDREWS
2003). The project documented the existence of over 250 sites with extensive Preclassic
occupation (ANDERSON 2005:13). During three field seasons, 25 structures were identified
as possible ballcourts (ANDERSON 2005:15).
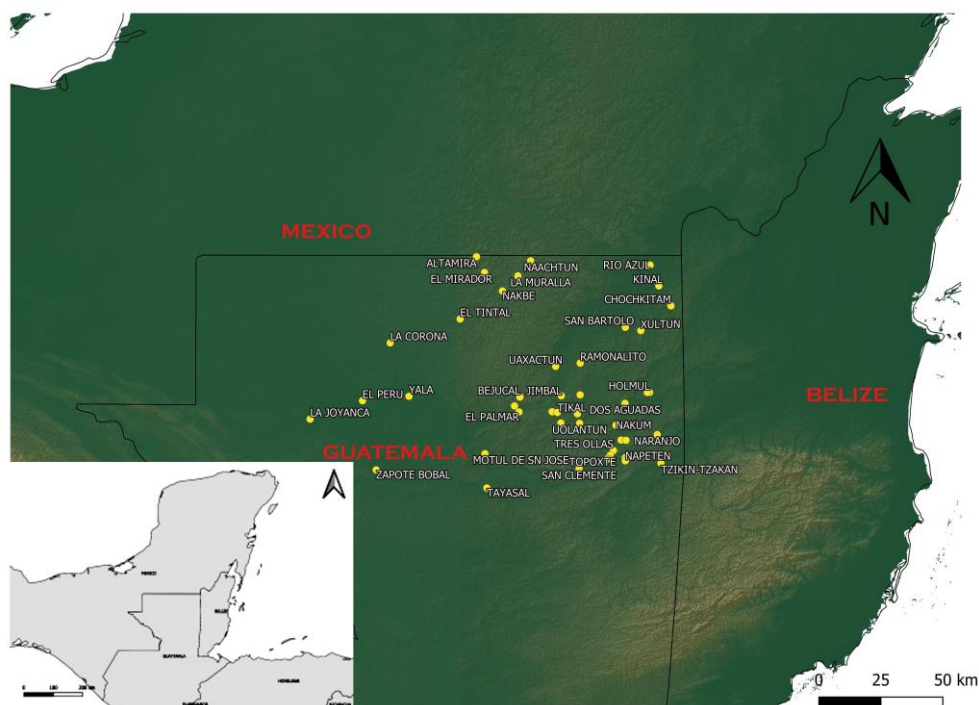
Figure 5: *Petén map*. GIS elaboration by author.

In general, the ceramics collected during the excavations belongs to the Middle Preclassic;
probably some of these ballcourts were settled during the Late Preclassic and archaeologists
also found sporadic Early Classic sherds during the excavations (ANDERSON 2005:15).

It looks like, during the Middle Preclassic, each site had its own ballcourt, even the small
cities. It is possible that the dimensions of the structures can determine the different range of
the cities. One example is Xtobó, a site that presents huge dimensions in building and

39

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

sacbeobs[3] that connected directly to the ballcourt, positioned on the south side of a Triadic Group. After Xtobó, there are sites of lower range, until the fourth range sites which were without any ballcourt. Except from Xtobó, the other Preclassic ballcourts found in the region are in very small sites (ANDERSON 2009:8).

During the Preclassic Period, there is a large distribution of ballcourts inside different territories, usually in small sites and along the regional boundaries. We can also find examples of isolated ballcourts (KOWALESKI et al. 1991; FOX 1996). By the end of the Late Preclassic and the beginning of the Early Classic, there is a major concentration of ballcourts in the main sites.

This can also lead to a different meaning of the ballgame. During the Preclassic, ballgame was used as a social connector for the population, while with the beginning of the Classic Period it turned into a ritual of State mostly related to the elite power.

In general, there is a loss of interest in the use of ballcourts during the Early Classic Period, maybe due to a possible different ballgame developed with the influence of Teotihuacán in the Maya area, documentable even before the so-called *Entrada*[4] of 378 AD.

At the end of the Early Classic (550-600 AD), there is a new interest in the construction of ballcourts that continues throughout the Late Classic and until the Postclassic; most part of ballcourts in the main cities of the Maya Lowlands dates during this period (TALADOIRE 2017:30).

Outside the Maya area, for example in the Nejapa valley, in Oaxaca, Marijke Stoll examined the distribution of ballcourts across the landscape in order to assess the socio-political role of the ballgame in Nejapa at a regional scale (STOLL – ANDERSON 2017:226). This area

---

[3]   The Maya causeway is called sacbé from the Yucatec sac (white) and beh (road). The plural form is sacbeo'ob (Historical Dictionary of Mesoamerica 2012:273).

[4]   The term Entrada is used to refer to a specific episode happened in the date 11 Eb of the Maya history, which correspond to the year 378 AD, reported on various monuments – among others, Tikal Stela 31 and Uaxactún Stelas 5 and 22 (STUART 2000; KOVÁČ – BARROIS 2012; BELIAEV et al. 2013). This episode refers to a political figure called Sihyaj K'ahk', who 'oversaw' the replacement of the rulers in cities such as Tikal and Uaxactún, with new rulers related with Teotihuacán. After the analysis of various texts, many scholars – first Tatiana Proskouriakoff and, among others, David Stuart – interpreted this episode as a military conquest by Teotihuacán. The Entrada can be considered as a definitive imposition of Teotihuacán in the Maya area, which influenced many other cities – including Copán, in Honduras, and Kaminaljuyú, on the Pacific Coast of Guatemala – which can be proved also by the adoption of architectural styles inspired by Teotihuacán.

40

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
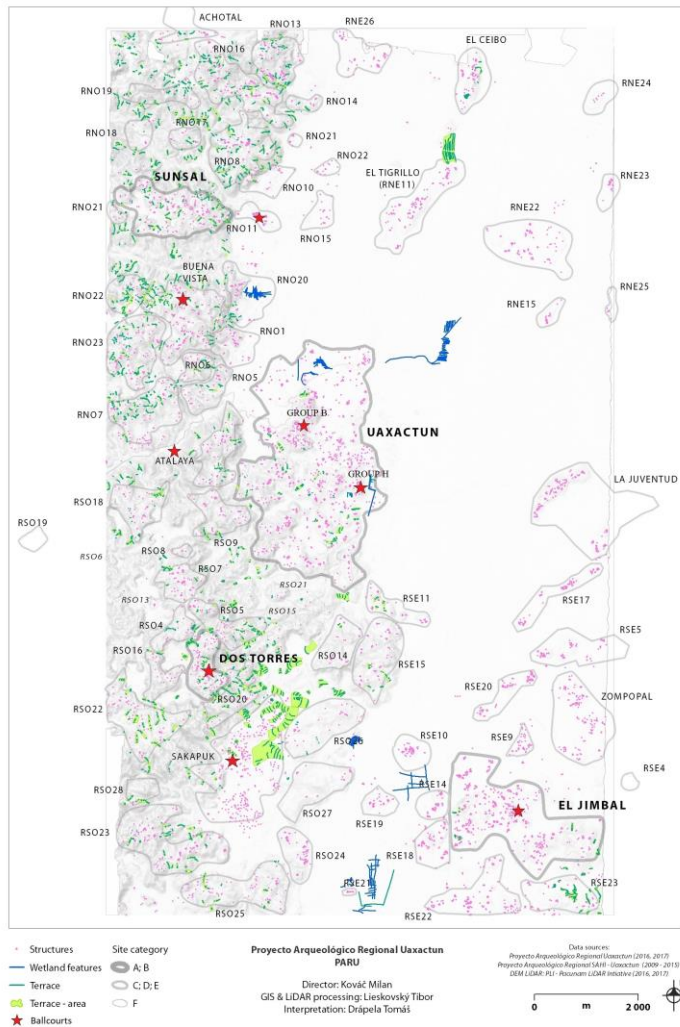Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

shows a continuity in the occupation from the Middle Preclassic to the Late Classic, with a peak in the Postclassic Period (STOLL 2017:60). Most of the ballcourts were found in sites that can be dated during the Postclassic, based on ceramic analysis and radiocarbon dates (STOLL – ANDERSON 2017:226). Numerous social, political, economic, and geographic factors determined the presence or absence of ballcourts inside a city across time and space. Stoll found that the Nejapa ballcourts were located at sites that vary in size, complexity, and elevation. The spatial analysis demonstrates that ballcourts were built in large urban centres, small towns, and even isolated locations (STOLL – ANDERSON 2017:226). If these sites with or without ballcourt have the same chronology, it is possible to suggest that the isolated ballcourts may have served as pilgrimage sites for people coming from different communities in the vicinity (STOLL – ANDERSON 2017:227).

Northeast of Petén

After this general premise about the political and social meaning of ballgame and the importance of the regional analysis of ballcourts, the attention can move to the Petén region, specifically on Northeast Petén (Figure 5).

The area was chosen due to the high number of project active in the last decades; great part of the area was also investigated with the recent LiDAR technology, which allowed to get more data from the high number of structures covered by the rainforest (CANUTO et al. 2018).

In 2016, especially, in the Uaxactún territory, the use of LiDAR confirmed the presence of structures, investigated through excavations during the months of July and August of 2017 (REGA 2019). The excavations confirmed the presence of new ballcourts in three satellite sites, Buena Vista/El Chival, Atalaya and Sakapuk, adding new data to information already know on ballcourts in Uaxactún and other sites in the surrounding territory, such as Dos Torres or Jimbal (Figure 6).

Excavations revealed that the great part of these ballcourts was constructed during the Late Preclassic Period and this is documented in Uaxactún itself (Group H; Figure 7a), Dos Torres, El Chival, Atalaya and Sakapuk.

These sites are mostly located on a distance which varies from 2 to 10 km, on the top of relatively high hills, and for sure belonged to the political organization of Uaxactún.

Maria Felicia REGA

Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

Figure 6: *Map of the Uaxactun territory by Tibor Lieskovský and Tomáš Drápela*. Modified by author with the location of ballcourts.

During the Late Preclassic, there was a great development of the Uaxactún satellite sites, which built their own ballcourts. As for other regions, the main idea of this large interest for

ballcourts could be an indicator of the relative independence of the satellite sites during this period and, in general, a less centralized power in the Uaxactún region.

By the end of the Late Preclassic, many scholars documented a period of crisis in the Central Lowlands, probably related to the fall of the great city El Mirador. El Mirador crisis involved other cities in the Maya Lowlands where there was evidence of abandonment between 150 and 250 AD, as in Uaxactún (KOVÁČ 2011) or evidences of destruction of buildings and construction of defensive structures, as in Tikal (COE 1990).
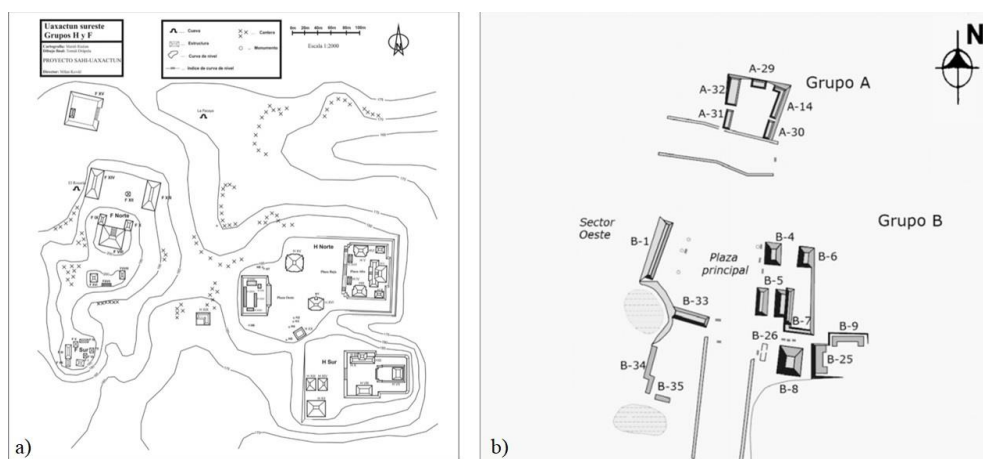
Figure 7: *a) Map of Uaxactun Group H south by Matúš Riečan and Tomáš Drápela; map of Uaxactun Group B by Renaldo Acevedo.*

After this moment of crisis, many cities were re-occupied with the beginning of the Early Classic; for example, in Uaxactún, there are evidence of a reoccupation of the "old city" before the movement of the population to the new urban centre (KOVÁČ 2011:53-54).

Anyway, there seems to be still lack of interest for the use of some complexes during these first centuries of the Classic Period, especially ballcourts.

In Uaxactún, for example, apart from the Preclassic ballcourt in the Group H, the ballcourt in the Group B was built directly during the Late Classic (BARROIS – JAU 2009:49) (Figure 7b), or, in the case of the satellite site El Chival, the construction corresponds to the Terminal Classic (REGA 2019:103). Several scholars related this apparent lack of interest to the Teotihuacán intervention in the Maya Lowlands (TALADOIRE 2017:29-30), a hypothesis justified by the apparent absence of a ballcourt in Teotihuacán. This idea should be discarded

after recent excavations in the so-called *Ciudadela*, in the southeast part of the city. Thanks to these excavations it was proposed that one of the structures – the Structure 5 – could be interpreted as a ballcourt, built during the so-called phase *Tzacualli* (100-150 AD) (GÓMEZ – GAZZOLA 2015:127). The hypothesis is reinforced by the materials found during the excavations which also include 13 rubber balls (GAZZOLA – GÓMEZ 2017:84-85).

The contact with Teotihuacán and the so-called *Entrada* in 378, anyway, had a great impact on the Maya area. The "New Order" imposed by Teotihuacán, in Uaxactún probably meant a high concentration of population in the main centre with a higher control. On the other hand, the ancient and well defensible sites of the surrounding mountains were abandoned; perhaps, it is possible to consider this abandonment as an evidence of some sort of *pax teotihuacana* (KOVÁČ et al. 2019:696). They served only sporadically as strategic points, more in the second half of the Early Classic, in case of wars or as elite shelters during turbulent times (MARTIN – GRUBE 2008:38).

The interest in ballgame, probably did not vanished totally, as we can see from the presence of a monument found during the excavations in El Chival (REGA 2019:97). The central marker found during the excavations of the local ballcourt, even if part of the Terminal Classic phase, was for sure carved in Uaxactún in the 5th century AD, according to iconography and palaeography (BELIAEV – TOKOVININE 2019:236-240; KOVÁČ et al. 2019:695). However, even if this monument could be interpreted also as an altar, the glyph B9 for the ballcourt itself confirms that this is for sure the ballcourt marker (KOVÁČ et al. 2019:698). This proves the existence of an interest in ballgame during the Early Classic in Uaxactún, even if there is no evidence of ballcourts dating in this period.

By the end of the Late Classic and the beginning of the Terminal Classic, in all the old satellite sites, a new population appears with a new constructive activity or re-occupation of previous complexes. On the other hand, it is evident that the power of Uaxactún became weaker and this led to the same regional pattern of the Late Preclassic, but with a division of power between satellite sites without central coordination. Among these, Dos Torres predominates in the south and El Chival/Buena Vista in the north. The antiquity of both sites is part of the ideology of the new elites to justify their right to power; but probably the main reason for this re-occupation is the defendable position of the two centres, due a great change in the social and political situation (KOVÁČ et al. 2019:697).

The use of this kind of analysis in the rest of Petén region is still at its beginning but it is already possible to see other example of this spread of construction of ballcourts at regional level, especially during the Late Preclassic or in the Late/Terminal Classic.

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

In the Holmul region, for example, the situation is very similar to what revealed in the Uaxactún territory. During the excavations inside the ballcourt in the so-called Group II, in the Holmul city centre, archaeologists found the central marker; even if the marker is eroded, its style can be dated in the Late Classic (ESTRADA-BELLI 2002:108). The latest excavations documented the existence of many Preclassic ballcourts, for example in Cival (BAUER et al. 2005:65), Chanchich (ESTRADA-BELLI 2015:16), T'ot (ESTRADA-BELLI 2015:19) and K'o (ESTRADA-BELLI 2005:10). Ballcourt in Dos Aguadas could had a first phase during the Late Preclassic and a possible second one during the Classic Period (ALVAREZ 2012:170) (Figure 8).
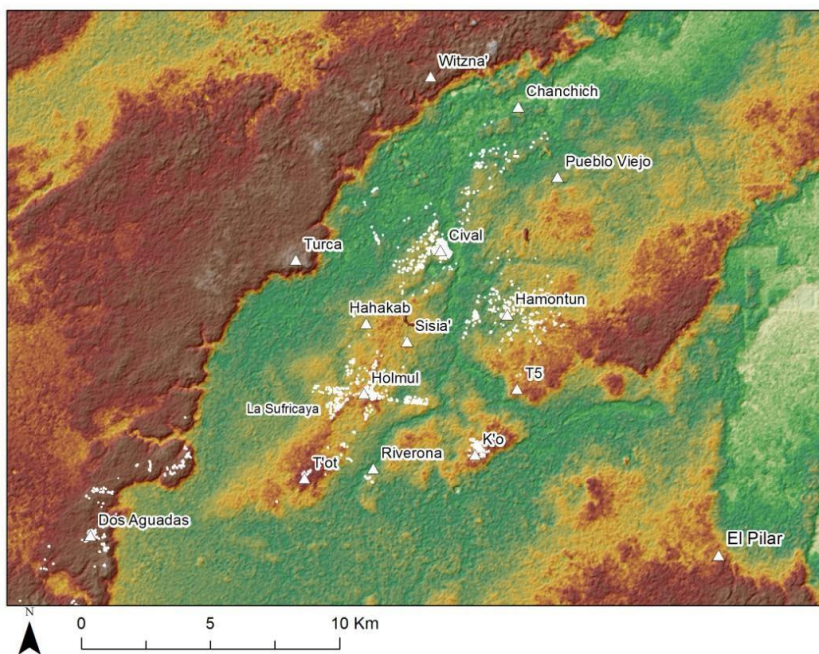

Figure 8: *Map of the Holmul region*. Map by Estrada-Belli 2015, Figure 1.1; topographic data by NASA, ASTER program.

Interesting is the situation in La Sufricaya which ballcourt, thanks to the excavations, can be dated during the Early Classic Period, with an abandonment shortly after the construction. Its chronology can be related to the rest of the Group I where the ballcourt was built, which is around 350-450 AD (TOKOVININE 2005:17).

45

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

The emergence of the local elites in satellite site can be documented in other regions during the Late Classic. In Yaxha hinterland, for example, during the Late Classic, the emergence of ballcourts in the intermediate centres reflect the type of relationship that occurred between the minor elites of the different centres and between them and the central power of Yaxha, which could reflect socio-political connection (FIALKO 2013:277) (Figure 9).
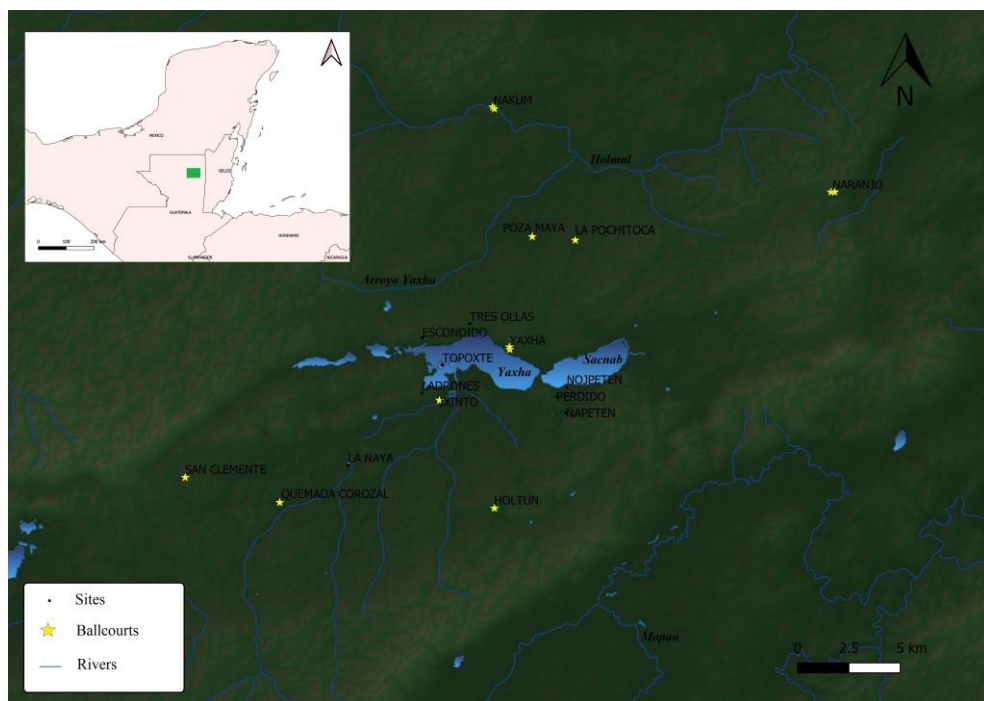

Figure 9: *Map of Yaxha area with the principal sites and the distribution of ballcourts*. GIS elaboration by author.

In Yaxha itself, the two ballcourts were built during the Late Classic Period, one on the north side of the Acropolis South, and the other one on the east of an E-Group, in a pattern that reminds Tikal ballcourts, the first in the Great Plaza, on the north side of Central Acropolis and the triple ballcourts in relation with the so-called Lost World, which follow the pattern of an E-Group (GÓMEZ 2007:512).

During the Late Classic, most of Yaxha satellite sites built their own ballcourt, which could reflect some socio-political independence from the main centre (FIALKO 2013:278). The ballcourts in Quemada Corozal and Ixtinto were built in relation to an E-Group (MORALES

46

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

2005:96), while other sites such as Poza Maya and La Pochitoca had their own ballcourt without any E-Group in the urban scheme.

The intermediate centres of La Naya and El Venado, lacking their own ballcourts, probably were at a direct dependence from the central power of Yaxha. The minor elites of San Clemente, La Quemada and Holtún with their own courts could have already had dynastic links with Yaxha (FIALKO 2013:278). On the other hand, in La Quemada, the elite importance is also confirmed by the burial practices, together with the erection of stelas in the main plazas and sculptures (MORALES 2005:108). It has been proposed by Vilma Fialko that the construction of ballcourts in the secondary rank sites can be in part related to the elite of Yaxha, even if it can be also the result of their independence. It is possible to propose that the presence of some of these sites with their own ballcourts, such as La Pochitoca and Poza Maya, in area of inter-site with Naranjo, could determine some political boundaries in the area of influence of the two cities. This bellicose relation with Naranjo is also verified in the texts on monuments dating in the 7th and 8th centuries. For example, stelas 21, 22 and 23 of Naranjo indicate that during this period Naranjo attacked several satellite sites of Yaxha, and there were probably at least two direct attacks against the city of Yaxha (MARTIN – GRUBE 2008:76-77); these attacks could refer specifically to the sites La Pochitoca and Poza Maya (FIALKO 2013:278).

Discussion

To recapitulate, the compared analysis of Uaxactún and Yaxha territories, it is interesting to understand the role that the ballgame had in their political organization.

The analyses in the Yaxha territory, as also proposed by Vilma Fialko, proved that ballcourts were built in sites at the borders of the Yaxha territorial influence and, in some cases, at the frontier with Naranjo and Nakum territory; as said, this could also be proved by the epigraphic analysis of stelas from Naranjo.

In the Uaxactún area, the ballcourts were built in the satellite sites that border the west part of the territory. The sites seem all in hill area, at a distance that varies from 2 to 10 km from Uaxactún centre. Excavations in the past years proved that the majority of the ballcourts where in use during the Late Preclassic, while the analysis of material from other ballcourts mapped in the territory, coming from the latest excavations, are still ongoing.

The presence of ballcourts dating in the Terminal Classic is very important. As shown in El Chival ballcourt, the presence of a monument carved in Uaxactún during the Early Classic,

47

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

could be the evidence of the emergence of a local power, which used an element of the old Uaxactún dynasty; a gesture that could be interpreted as a legitimation of power in a turbulent period (KOVÁČ et al. 2019:696). The re-use and relocation of ancient monuments is common in the ancient times and usually happened in moment of political instability, military conquest and new political alliances, as seen in many cities of the Central Lowlands by the end of the Late Preclassic and the beginning of the Early Classic (LOWE 2012:194).

The construction or reoccupation of a ballcourt during a turbulent time such as the Terminal Classic, can be indicative of the great political and cultural importance of ballgame, even in troubled times. An interesting example comes from Nohmul, in Belize. The proposed chronology for this ballcourt is around 800 AD, in a moment of great cultural changes and influence from the Northern Lowlands (HAMMOND et al. 1987:278-279; HAMMOND 1991:56-57).

This is just one example of the continuity in the building activity during a turbulent time, as we can see in cities as Yaxhá itself, or Nakum, which confirmed a high renovation programme in the centre of the city and in its periphery in the years between 850-950 AD (ŹRAŁKA – HERMES 2012:171-175).

It is possible to propose that, even in a moment of great cultural and political changing such as the Terminal Classic, the presence of a ballcourt was still considered an important element in the urban organization, used by the local elite to express its prestige and power.

Conclusion

The analysis of the regional distribution of ballcourts in the Northeast of Petén, revealed that each analysed territory is unique, but it is possible to see common patterns in different cities and their relationship with the hinterland.

In Uaxactún territory, the distribution of ballcourts in the satellite sites, reveals the changes in the political organization across the centuries. Comparing Uaxactún with other areas with a high number of ballcourts in small sites during the Late Preclassic, it is possible to propose for this area a fragmentation of the elite power, as proposed by Anderson for the Northwest of Yucatán Peninsula and Fox for Cuyumapa Drainage.

By the end of the Late Preclassic and the beginning of the Early Classic, all these regions showed a low interest in the construction of ballcourts. In Uaxactún, this can be related to the moment of crisis that involved many cities in the Maya Lowland and culminated with the

48

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

strong Teotihuacán influence on the Maya area. This influence could lead to a political centralization, with the abandonment of the satellite sites and the moving of Uaxactún population in the new urban centre. The interest in the construction of ballcourts will not happen again until the Late Classic, with the construction of the ballcourt in the Group B.

The Late Classic in general, saw the highest interest in the construction of ballcourts, as we can see also in Tikal and Yaxha. The appearance of ballcourts in the intermediate site in Yaxha region, some of them in the inter-site area with Naranjo and Nakum, can be explained with the emergence of locale elites related to the main centre.

With the lack of central power during the Terminal Classic, a new fragmentation of power occurred, as it is possible to see with the emergence of El Chival in Uaxactún territory.

The existence of ballcourts in isolated position or at the territorial borders, reveals the social role that ballgame had in all Mesoamerica across the centuries, and not just during the Preclassic Period. As Hill pointed out for the Mazatán region, and Stoll and Anderson confirmed for Oaxaca and Northwest of Yucatán, the primary role of ballgames was for community-building. This social importance can be confirmed by archaeological evidence indicating feasts in close connection with ballcourts, confirming the participation of a high number of people which can be perceived also thanks to representations on vessels.

In conclusion, with the increase of data for this kind of analysis and the production of catalogues and GIS-based maps, it will be possible to better understand the regional distribution of ballcourts in the Northeast of Petén and to help reconstruct the changes in the political and social use of ballgame in this area across the centuries.

Bibliography

AGUILAR, Miguel (2003): The Ballgame as a portal to the Underworld. In *The PARI Journal,* Vol. III, n. 2, pp. 4-9.

AGUILAR-MORENO, Miguel (2015): *Ulama*: pasado, presente y futuro del juego de pelota mesoamericano. In *Anales de Antropología* Vol. 49-1, pp. 73-112.

ALVAREZ, Brenda (2012): Capítulo 13. DAG.L.05. y DAG.T.10, Juego de Pelota. In Francisco Estrada-Belli (ed.): *Investigaciones arqueológicas en la región de Holmul, Petén: Holmul y Dos Aguadas. Informe Preliminar de la Temporada 2012*. Boston: Boston University, Archaeological Department, pp. 167-175.

49

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

ANDERSON, David (2005): Preclassic Settlement Patterns in Northwest Yucatán. In *Mono y Conejo* 3, pp. 13-34.

ANDERSON, David – MEDINA CASTILLO, Edgar (2017): El juego de pelota en el Noroeste de Yucatán. In *Arqueología Mexicana* 146, pp. 35-39, México.

BARROIS, Ramzy (2006): *Les Sculptures Associées aux Jeux de Balle dans l'Aire Méso-Américaine*. Thèse pour obtenir le grade de Docteur de l'Université Paris I es archéologie et anthropologie. Paris: Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, U.F.R. Histoire de l'Art et Archéologie.

BARROIS, Ramzy – JAU, Cruz (2009): Capitulo I. Investigacion y restauración en el Juego de pelota. (Operación 1). In Milan Kováč, Ernesto Arredondo Leiva (eds): *Nuevas Excavaciones en Uaxactun I. Temporada 2009*. Bratislava – Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción: SAHI, pp. 15-51.

BAUER, Jeremy – FEIJTA, Dessa – SPECTOR, Zac (2005): Investigaciones preliminares de un juego de pelota preclásico en Cival, Petén, Guatemala. In Francisco Estrada-Belli (ed.): *Investigaciones en la región de Holmul, 2005. Informe preliminar de la temporada 2005*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University, pp. 65-78.

BECKER, Marshall J. (2015): Ancient Maya Markets. Architectural Grammar and Market Identifications. In Eleanor M. King (ed.): *The Ancient Maya Marketplace: The Archaeology of Transient Space*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, pp. 90-110.

BELIAEV, Dmitri – TOKOVININE, Alexandre – VEPRETSKIY, Sergei – LUIN, Camilo (2013): Los monumentos de Tikal. In Dmitri Beliaev and Mónica de Léon (eds.): *Proyecto Atlas epigráfico de Petén. Fase I. Informe Final No.1. Temporada abril-mayo 2013*. Guatemala: Instituto de Antropología e Historia, pp. 37-170.

BELIAEV, Dmitri – TOKOVININE, Alexandre (2019): Capítulo XVIII. Análisis epigráfico del marcador de El Chival/Buena Vista. In Milan Kováč, Sandra Ventura, Dora García (eds.): *Nuevas excavaciones en Uaxactun IX. Temporada 2017*. Bratislava: Center for Mesoamerican Studies (CMS) Comenius University – Chronos, pp. 236-240.

BLAKE, Michael – Lesure, Richard G. – HILL, Warren D. – BARBA, Luis – CLARK, John C. (2006): The Residence of Power at Paso de la Amada, Mexico. In Jessica J. Christie, Patricia J. Sarro (eds.): *Palaces in the Americas. From Perú to Northwest Coast*. Austin: University of Texas Press, pp. 191-210.

CHICHILLA MAZARIEGOS, Oswaldo (1992): El juego de pelota en la escritura y el arte maya clásico. Interpretaciones recientes. In Maria Teresa Uriarte (ed.): *El juego de pelota mesoamericano. Temas eternos, nuevas aproximaciones*. México: Dirección General de Publicaciones y Fomento Editorial, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, pp. 67-93.

50

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

COE, William R. (1990): *Excavations in the Great Plaza, North Terrace and North Acropolis of Tikal. Tikal Report No. 14*. Philadelphia: The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania.

COLAS, Pierre R. – VOSS, Alexander (2006): A Game of Life and Death – the Maya Ballgame. In Nikolai Grube (ed.): *Maya: Divine Kings of the Rainforest*. Cologne: Könemann, pp. 186-191.

DANEELS, Annick (2008): Ballcourts and Politics in the Lower Cotaxtla Valley: a Model to Understand Classic Central Veracruz? In Arnold III. Philip J., Christopher A. Pool (eds.): *Classic Period Cultural Currents in Southern and Central Veracruz*. Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Other Titles in Pre-Columbian Studies, Harvard University Press, pp. 197-223.

DANEELS, Annick (2016): *Juego de pelota y política. Un estudio sobre cómo se desarrolló la sociedad del Periodo Clásico en el centro de Veracruz*. México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

DE MONTMOLLIN, Olivier (1997): A Regional Study of Classic Maya Ball Courts from the Upper Grijalva Basin, Chiapas, Mexico. In *Ancient Mesoamerica* 8, pp. 23-41.

EARLE, Timothy (1997): *How Chiefs Come to Power: The Political Economy in Prehistory*. Stanfrod: Stanford University Press.

ESTRADA-BELLI, Francisco (2002): Anatomia de una ciudad: Holmul. Resultados de nuevas investigaciones arqueológicas en 2000 y 2001. In *Mexicon*, Vol. XXIV, pp. 107-112.

ESTRADA-BELLI, Francisco (2015): Resumen de las investigaciones de la temporada 2015. In Francisco Estrada-Belli (ed.): *Investigaciones arqueológicas en la región de Holmul, Petén: Holmul y Cival. Informe preliminar de la temporada 2015*. New Orleans: Tulane University, pp. 2-28.

FASH, Barbara – FASH, William (2007): The Roles of Ballgames in Mesoamerican Ritual Economy. In E. Christian, Karla Davis-Salazar (eds.): *Mesoamerican Ritual Economy: Archaeological and Ethnological Perspectives*. Boulder: University of Colorado Press, pp. 267-283.

FASH, William – FASH, Barbara (2015): Apuesta, guerra ritual e identidad en el juego de pelota en Mesoamerica. In Maria Teresa Uriarte (ed.): *El juego de pelota mesoamericano. Temas eternos, nuevas aproximaciones*. México: Dirección General de Publicaciones y Fomento Editorial, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, pp. 39-66.

FOX, John Gerard (1996): Playing with Power: Ballcourts and Political Ritual in Southern Mesoamerica. In *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 37, n. 3, pp. 483-509.

GARCIA PATZÁN, Dora Maritza – REGA, Maria Felicia (2019): The Decapitation Ritual and the Ancient Maya Ballgame. From Archaeological Evidences to Sacred Stories. In *Axis Mundi* 13 (1), pp. 30-41.

GAZZOLA, Julie – GÓMEZ CHÁVEZ, Sergio (2017): Nuevos datos sobre el juego de pelota en Teotihuacan. In *Arqueología Mexicana* 25 (146), pp. 82-85.

GÓMEZ, Oswaldo (2007): Proyecto Plaza de los Siete Templos de Tikal: Los edificios del sur de la plaza. In Juan Pedro Laporte, Bárbara Arroyo, Hector Mejía (eds): *XX Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala, 2006*. Guatemala: Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, pp. 492-518.

GÓMEZ CHÁVEZ, Sergio – GAZZOLA, Julie (2015): Una posible cancha de juego de pelota en el área de la Ciudadela, Teotihuacan. In Annick Daneels (ed.): *Anales de Antropología* 49-I, pp. 113-133.

GRUNEAU, Richard S. (1975): Sport, Social Differentiation, and Social Inequality. In Donald W. Ball, John W. Loy (eds.): *Sport and Social Order. Reading: Contributions to the Sociology of Sport*. Boston: Addison-Wesley.

HAMMOND, Normann (1991): The Ball Court at Nohmul, Belize. In Gerard W. van Bussel, Paul L. F. van Dongen, Ted J. J. Leyenaar (eds.): *The Mesoamerican Ballgame*. Leiden: Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, pp. 43-57.

HAMMOND, Normann – DONAGHEY, Sara – GLEASON, Colleen – STANEKO, J. C. – VAN TUERENHOU, Dirk – KOSAKOWSKY, Laura (1987): Excavations at Nohmul, Belize, 1985. In *Journal of Field Archaeology* 14 (3), pp. 257-281.

HILLS, Warren (1999): *Ballcourts, Competitive Games and the Emergence of a Complex Society*. Thesis to obtain the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Department of Anthropology and Sociology. Vancouver: The University of British Columbia.

HELMKE, Christophe – ANDRES, Christopher R. – MORTON, Shawn G. – WROBEL, Gabriel D. (2015): For Love of the Game: The Ballplayer Panels of Tipan Chen Uitz in Light of Late Classic Athletic Hegemony. In *The PARI Journal,* Vol. XVI (2), pp. 1-30.

JONES, Christopher (2015): The Marketplace at Tikal. In Eleanor M. King (ed.): *The Ancient Maya Marketplace: The Archaeology of Transient Space*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, pp. 67-89.

52

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

KIRCHHOFF, Paul (1966 [1943]): Mesoamerica: Its Geographic Limits, Ethnic Composition and Cultural Characteristics. Translated by Norman A. McQuown. In *Ancient Mesoamerica: Selected Readings*, Palo Alto: Peek Publications, pp. 1-14.

KOVÁČ, Milan (2011): Hiatus en el fin de Preclásico y retorno de los reyes, Uaxactun, Guatemala. In *Contributions in New World Archaeology* 3, pp. 49-63.

KOVÁČ, Milan – BARROIS, Ramzy (2012): El papel de Siyaj K´ahk´ en Uaxactun y el Petén Central. In Jarosław Źrałka and Wiesław Koszkul (eds.): *Contributions in New World Archaeology, vol. 4, Maya Political Relations and Strategies, Proceedings of the 14th European Maya Conference*. Krakow: Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences, Jagiellonian University, Institute of Archaeology, pp. 113-126.

KOVÁČ, Milan – BELIAEV, Dmitri – TOKOVININE, Alexandre – REGA, Maria Felicia – DÍAZ GARCÍA, Maurizio – MÉNDEZ, Diana (2019): Relevancia de las canchas de juego de pelota alrededor de Uaxactun. Una interpretación sociopolítica y epigráfica. In Bárbara Arroyo, Luis Méndez Salinas, Gloria Ajú Álvarez (eds.): *XXXII Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala*. Guatemala: Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, Instituto de Antropología e Historia pp. 693-704.

LAPORTE, Juan Pedro – CHOCÓN Jorge E. (2008): ¿Será un Palacio?... ¡No! ¿Será una Acrópolis?... ¡No!: Un conjunto de función desconcertante en el centro de Pueblito, Petén. In Juan Pedro Laporte, Bárbara Arroyo, Hector Mejía (eds.): *XXI Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala, 2007*. Guatemala: Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes, IDAEH, Asociación Tikal. pp. 696-712.

LEE, David F. – PIEHL, Jennifer C. (2014): Ritual and Remembrance at the Northwest Palace Complex, El Perú- Waka'. In Olivia C. Navarro-Farr, Michelle Rich (eds.): *Archaeology at El Perù-Waka'*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, pp. 85-101.

LEYNAAR, Ted J. J. (2001): The Modern Ballgames of Sinaloa: a Survival of the Aztec Ullamaliztli. In E. Michael Whittington (ed.): *The Sport of Life and Death: The Mesoamerican Ballgame*. New York: Thames and Hudson, pp. 122-128.

LIENDO STUARDO, Rodrigo (2015): Canchas de Juego de Pelota en la Región de Palenque, Chiapas. Representación y Política. In *Anales de Antropología*, Vol. 49-1, pp. 135-15.

LIENDO STUARDO, Rodrigo – LÓPEZ BRAVO, Roberto (2006): Organización política y funciones sociales vistas a través de los patios para el Juego de Pelota del señorío de Palenque. In Juan Pedro Laporte, Barbara Arroyo and Hector Mejía (eds.): *XIX Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala, 2005*. Guatemala: Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, pp. 431-440.

53

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

MARTIN, Simon – GRUBE, Nikolai (2008): *Chronicle of Maya Kings and Queens*. New York: Thames and Hudson.

McCLANCEY, Jeremy (1996): *Sport, Identity and Ethnicity*. Oxford: Berg Press.

MEJÍA, Héctor E. – VALLE, Gendry R. (2010): Exploraciones en el Área Central de La Puente, Dolores, y la determinación de otro conjunto de mercado en la zona. In Bárbara Arroyo, Adriana Linares, Lorena Paiz (eds.): *XXIII Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala, 2009*. Guatemala: Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, pp. 595-608.

MILLER, Mary Ellen (2001): The Maya Ballgame: Rebirth in the Court of Life and Death. In E. Michael Whittington (ed.): *The Sport of Life and Death: The Mesoamerican Ballgame*. New York: Thames and Hudson, pp. 78-87.

MILLER, Mary Ellen – HOUSTON, Stephen (1987): The Classic Maya Ballgame and Its Architectural Settings. A Study of Relations between Text and Image. In *RES* (14), pp. 47-65.

MOODIE, Stephen J. Morgan (2012): Excavations at the Minanha Ballcourt, North Vaca Plateau, Belize. Paper presented at the 77th Annual Meeting of the Society for American Archaeology (SAA), April 18-April 21, 2012. Memphis: Tennessee.

MORIARTY, Matthew D. – FOIAS, Antonia E. (2007): El juego de poder en el centro de Petén: Evidencia cerámica sobre festejos asociados al Juego de Pelota en La Trinidad de Nosotros. In Juan Pedro Laporte, Bárbara Arroyo, Hector Mejía (eds.): *XX Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala, 2006*. Guatemala: Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, pp. 1397-1415.

ORTIZ, Ponciano – RODRIGUEZ, María del Carmen – DELGADO, Alfredo – URIARTE, María Teresa (2015): Las ofrendas en El Manatí y su posible asociación con el juego de pelota: un yugo a destiempo. In Maria Teresa Uriarte (ed.): *El juego de pelota mesoamericano. Temas eternos, nuevas aproximaciones*. México: Dirección General de Publicaciones y Fomento Editorial, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, pp. 67-93.

PANQUEBA CIFUENTES, Jairzinho F. (2015): Espiritualidades mayas en los juegos de pelota de antebrazo y cadera en el siglo XXI. Pok-Ta-Pok en México, Chaaj y Chajchaay en Guatemala. In *El Futuro del Pasado* (6), pp. 159-173.

REGA, Maria Felicia (2019): Capítulo VIII. Excavaciones en los grupos satelitales – Buena Vista, Oper. 38 A. In Milan Kováč, Sandra Ventura, Dora García (eds.): *Nuevas excavaciones en Uaxactun IX. Temporada 2017*. Bratislava: Center for Mesoamerican Studies (CMS) Comenius University – Chronos, pp. 92-103.

54

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

ROBLES CASTELLANO, Fernando – ANDREWS, Anthony (2003): *Proyecto Costa Maya: Reporte interino, Temporada 2002: Reconocimiento arqueológico de la esquina noroeste de la península de Yucatan*. Mérida: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Centro INAH Yucatán.

SAHAGUN, Fray Bernardino de (1938): *Historia General de las cosas de Nueva España. Tomo II.* Mexico D.F: Editorial Pedro Robredo.

SCHELE, Linda – FREIDEL, David (1991): The Courts of Creation: Ballcourts, Ballgame and Portals to the Maya Otherworld. In Vernon L. Scarborough and David R. Wilcox (eds.): *The Mesoamerican Ballgame*. Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, pp. 289-315.

SCHELE, Linda – MILLER, Mary Ellen (1986): *The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art*. New York: George Braziller Inc.

STOLL, Marijke M. (2017): Los Juegos de Pelota y las relaciones comunitarias en Oaxaca y la Sierra Sur. In *Arqueología Mexicana* 25 (146), pp. 58-63.

STOLL, Marijke M. – ANDERSON, David S. (2017): Sport and Ritual as Social Bonding. The Communal Nature of Mesoamerican Ballgames. In Barbara Voorhies (ed.): *Prehistoric Games of North American Indians: Subarctic to Mesoamerica*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, pp. 219-234.

STUART, David (2000): The 'Arrival of Strangers': Teotihuacan and Tollan in Classic Maya History. In David Carrasco, Lindsay Jones, Scott Sessions (eds.): M*esoamerica's Classic Heritage: From Teotihuacan to the Aztecs*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, pp. 465-514.

TALADOIRE, Eric (1981): *Les terraines de Jeu de Balle. Mésoamérique et Sud-ouest des États-Unis*. Mexico: Centre of Mexican and Central American studies.

TALADOIRE, Eric. (2001): The Architectural Background of Pre-Hispanic Ballgame: an Evolutionary Perspective. In E. Michael Whittington (ed.): *The Sport of Life and Death. The Mesoamerican Ballgame*. New York: Thames and Hudson, pp. 96-115.

TALADOIRE, Eric. (2017): Los juegos de pelota en Mesoamérica. In *Arqueología Mexicana* 25 (146), pp. 27-34.

TAUBE, Karl (2017): The Ballgame, Boxing and Ritual Blood Sport in Ancient Mesoamerica. In Colin Renfrew, Iain Morley, Michael Boyd (eds): *The Ritual in the Game, the Game in the Ritual – Part III.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 264-301.

TOKOVININE, Alexandre (2005): Excavaciones en el juego de pelota en La Sufricaya (Estructuras 48 y 49). In Francisco Estrada-Belli (ed.): *Investigaciones en la región de*

55

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Maria Felicia REGA
Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame in North-East Petén, Guatemala: A Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective

Holmul, 2005. Informe preliminar de la temporada 2005. Nashville: Vanderbilt University, pp. 193-217.

TORRES, Paola (2010): Canchas como instrumentos de interacción política, económica y social en el Mundo Maya de Mesoamérica. In Bárbara Arroyo, Andrea Linares y Lorena Paiz (eds.): *XXIII Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala, 2009*. Guatemala: Museo Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, pp. 99-110.

TUNESI, Raphael (2007): A New Monument Mentioning Wamaw K'awiil of Calakmul. In *The PARI Journal* 8 (2), pp. 1-9.

VELASQUEZ GARCIA, Eric (2016): The Ballgame: confluence between the Human and the Divine. In Alejandra Martínez de Velasco Cortina, María Elena Vega Villalobos (eds.): *The Maya. Voices in Stone*. Nashville: Turner, pp. 267-280.

WITSCHEY, Walter R. T. – BROWN, Clifford, T. (2012): *Historical Dictionary of Mesoamerica*. The Scarecrow Press, Inc. Lanham. Toronto. Plymouth, UK.

ZAMORA RIVERA, Monica (2017): Los Juegos de Pelota en Cantona, Puebla. In *Arqueología Mexicana* 25 (146), pp. 46-51.

ZENDER, Marc (2004): Sport, Spectacle and Political Theater: New Views of the Classic Maya Ballgame. In *The PARI Journal* 4 (4), pp. 1-12.

ŹRAŁKA, Jarosław – HERMES, Bernanrd (2012): Great Development in Troubled Times: the Terminal Classic at the Maya site of Nakum, Petén, Guatemala. In *Ancient Mesoamerica* (23), pp. 161-187.

Maria Felicia Rega (1988) is an archaeologist and PhD candidate at Sapienza University of Rome and Comenius University in Bratislava. She gets her master's degree in 2016 with a thesis about ancient topography and urbanism of the Maya area. Her PhD project is now focused on the urban and regional distribution of ballcourts in Northeast Petén, Guatemala, especially in the Uaxactun territory, thanks to the collaboration with the Uaxactun Archaeological Project in Petén. Her previous publications include a co-authorship with Dora García, *The Decapitation Ritual and the Ancient Mayan Ballgame. From Archaeological Evidence to Sacred Stories* (2019), on the journal *Axis Mundi*, and a co-authorship with Milan Kováč, Dmitri Beliaev, Alexandre Tokovinine, Mauricio Díaz García and Diana Méndez, *Relevancia de las canchas de juego de pelota alrededor de Uaxactun. Una interpretación sociopolítica y epigráfica* (2019), in *XXXII Simposio de Investigaciones Arqueológicas en Guatemala 2018*.

The Vitality and Endangerment of the Western Shoshone Language

MIROSLAV ČERNÝ

Department of English and American Studies,
University of Ostrava, Czech Republic
miroslav.cerny@osu.cz

ABSTRACT

Shoshone, the northernmost Uto-Aztecan language, originally spoken in the area of the Great Basin (U.S.), has been frequently reported as threatened. In his paper, the author presents a vitality assessment of the Western dialect of the Shoshone language based on the methodology which stems from the *UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages*. He takes into account UNESCO´s nine factors in order to determine the degree of language vitality and endangerment for Western Shoshone and to outline strategies which might help to revitalize the language in the future.

KEY WORDS: endangered languages, UNESCO, Western Shoshone, vitality

Introduction

Shoshone is a language spoken by the Shoshone Indians, traditionally inhabiting vast semi-arid and mountain regions of Great Basin in the western section of the United States. As most native tongues in the United States and Canada, Shoshone, too, belongs among endangered languages, it struggles with the loss of active users, and as a living language code it is exposed

Miroslav ČERNÝ

The Vitality and Endangerment of the Western Shoshone Language

to uncertain future. My primary aim in the presented article[1] is to map contemporary vitality of the Shoshone language, particularly of its western dialect, taking advantage of the methodological guidelines organized by the UNESCO linguistic team.

The Shoshone: History, Location, Culture

The name *Shoshone* (also spelled *Shoshoni*) derives from the Shoshone word *sosoni´*, which is the plural form of the substantive *sonipe*, i.e. a special kind of high-growing grass (GOULD – LOETHER 2002:4). The grass was used for building huts and shelters resided by the Shoshone who were accordingly called "Grass House People" by some of the Plains tribes. The first written record of the word Shoshone appeared in 1805 in the journal of Meriwether Lewis of the Lewis and Clark Transcontinental Expedition (1804-1806) in which he described his encounter with a group of "Sosonees"[2]. Before the event and also long after that they were together with neighbouring Paiute and Bannock tribes often referred to as the Snake Indians. The Shoshone themselves prefer the term *Newe*, meaning simply "the People".

The prehistory of the Shoshone people, especially the time frame of their migration from the ancestral land to new settlements, has not been sufficiently clarified and still remains a puzzle. The linguistic analysis and the lexical reconstruction of the proto-language assumes that their ancestors, known as the *Numa*,[3] dwelt along the eastern slopes of the southern tip of Sierra Nevada in what is today California; this area shows the greatest congruence between local plant and animal species and relevant features of the reconstructed vocabulary (FOWLER 1972:105-121). From this southwestern corner of the Great Basin the mother population migrated north-east direction and step by step spanned across large territories east of the Cascade Mountains and Sierra Nevada and west of the Great Plains.

By 1500 Shoshone already populated their traditional area in what is today Nevada and Utah, they possibly reached the Idaho portion of the Columbia Plateau, and some groups may have

---

[1] The paper is based on the master´s thesis *Language and Cultural Vitality of the Shoshone Indians* (2013) written by Kateřina Kalendová and supervised by Miroslav Černý. For the purpose of the article, relevant parts have been considerably modified, re-written, and updated.

[2] See *Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition*. Available at: https://lewisandclarkjournals.unl.edu/journals.

[3] For more see Fowler – Fowler (1971).

even crossed the Rocky Mountains and started expansion to the Great Plains. At the end of the 17th century one group separated from the rest of the Shoshone population in the Plains, moved from what is today Wyoming southwards, developed their own identity, and entered the history as the Comanche. The remaining bands were gradually pushed back to the west by the Blackfeet (see SMOAK 2005:20-25). By the end of the 18th century, the only Newe who apart from the Comanche maintained their power in the Plains were the Eastern Shoshone (or People of the Wind River) in central Wyoming (cf. STAMM 1999).

The Shoshone community is, based on the geographical distribution, usually divided into three main parts: eastern, northern and western.[4] While the Eastern Shoshone domesticated horse and took over the way of life of the buffalo hunters, the Northern Shoshone culturally adapted to conditions typical for the Plateau. The Western Shoshone retained the archaic basin culture of pedestrian hunters and gatherers.

Shoshone: Genealogy, Typology, Dialectology

The Shoshone speak an Uto-Aztecan language. Apart from Shoshone, the Uto-Aztecan language family includes approximately thirty languages, which could be further divided into northern and southern. Regarding the southern branch, the most famous are Aztecan languages (Nahuatl etc.). This branch also comprises Pimic (Pima, O´odham, Tepehuan), Taracahitic (e.g. Tubar, Tarahumara or Guarijío), and Corachol languages (Cora and Huichol). The northern branch consists of the Hopi language, Tübatulabal language, Takic languages (e.g. Serrano, Cupeño or Kitanemuk) and, most importantly, Numic languages. The Numic languages split into Western (Mono, Northern Paiute), Southern (e.g. Southern Paiute, Chemehuevi, Kawaiisu), and Central (Comanche, Panamint, Shoshone).[5]

The Uto-Aztecan language family split into separate branches about 5000 years ago. Individual branches, subgroups and languages evolved relatively solo and, in consequence, they exhibit significant differences. Moreover, some languages (e.g. Ópata or Kitanemuk) have become extinct over the years. Among the most general features of the Uto-Aztecan

---

[4] Brigham Madsen divides the Shoshone population into seven parts: (1) the Eastern Shoshone, (2) the Fort Hall Shoshone, (3) the Northwestern Shoshone, (4) the Lemhi Shoshoni, (5) the Boise and Bruneau Shoshone, (6) the Gosiute, and (7) the Western Shoshone (MADSEN 1985: 3-24).

[5] For more see Campbell (1997).

languages belong polysyntheticity, incorporation, and the use of a great number of derivative prefixes and suffixes (see POKORNÝ 2010:189). The characteristic features of Shoshone are – in comparison with Czech for example – the subject-object-verb word order, the postposition of prepositions and auxiliary verbs, three grammatical cases (subjective, objective and possessive), dual number, or alternating stress pattern (CRUM et al. 2001:9-19, MILLER 1996:693-720).

Due to geographical and climatic circumstances the Shoshone population has always been scattered. As a result, Shoshone consists of several territorial dialects. Traditionally, we distinguish three main dialects: Eastern (in Wyoming), Northern (in Idaho) and Western (Utah and Nevada). The reservation policy by the end of the 19th century, nevertheless, caused partial redeployment of the population and the establishment of new communities where the original dialects mixed and/or were innovated. Therefore, the present-day dialects are sometimes defined and named after the reservation or colony where they are spoken. The Shoshone in Nevada thus use Reese River, Duckwater, Ely, Battle Mountain, Ruby Valley, Elko or Duck Valley dialects. The Shoshone in Utah speak Goshute, Skull Valley and Washakie dialects. The Shoshone in Idaho are centralized in Fort Hall reservation, so we speak of Fort Hall dialect, and the dialect of the Shoshone from Wyoming is named Wind River (MITHUN 1999:541), which is the name of the reservation the Eastern Shoshone share with the Northern Arapaho.

Dialectal differences are also reflected in various forms of orthographic record. At present there are three main spelling systems: (1) the system by Wick Miller (1972, created for the western dialect(s), (2) the system by Malinda Tidzump (1970, created for the eastern dialect), and (3) the system by Drusilla Gould and Christopher Loether (2002, for the northern dialect).

Language Diversity in Danger: An American Perspective

As already suggested, Shoshone shares the fate of many native (North) American languages whose speakers gradually lose the knowledge of their mother tongues and shift in use to dominant languages of the majority: English, French, Spanish and Portuguese. The Americas comprise the territory with the largest number of the so-called *language hotspots*,[6] referring

---

[6]   Language hotspots are areas with high genetic diversity, high levels of language endangerment, and low levels of language documentation. See https://livingtongues.org/language-hotspots/.

to places where the language diversity is under serious threat.

According to the late Michael Krauss, one third of all Native American languages (around 300 of 900) is moribund, i.e. that the languages are no longer being learned by children. The calculation shows that 50 of 300 languages (17%) in Central America (including Mexico) and 110 of 400 languages (27%) in South America are not being learned by children (KRAUSS 1992:4-10).

The most critical situation is in the United States where 155 of 175 languages (89%) have no speakers within the youngest age group. Krauss divides these languages – according to their viability – into four categories: out of the 175 languages, the smallest number belong to Category A (languages still being learned by children; 20, 11%) and Category B (languages still spoken by the parental generation; 32, 19%), whilst the largest number of indigenous languages spoken in the United States go to Category C (languages spoken only by the middle-aged or grandparental generation; 70, 40%) and Category D (languages spoken only by a few of the very oldest people; 53, 30%) (KRAUS 1996:16).[7] The situation in Canada, where 35 native languages are spoken, seems better, but it is still serious. The rapid language shift towards English (or French) is clear even among the healthiest language groups, such as the Cree.

I believe there is no need to describe in detail what triggered this dramatic language erosion, it has been clarified by others (CRYSTAL 2000; EVANS 2010; HAGÈGE 2009; HARRISON 2007; NETTLE – ROMAINE 2000). Let me just briefly remark that most endangered are often those languages whose speakers were in past exposed to genocide and/or to destruction of their natural (social, cultural, territorial) environment. Entire language communities were relocated, children taken away from their parents and assimilated through western educational system and via the influence of dominant Christian denominations. More recently, there has been a strong impact of modern media (television and the internet).

Language Vitality and Endangerment: Methodology

The above-mentioned categorization by Krauss is not the only approach to measure vitality of languages. Other two well-known and interrelated classifications are *Graded*

---

[7] It should be stressed that the data provided by Michael Krauss are twenty-five years old. The present-day situation is very likely quite different.

Miroslav ČERNÝ

The Vitality and Endangerment of the Western Shoshone Language

Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), introduced by Joshua Fishman in his publication *Reversing Language Shift* (1991), and its more complex version *Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale* (EGIDS), used by the database of the world´s languages *Ethnologue* (2019). The three language vitality assessment tools address the intergenerational transmission of the endangered languages as the most important factor. However, they overlook some other factors which are also cardinal for language maintenance.[8]

For the purpose of the present paper whose aim is to map and assess the vitality or the level of endangerment of the western dialect of the Shoshone language (spoken in Nevada and Utah), I take advantage of the UNESCO 'nine factors' system which stems from the work of leading experts on threatened languages. Unlike the three approaches introduced above, the UNESCO methodology addresses two important factors that impact on language vitality and are crucially important in the process of revitalizing any language:

1. community member´s attitudes towards their own language,

2. type and quality of documentation.

Together with these two there are seven other factors implemented in the system:

3. absolute number of speakers,

4. proportion of speakers within the total population,

5. intergenerational language transmission,

6. shifts in domains of language use,

7. governmental and institutional language policies,

8. availability of materials for language education and literacy,

9. response to new media and domains.

With the exception of Factor 3 ('Absolute number of speakers'), all the other factors are graded on a 0 to 5 scale (based on given parameters) and, at the same time, correlated with a

---

[8]   The evaluation of different tools and techniques for endangered-language assessment and revitalization is given by Arienne Dwyer in her paper presented at *Vitality and Viability of Minority Languages*, October 23-24, 2009, in New York; see https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/7109/Dwyer2011_AssessRevitalize.pdf.

particular level of endangerment.[9] The UNESCO database classifies languages into following categories: Safe (5), Vulnerable (4), Definitely Endangered (3), Severely Endangered (2), Critically Endangered (1), and Extinct (0). Since it has been frequently noted that a language can be under specific circumstances brought back to life, or resurrected, present-day linguists seem to prefer words "sleeping" or "dormant" instead of "extinct" or "dead" (cf. HINTON 2008).

Western Shoshone Vitality Assessment[10]

1. Community member´s attitudes towards their own language

Since no research mapping language attitudes of the (Western) Shoshone has been realized so far, or there is no reliable data available outside the language community, the only thing I can presently do in relation to this factor is speculate. What may be judged against the background of indirect pieces of information (such as the number of speakers, level of intergenerational transmission or quality of documentation) is that some tribal members do have positive attitudes to Shoshone and struggle to preserve the language. The attitudes of many others are, nevertheless, indifferent and they do not really care about its future. With respect to the UNESCO instruction scale, Shoshone, including its western dialect, is to be assessed as a severely endangered language (2).

2. Type and quality of documentation

Shoshone belongs among the better documented languages, which is especially true regarding its western dialect. There is a grammar book available (*Western Shoshoni Grammar*, 1993) as well as a dictionary (*Newe Natekwinnappeh. Shoshone Stories and Dictionary*, 1972). There exist collections of Shoshone poetry songs (*Newe Hupia*, 2001), appended with CD records, and also anthologies of other genres (*Shoshoni Texts*, 1997). Very rich is the corpus of Western Shoshone myths and legends, published also in commented

---

[9]   For details see http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/endangered-languages/language-vitality/.

[10]   Cf. Kalendová (2013) as the investigation and vitality assessment partially draws on the data presented in her work.

English translations (*Shoshone Tales*, 1993). Thanks to the *Shoshone Language Project* organized by the University of Utah, most of the Shoshone language material is archived in a digital form. Since the language has no representation in everyday media, it is, however, given only the grade 3 (which represents 'a definitely endangered language').

3. Absolute number of speakers

Opinions on the number of Shoshone speakers differ. According to Drusilla Gould and Christopher Loether, the Shoshone language is spoken by approximately 5000 people (GOULD – LOETHER 2002:3). Marianne Mithun states there are over 1000 Shoshone speakers (MITHUN 1999:541). The 2010 U.S. Census counted 2,211 speakers and ranked the Shoshone language the 18th in the number of speakers of American Indian languages (U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C.). However, even in this case we cannot be sure if the whole Shoshone population was addressed and whether everybody who claimed to be a speaker of Shoshone really speaks fluently or he/she knows only a limited number of phrases used in a limited number of communicative situations. It seems most likely that a half of those 2,211 consider Shoshone a mother tongue, whilst the second half speakers have only a partial knowledge and their mother tongue is English. Exact data regarding individual dialects do not exist. According to Beverly Crum et al., "there are only a few hundred people who use the [Western Shoshone] language on day-to-day basis as their first language" (CRUM et al. 2001:8).

4. Proportion of speakers within the total population

The 2010 U.S. Census states that the ethnic Shoshone population numbers 13,000. It is clear that the number of speakers of Shoshone forms a minority within the total population. Even if all 2,211 persons were recognized as native speakers, it would be mere 17%. Regarding this percentage (which can be assumed also within individual dialects) and in line with the UNESCO methodology, Shoshone is to be assessed as a severely endangered language (2).

5. Intergenerational language transmission

Based on the acquired data, the western dialect of the Shoshone language is being learned by children only in a few households (MILLER 1996:693), especially in Duck Valley and Ruby Valley Indian Reservations in Nevada and in Skull Valley Reservation in Utah. Furthermore, there is a group of teenagers who attend classes organized by the University of Utah where

they learn the language with the help of linguists and Shoshone elders. Most speakers of Shoshone are, however, older than fifty. A portion of parental generation understands Shoshone but does not speak the language. Also through the prism of this factor Shoshone should be classified as a severely endangered language (2).

6. Shifts in domains of language use

Given that Shoshone does not have a fully functional intergenerational language transmission, it is more than obvious that its use is limited only to some communication domains. Shoshone is neither a language of official education, nor a language of tribal council meetings; in both cases English is used. Apart from the everyday communication of older generations of speakers, the language is spoken exclusively during ceremonies and traditional celebrations and festivals. With respect to the factor under scrutiny, the Shoshone language is given grade 2, which in this case represents limited and formal possibilities of use.

7. Governmental and institutional language policies

The right of Native Americans (including the Shoshone) to preserve, protect, promote, practice, and develop their ancestral languages is guaranteed by *The Native American Language Acts* 1990 and 1992. Native Americans have a legitimate claim to draw federal financial support for their language revitalization projects and programs (see *Administration for Native Americans*, or *Language and Culture Preservation Program*). Nonetheless, as Jared Diamond notes, more finances are spent on the protection of one particular animal species (California Condor) than on the support of American Indian tongues altogether (2014:400). Luckily, there exist other financial sources (both private and institutional). According to UNESCO, this situation can be described as *Differentiated Support*, which classifies Shoshone as a vulnerable language (4).

8. Availability of materials for language education and literacy

The sources mentioned in Section Two ('Type and Quality of Documentation') can also be used as teaching materials. Apart from them there is a textbook entitled *Dammen Daigwape: An Introduction to the Shoshoni Language* (2002). Though primarily aimed at Northern Shoshone, it also contains information on the western dialect. Moreover, there are several children's books based on traditional Western Shoshone stories recorded by Wick Miller. Worth mentioning is *Native Voices Language Program*, organized by Reno-Sparks colony.

The program records the speech of native Western Shoshone (and also Paiute and Washo) speakers in order to sustain the language of the local people. Generally speaking, the quality of teaching materials is rather poor which reflects the fact that Shoshone is not part of school curriculum. Although much is supposed to change in this respect in future, for now this factor can be assessed only with the grade 2 ('Severely Endangered Language').

9. Response to new media and domains

In their communities Western Shoshone take advantage of several mass media. They have their own radio broadcast (www.blogtalkradio.com), information newsletters (e.g. Numa News), web pages (mj. www.wn.com/western_shoshone), facebook and printed newspapers (e.g. Te-Moak Tribal Newspaper: Shoshoni Spirit). Unfortunately, the language of the media is not Shoshone but English. The *Shoshone Youth Language Apprenticeship Program* (SYLAP) tries to inform about the importance of implementing Shoshone into new media domains, but the response is not adequate, which turns Shoshone into a critically endangered language (1).

Summary of Results and Discussion

If points in individual categories are counted (18) and divided by the number of categories (8 – 'Absolute number of speakers' is not graded), we get 2.25, rounded to 2. This result marks the place of Shoshone on the language vitality scale and represents the degree of its endangerment. As is evident, Shoshone is a severely endangered language.

The outcome deserves comment and consideration. First, it needs to be emphasized that the result does not mirror the most current state of affairs. All languages and related language behaviour of their users are under a constant process of change, which means that a description of any language situation always comes with some delay, and it in fact archives a state which has already worn off. With unstable languages – which are greatly sensitive to any social or whatever modification of conditions – it is true even more. Still, it is useful to strive to detect the language change since we can learn a lot about evolutionary tendencies in a given language community which allows us to adjust the program of revitalization.

Second, its right to admit that the chosen methodology of 'nine factors' is not perfect, as no language assessment method is perfect. Mapping language vitality and endangerment is such a complex work that the obtained data are always incomplete and fragmentary and as such

they are inaccurate and approximate, no matter which approach or classification we decide to apply. This handicap can be neutralized with a long-term fieldwork, including participant observation, which is much more effective than short-run inquiries relying on the interviews with speakers or on the questionnaire survey.

Moreover, regarding Western Shoshone we have to take into account the fact that the language community is scattered across vast territory. Unlike Eastern Shoshone and Northern Shoshone with speakers located in one reservation (Wind River – Wyoming, Fort Hall – Idaho, respectively), the community of the Western Shoshone is broken into reservations and small colonies in Utah and Nevada. In total, there are more than ten Western Shoshone locations and in some of them they live side by side with members of related ethnic groups (e.g. Northern Paiute), which can influence the form of language use. Hence the language vitality and the state of endangerment can differ colony by colony.

Conclusion

Thanks to the effort of traditionalists, language activists and field linguists Shoshone appears to be a language with future. It has been properly documented, analyzed, and archived. There are still native speakers of middle-aged or grandparental generations who could function as teachers of incoming generations. Despite that, the language of the Shoshone is severely endangered, and its stabilization will require decades of constant work. The Shoshone language community will have to care more as their language attitudes seem to be half-hearted. If the Shoshone do not immediately support intergenerational language transmission, their mother tongue will survive in an eroded form, functioning only in a limited number of domains (e.g. as a language of ritual), not as a tool of everyday communication.[11]

Experience from other Native American communities suggest that to slow down or even to stop the process of language decline, tribal members have to focus on the methods, materials, and motivation: "Methods deal with what teaching techniques will be used at what age levels and stages of language loss. Materials deal with what things will be available for teachers and learners to use, including audiotapes, videotapes, storybooks, dictionaries, grammars, textbooks, and computer software. Motivation deals with increasing the prestige and usefulness of the indigenous language in the community and using teaching methods that

---

[11]   Cf. Hinton (2013) or Shreve (2019).

learners enjoy so they will come back for more indigenous language instruction" (REYHNER 1999:xvii). Under favorable circumstances a new generation of speakers will rise who might be even willing to use Shoshone as their first language.

Bibliography

CAMPBELL, Lyle (1997): *American Indian Languages. The Historical Linguistics of Native America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

CANTONI, Gina (ed.) (1996): *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages*. Flagstaff: Northern Arizona University.

CRUM, Beverly – CRUM, Earl – DAYLEY, Jon (1993): *Western Shoshoni Grammar*. Boise: Boise State University.

CRUM, Beverly – DAYLEY, Jon (1997): *Shoshoni Texts*. Boise: Boise State University.

CRUM, Beverly – CRUM, Earl – DAYLEY, Jon (2001): *Newe Hupia. Shoshoni Poetry Songs.* Logan: Utah State University Press.

CRUM, Steven (1994): *The Road on Which We Came. A History of the Western Shoshone.* Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.

CRYSTAL, David (2000): *Language Death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

ČERNÝ, Miroslav (2013): *Poselství prachu. Mýty a legendy Šošonů.* Praha: Argo.

DIAMOND, Jared (2014): *Svět, který skončil včera. Co se můžeme naučit od tradičních společností?* Brno: Jan Melvil Publishing.

D'AZAVEDO, Warren (ed.) (1986): *Handbook of North American Indians 11. Great Basin*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution.

EBERHARD, David – SIMONS, Gary – FENNING, Charles (eds.) (2019): *Ethnologue. Languages of the World. Dallas*, Texas: SIL International.

EVANS, Nicholas (2010): *Dying Words. Endangered Languages and What They Have to Tell Us*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

FISHMAN, Joshua (1991): *Reversing Language Shift*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

FOWLER, Catherine (1972): Some Ecological Clues to Proto-Numic Homelands. In Don Fowler (ed.): *Great Basin Cultural Ecology. A Symposium*. Reno: University of Nevada, pp. 105-121.

FOWLER, Don (ed.) (1972): *Great Basin Cultural Ecology. A Symposium*. Reno: University of Nevada.

FOWLER, Don – FOWLER, Catherine (eds.) (1971): *Anthropology of the Numa. John Wesley Powell's Manuscripts on the Numic Peoples of Western North America, 1868-1880*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution.

GODDARD, Ives (ed.) (1996): *Handbook of North American Indians 17. Languages*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution.

GOULD, Drusilla – LOETHER, Christopher (2002): *An Introduction to the Shoshoni Language.* Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.

HAGÈGE, Claude (2009): *On the Death and Life of Languages*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

HARRISON, David (2007): *When Languages Die. The Extinction of the World's Languages and the Erosion of Human Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

HINTON, Leanne (2008): Sleeping Languages. Can They Be Awakened? In Leanne Hinton, Ken Hale (eds.): *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*. Bingley: Emerald, pp. 413-418.

HINTON, Leanne – HALE, Ken (2008): *The Green Book of Language Revitalization in Practice*. Bingley: Emerald.

HINTON, Leanne (2013): *Bringing Our Languages Home. Language Revitalization for Families.* Berkeley: Heyday.

KALENDOVÁ, Kateřina (2013): *Language and Cultural Vitality of the Shoshone Indians. Master´s Thesis*. Ostrava: University of Ostrava.

KRAUSS, Michael (1992): The World´s Languages in Crisis. In *Language* 68 (1), pp. 4-10.

KRAUSS, Michael (1996): *Status of Native American Language Endangerment. In Gina Cantoni (ed.): Stabilizing Indigenous Languages*. Flagstaff: Northern Arizona University, pp. 15-20.

MADSEN, Brigham (1985): *The Shoshoni Frontier and the Bear River Massacre*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.

MILLER, Wick (1972): *Newe Natekwinnappeh. Shoshone Stories and Dictionary*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.

MILLER, Wick (1996): Sketch of Shoshone, a Uto-Aztecan Language. In Ives Goddard (ed.): *Handbook of North American Indians 17. Languages*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution, pp. 693-720.

MITHUN, Marianne (1999): *The Languages of Native North America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

NETTLE, Daniel – ROMAINE, Suzanne (2000): *Vanishing Voices. The Extinction of World´s Languages.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

POKORNÝ, Jan (2010): *Lingvistická antropologie. Jazyk, mysl, kultura*. Praha: Grada.

REYHNER, John (ed.) (1997): *Teaching Indigenous Languages*. Flagstaff: Northern Arizona University.

SHREVE, Bradley (ed.) (2019): *Language Revitalization at Tribal Colleges and Universities. Overviews, Perspectives, and Profiles 1993-2018*. Mancos: Tribal College Press.

SMITH, Anne (1993): *Shoshone Tales*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press.

SMOAK, Gregory (2006): *Ghost Dances and Identity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

STAMM, Henry (1999): *People of the Wind River. The Eastern Shoshones 1825-1900*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

TIDZUMP, Malinda (1970): *Shoshone Thesaurus*. Grand Forks: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

TRENHOLM, Virginia – CARLEY, Maurine (1964): *The Shoshonis. Sentinels of the Rockies*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Miroslav Černý (1977) is a sociolinguist and linguistic anthropologist working as Associate Professor and researcher at the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Ostrava. He teaches sociolinguistics, linguistic typology, history of English, and Native American studies. His research focuses on the varieties of English, on mapping vitality of endangered languages, and on the history and culture of Amerindians. His previous publications include *Homo Loquens: Selected Chapters from Linguistic Anthropology* (2009) or *In Search of Language Horizons: Sociolinguistic Crossroads, Links, and Trajectories* (2015). He co-edited *New Chapters in Functional Syntax* (2011) and *Collected Works of Jan Firbas II, III* (2013, 2014).

Symbolism of the Eagle and Jaguar in the Novel *City of the Beasts* by Isabel Allende

ROMAN ZAŤKO

Department of Romance Studies,
Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic
roman.zatko@ff.cuni.cz

ABSTRACT

The following article is concerned with the analysis of the symbols of eagle and jaguar in the native cultures from the Amazon area, which, have inspired, among others, Chilean author Isabel Allende in her novel *City of the Beasts.*

The animal motives become an integral part of the cultural tradition of the South American indigenous tribes that the author mentions. Legends and myths that the inhabitants of the rainforest keep to this day often describe the relation between person's life and the surrounding nature. In this respect, eagle and jaguar play an important role.

From an anthropological point of view, the native peoples of the Amazon are closely tied with these animals. Their culture contains customs and rituals in which they imitate these worshipped animals. The aim of these rituals is to acquire animal hunting skills and strength.

In literature, this connection can be even stronger. There are occasionally marriages between an eagle or jaguar and human characters, who live side by side. Such connection is not possible with other animals like sloths or monkeys. The reason for this is primarily the fact that only jaguars and eagles make living in a similar fashion to human characters of native myths. They hunt like people, eat what humans do and they share the same hunting grounds and habitat.

In the novel, Isabel Allende refers to the jaguar and eagle as totem animals. They are symbols of profound connection between humans and nature. In the course of the story, the eagle and jaguar accompany the young heroes Alexander Cold and his friend Nadia on their initiation journey through the forest. At the end of the story, the young couple comes back to

the civilization to convey the message of the indigenous people of Amazon, seeking an end of the bloodshed these tribes face.

KEY WORDS: Amazonia, eagle, indigenous, Isabel Allende, jaguar, rainforest, totem animal

Introduction

Totemism, or the faith in certain natural symbols, can be observed in indigenous communities all over the world. The phenomenon manifests as a bond with specific animals, plants, and supernatural beings (totems), which these communities hold in high regard, show respect and worship through certain rituals. Totemism is also related to early basic forms of religion and social structure of the mentioned groups. Accordingly, the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss in his book *Totemism* (*Le Totémisme aujourd'hui*, 1962) points to the theory of the British scientist William Halse Rivers Rivers, who claims that the structure of these populations shows psychological, social and ritual elements that fuse and create a culture based on totemism (LÉVI-STRAUSS 2001:16-17). This religious-social principle can be observed especially in the indigenous nations of the Oceania, Africa, Australia, or America. In this study, the focus will be on the American continent where this cult can be seen even today, for example in the Amazon basin area. It is a vast region where certain indigenous communities practise rituals connecting them to the mystical realm of the surrounding nature. The main function of the rituals is to obtain magical powers and abilities of their totems that accompany the members of the particular tribe during hunting or in different phases of life of the given population.

From a literary point of view, the faith in a specific totem intensifies in indigenous Amazon myths and orality so that there are stories, which not only picture the ability of humans to acquire the features of their totems, but also establish blood ties with the animals. This enables both sides to share their lives and even produce offspring. Lévi-Stauss also captures the theory of the American anthropologist Ralph Linton, according to whom the true totemism is based on marriage rules and the belief of the origin in the totem or the blood tie with it (LÉVI-STRAUSS 2001:16).

As will be shown in the following, the animals that the indigenous American tribes worship most intensively and with which they most often come into contact in their myths include eagle and jaguar. These two species can be classified as the top predators of the American rainforests. This fact, together with the courage and strength, are attributed to these animals,

leading the indigenous tribes of the Amazon to incorporate both species to their mythology in which they become integral part of life of the literary hero. The result of these ties in the indigenous legends is the offspring of animals and humans that arrive in the world with the abilities of both human and animal parent.

In its specific form totemism appears even today in modern Hispanic American literature of the 20th and 21st centuries. There are works, which are built on the orality of the original South American nations and capture the relation between the indigenous peoples and nature with which the tribes have lived in a harmonious relation for hundreds of years. Within the traditional New World's mythology, the focus of the study will be primarily on the analysis of the legends of the Wayana tribes from North-East of Brazil and the South of French Guiana and Suriname and on the Myth of Yuruparí which comes from the area of Vaupés River in South Columbia. The study will show the influence of this oral culture on the novel *City of the Beasts* (*La Ciudad de las Bestias*)[1] written by Chilean author Isabel Allende as a part of the trilogy *Memories of the Eagle and the Jaguar* (*Las memorías del Águila y del Jaguar*) in 2002. The aim of the study makes it an important work whose composition is based on the cultural and literary tradition of the indigenous tribes of the Amazon rainforest area. The plot of the book Isabel Allende situates on the border of Brazil and Venezuela and tries to confront the indigenous way of living with the Western culture that constantly threatens and pushes the original inhabitants out of the rainforest, which is their natural environment. The conclusion of the book draws attention to the devastation of the Amazon populations whose disappearance is one of the main problems of today's Hispanic society. According to the Chilean author, a great amount of natural and cultural wealth of the continent vanishes with them and requires protection in order to preserve the diversity for future generations.

The Plot

In the plot of the novel *City of the Beasts* the Chilean author tells a story about the boy named Alexander Cold going on a journey to the Amazon rainforest with his grandmother Kate Cold, a reporter in the magazine *International Geographic*. They are part of an expedition that seeks a mythical being, "creature", whose existence is shrouded in rumour around the

---

[1]   For the purpose of this article we used English translation ALLENDE, Isabel (2002): *City of the Beasts,* New York: HarperCollins.

Amazon River. The creature is only occasionally claimed to be seen and the main goal of the expedition is to verify the rumours. Other characters take part in the expedition too, for example doctor Omayra Torres, or Ludovic Leblanc, a known French anthropologist, or their guide César Santos and his 12-year-old daughter Nadia.

Nevertheless, their journey through the American inland does not go seamlessly. After entering the rainforest, Nadia and Alexander are abducted by the indigenous tribe called "People of the Mist" (*La gente de la neblina*) who bring them inside the Table Mountain called "World's Eye". It is a mystical place where the young people meet supernatural beings and miraculous items symbolising the ancient past when the existence of such creatures and principles of the magical world was still possible. It is also the place of dwelling of the rumoured creature, or as we find out later, a couple of them, whose purpose is the protection of the ancient indigenous cultures together with the legendary city of El Dorado that is also inside of the Table Mountain.

Isabel Allende uses the supernatural scenes to explain the habits and rituals of the People of the Mist and to reveal the world of the pre-Columbian Amazon cultures to the reader in general. After leaving the mountain, Alexander and Nadia come back to the profane world to stand up to the adversaries of the Amazon and its inhabitants in order to try saving this precious area. They discover that doctor Omayra Torres wants to spread a contagious disease among the indigenous people under the cover of vaccination and together with her accomplices they want to take hold of the natural wealth contained in the forests. In the end, they fail. Alexander, Nadia, and other members of the expedition reveal the truth and with the help of the People of the Mist and the mythical creatures, they face the enemy to avert the danger that was posed to them and the whole of Amazon. In the end of the novel, the author further ponders over the future and possible ways of saving this part of world.

City of the Beast within the Framework of Rainforest Novels

When we look at the composition of *City of the Beasts*, we find that it is a hybrid work whose structure matches several types of the novel genre.

Such hybrid literary text was created in the American Hispanic literature as early as the 19th century when the Argentinian writer Domingo Faustino Sarmiento published his essay: *Facundo. Civilization and Barbarism* (*Facundo. Civilización y barbarie*, 1845). It is a mixture of novel and essay form that highlights the basic dichotomies which are later elaborated in South America: civilization/barbarism, modernity/tradition, city/countryside.

Roman ZAŤKO

Symbolism of the Eagle and Jaguar in the Novel *City of the Beasts* by Isabel Allende

Bearing in mind the concept of a literary hybrid, we can see that *City of the Beasts* fulfils, for example, the characteristics of the fantasy literary genre. A feature of the fantasy genre is the magical world containing monsters who live in the mythical city in the middle of Table Mountain – *"Tepui"*, that can be accessed through a secret entrance in the rocks. We also find that the purpose of the monsters is to protect the ancient world of the indigenous people of the Amazon, their culture, and primarily their oral tradition. These creatures have an excellent memory and are capable of remembering all the stories told by the natives.

However, *City of the Beasts* also contains the features of a romantic adventure novel in a forest setting. Other American Hispanic works also have similar structure. For example, novel *The Vortex* (*La vorágine*, 1924) by a Columbian writer José Eustasio Rivera who, according to the essayist Óscar Collazos, fulfils the norm of an adventurous syuzhet – we can find the element of escape of the main hero, Arturo Cova and his lover Alicia, who run from the city of Bogotá. Then, we find the moment of separation when Alicia, wooed by the rubber collectors of the Amazon forests, leaves Arturo. In the end, there is the part of reunion – Arturo finds his love and they continue their journey through the forest (COLLAZOS 1971:191).

In *City of the Beasts*, we can see a similar scheme. At the beginning, there is the element of journey – Alexander and his grandmother Kate Cold set off from New York to the Amazon basin. Further, we find the moment of separation when Nadia and Alexander are abducted by the native tribe "People of the Mist". Finally, we find the moment of reunion when the two meet the rest of their expedition to act with joint forces and save the fragile world of South American natives and their environment.

Nevertheless, the novel of the Chilean author also shows one more structure of the so-called "initiation novel of the forest". This type of text had appeared mainly at the beginning of the 20th century with works like Rivera's *The Vortex* or *The Lost Steps* (*Los pasos perdidos*, 1953) by the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier. The backbone of these novels is a hero who enters the Amazon forests where he encounters a completely different world than the one he knew before. He finds a powerful nature and discovers new values that change his thinking and his awareness of the world. Despite the harsh natural conditions, in the novel *The Vortex,* Arturo Cova wishes to stay with Alicia even for a little while in the unspoiled world of South American plains and after the entrance to the hostile forest he even finds fulfilment as a writer after keeping the notes of his journey. In the *The Lost Steps,* the literary anthropologist whose name we do not know, sets off to the upper flow of the Orinoco River to find a new world of ancient cultures that recedes from the contemporary one time-wise and space-wise. In the middle of the forest, he finds inspiration and starts composing his musical masterpiece.

However, both novels end tragically. In *The Lost Steps,* the main hero is forced to come back to civilization where nothing makes sense as it did before his departure to the wilderness. Later, when the hero decides to come back to the place amidst the untouched nature where he was sincerely content, he cannot find the carved mark in a tree that was supposed to lead him there so he is left imprisoned between the two places: between the ancient world of the indigenous inhabitants of the forest and the current world from which he is thus not able to escape.

In *The Vortex*, the main character Arturo Cova gets deep in the Amazon rainforest where he and the rest of his expedition eventually end up being devoured by the nature and they are not heard of since. The book ends with a symbolically concluding sentence: *"The forest devoured them"* (RIVERA 1998:385).

The frequent conflict between the literary character and the mighty nature that takes place in the so called rainforest novels is another constitutive element of this novel subgenre of the 20th century Hispanic literature. The Uruguay essayist Fernando Aínsa in his book *From Topos to Logos, Geo-Poetic Proposals* (*Del topos al logos. Propuestas de geopoética*, 2006) points to the fact that texts of this period depict a clash between literary characters and the untamed nature against which the hero leads an uneven fight that he is eventually unable to win. A "stranger" entering the forest is dominated by an uncontrollable power that lures him deeper into its centre where he is forced to battle with the hostile environment, wild animals, and natural phenomena that gradually take over and overwhelm him. Literary characters feel increasingly lost in the forest; they always wander in circles through the alien landscape until they succumb to the 'green hell'. Novels that could be included in this genre are works such as *Canaima* (1935) from the Venezualan novelist Rómulo Gallegos, *Green House* (*La Casa Verde*, 1966) from Peruvian author Mario Vergas Llosa, or *Maladrón* (1969) written by Guatemalan author Miguel Ángel Asturias (AÍNSA 2006:52-53).

This kind of hostile picture of New World's nature in the 20th century literary works is in sharp contrast with the texts written in the earlier periods, beginning with the discovery of America and lasting until the 19th century. During this period, authors captured nature that is close to humans, friendly and gentle. The main reason for such a depiction stems from the European literary tradition that is, after the discovery of America, transmitted to the new continent where the American authors apply it in their works (AÍNSA 2006:56).

Literary scholar Anna Housková, in her essay *Vision of Hispanic America* (*Visión de Hispanoamérica. Paisaje, utopia, quijotismo en el ensayo y en la novella*, 2010), notices that the ultimate origin of this interpretation of nature in European literature has its roots in the Greek motif of beautiful valley Tempé (HOUSKOVÁ 2010:55), which is situated in central

Greece and served as an inspiration for the ancient authors. Aínsa adds that it is primarily the European works of Greco-Roman tradition and Renaissance texts that inspired the South American authors to write their books. In the classical literature of the Old Continent, it is for example Virgil's Eclogues and Georgics describing the idyllic shepherd life in the countryside. Later in the modern age, Aínsa mentions pastoral novels that appear in Europe mainly in the 16th century. Some of these works are, for example, *Arcadia* (1504) from the Italian humanist Jacopo Sannazaro, or *La Galatea* (1585) from the renowned Spanish writer Miguel de Cervantes y Saavedra.

With the European influence, works with idealised vision of American nature arise on the New Continent for more than four hundred years among which are the pastoral novel *Century of Gold in the Forests of Erífile* (*Siglo de oro en las selvas de Erífile*, 1608), that was written by the Mexican poet of Spanish origin Bernardo de Balbuena, or *Rusticatio Mexicana* (1781) written in Latin by Rafael Landívar from Guatemala.

The vision of friendly and gentle nature in Hispanic literature had its successors in the 19th century, during the age of Romantism, when for example the novel *Cumandá* (1879) is written by the Ecuadorian writer Juan León Mera (AÍNSA 2006:56).

Only at the beginning of the 20th century this outlook changes as indicated above when America with the acquired independence and a new way of thinking leaves its colonial past and texts capturing the new vision of the continent start arising. Under the influence of American regionalism, the depiction of nature in literature changes and writers stress the mighty and untamed force that gets into a direct conflict with the hero of a text.

In the second half of the 20th century, however, this sharp conflict mitigates. A new tradition arises in which the writers begin to realise the importance of the natural wealth of the rainforests and the cultural significance of its inhabitants for the identity of the American continent.

This ecological-cultural legacy was elaborated, for example, in the novel *The Storyteller* (*El hablador*, 1987) by Vargas Llosa, or *The Old Man Who Read Love Stories* (*El viejo que leía novelas de amor*, 1989) written by Isabel Allende's fellow countryman Luis Sepúlveda.

Analysis of the Novel

In the novel *City of the Beasts*, the Chilean author strives for a continuity of the two concepts: ecological-cultural meaning of the rainforest environment together with the features that

define the subgenre of the first half of the 20th century. She describes nature as a mighty force again, capable of overwhelming anyone who intends to infiltrate it and she tries to combine this aspect with the passages in which she stresses the cultural wealth and the fragility of the forest environment and its original inhabitants. Analogous to Rivera's or Carpentier's work, there are features of the initiation novel when the main hero feels consonance with the new environment upon entering the forest that changes him and reinvents him from inside.

When, in the *City of the Beasts*, the young Alexander Cold enters the rainforest, like Arturo Cova of *The Vortex* or the hero from *The Lost Steps*, he feels a certain power of the stately nature that affects him deeply. Under its influence, the boy starts to be aware of himself and the fact that he is not the same. He notices that he is more mature and able to perceive his surroundings on a considerably deeper level than before. Everything is brought to another level:

"Alex had been sitting for more than an hour, bored, gazing at the night and the reflections on the water, watching over the sleep of his companions, thinking about how much he had changed in a few days. Now he could sit quietly for a long time, in silence, concentrating on his thoughts, forgetting his video games, his bicycle, and television. He discovered he could transport himself to that private place of stillness and silence that he had to reach when he climbed mountains. His father's first lesson in climbing had been that when you are tense or anxious or hurrying, you lose half your strength. It takes calm to conquer a mountain" (ALLENDE 2002:84).

Another important moment of the boy's initiation process happens when Alexander sees a live jaguar in the forest for the first time. From the initial moment he feels strength which permeates and binds him with the wild animal:

"Everything faded away. […] *He saw the cat open its jaws, he saw the gleam of its enormous pearl-white teeth, and in a human voice, but one that seemed to issue from the depths of a cavern, it spoke his name: Alexander. And he answered in his own voice, but it, too, sounded cavernous: Jaguar. The cat and its counterpart repeated those words three times: Alexander, Jaguar; Alexander, Jaguar; Alexander, Jaguar"* (ALLENDE 2002:61).

Immediately, he confesses to Nadia and describes to her how he felt something strange when he was looking at the jaguar. She reacts with the following:

"The jaguar recognized you because it is your totemic animal. […] *We all have an animal spirit that accompanies us. It is like our soul. We don't all find our animal; usually it's only great warriors and shamans who do, but you discovered yours without looking. Your name is Jaguar"* (ALLENDE 2002:63).

This connection between the young hero and his totem animal culminates in the twelfth chapter during the ritual following the death of the great indigenous leader Mokarita, the chief of the People of the Mist tribe, when the powerful wizard Walimai arrives and serves everyone with a potion. The effect of the potion was to make everyone look in the depths of their soul. After consuming the potion, Alexander felt:

"...his limbs grow longer, and burning heat spread inside him. […] *He was transformed into a large, black, sleek cat, the magnificent male jaguar he had seen in the courtyard of Mauro Carías. The animal was not in him, or he in it; the two of them had blended into a single being, simultaneously animal and youth. Alex took a few steps, stretching, and testing his muscles, and realized that he was endowed with the lightness, the speed, and the strength of the jaguar. He made a few great leaps through the forest, possessed with supernatural energy.* […] *He knew he was powerful, feared, solitary, invincible, the king of the South American jungle. No other animal was as fierce as he was"* (ALLENDE 2002:128).

At this point, Nadia has similar feelings to Alexander's. After she drinks the offered beverage, she feels herself flying up to the skies and suddenly senses the strength of her own totem animal – the eagle:

"Nadia soared upward and in a few instants' time lost the fear of heights that had always plagued her. Her powerful eagle wings barely stroked; the cold air held her and the slightest movement was enough to change the direction or speed of her course. […] *Borne by the wind, the eagle was as invincible as the jaguar was on land: nothing could reach her.* […] *She knew that she was the protector of these Indians, the mother-eagle of the People of the Mist"* (ALLENDE 2002:129).

The initiation journey of the two heroes peaks when the powerful shaman Walimai dispatches them on a quest for relics that Alexander and Nadia were supposed to bring – three big crystals (diamonds) and the water of life.

While Alexander descends for the sacred water into the depths of Table Mountain, Nadia leaves for her search of the diamonds and begins an ascend on the top of the mountain. These are further schemes of the initiation novel.

First, there is Alexander who, to attain his goal – to find the spring of the water of life, has to enter the underground of the mountain through a narrow passage that he barely crosses. According to Czech essayist Daniela Hodrová, *"the topos of entry plays a key role in all initiation rituals.* […] *It signalises a boundary, a beginning, a change. Many rites of transition (initiation trials, triumph arrivals) arise around this topos"* (HODROVÁ 1994:110).

There is also a big challenge for Alexander at this moment. After walking into the fairy land of the mountain's underground, he enters the chamber with the sacred water's spring. However, he must face a mighty foe, a gigantic white bat that threatens him. Alex, knowing that any escape from his adversary would be vain, intuitively pulls out the flute that he acquired from his grandfather and starts playing.

„The enormous vampire, extraordinarily sensitive to sounds, tucked in its wings and seemed to shrink in size" (ALLENDE 2002:176).

In the following moment, the bat retreats and Alex finds his objective: *"When the animal moved, Alex saw a tiny thread of water trickling down the wall of the cavern, and he knew he had come to the end of the trail"* (ALLENDE 2002:176). There is one more obstacle. As Alexander prepares to gather the sacred water into the gourd that he has with him, he finds out that the spring dried up. In the first moments of incertitude, he recalls the words of the powerful shaman Walimai: *"to give the equivalent of what you received"* (ALLENDE 2002:177). Alexander then understands that to bring the sacred water, he must dispense the most precious item he has. It is his grandfather's flute. That is why he offers his instrument to the mountain. Immediately, the spring starts flowing again and the boy can scoop up a little of the miraculous water to heal his sick mother.

Second, Nadia begins her journey by ascending to the top of the Tepui where there are three crystal eggs. They are three diamonds that would save the world of South American forests and their inhabitants.

Ascending, like descending, can be understood as a part of the initiation process. According to Hodrová *"a mountain being a vertical dominant in the landscape (or in the world) is a symbol of a meeting point in the world; it is a place where the sky meets the earth; it is the dwelling of gods and the aim of human spiritual ascend"* (HODROVÁ 1994:62).

During her climb, Nadia feels again the power of eagle whose ghost accompanies her:

"When she reached the balcony, she realized that the stairs ended there. [...] She breathed in with all her strength so clean air would fill her lungs and travel through her body to the tips of her fingers and toes. [...] She felt her soft and curly hair changing into strong feathers that lay flat against her skull but that bristled when she willed, feathers that contained everything eagles know, antennae that perceived anything in the air, even the invisible. Her body lost its muscled flexibility and in exchange acquired an airiness so absolute that she could lift up from the earth and float with the stars. She experienced a tremendous sense of power, with all the eagle's strength flowing in her blood. She felt that strength penetrating her cells, her

whole awareness. "I am Eagle!" she cried aloud, and opened her eyes" (ALLENDE 2002:164).

Like Alexander, she also faces the last test of her inner maturity. After she reaches the objects of her task, she is forced to abandon a valuable thing as well. In her case, it is the amulet that the powerful shaman Walimai gave her: *"As she bent over, she felt the talisman on her chest and realized in a flash that this was the price she would have to pay for the eggs"* (ALLENDE 2002:168).

After leaving it, Nadia descends with the diamonds from the sacred mountain and comes back to the valley where she meets Walimai and Alexander.

When we look at the depiction of the natives in *City of the Beasts*, we could claim that Isabel Allende thoroughly studied their customs and their way of life which she attempts to describe very accurately. In the book *Isabel Allende's Magical Realism* (*Magický realizmus Isabel Allendovej*) the Slovakian literary scholar Magda Kučerková points to the fact that the Chilean author is in this sense associated with the writers at the turn of the 20th and 21st century, when the literature reaches original artistic understanding of the indigenous cultures, that Isabel Allende includes in her magical realism poetics (KUČERKOVÁ 2011:48). We find many native customs in the novel that the Hispanic South American author incorporates in the plot. This concerns different ceremonies, sacred musical instruments, or various customs that are part of the everyday life of the Amazon nations. In addition, there are totemic animals like eagle or jaguar. Due to their strength, agility and hunting abilities, they are worshipped by virtually all the civilisations on the American continent.

According to British anthropologist Nicholas J. Saunders, jaguar, for instance, is often thought to be an ambiguous symbol that represents sun and life, but also hell and death. It is caused by his ability to hunt during both day and night and also because of the indigenous belief that jaguars raise their cubs in caves.

From an anthropological perspective, natives identify themselves with jaguar to such an extent that they try imitating its appearance. In his book *Animal Spirits* (1995)*,* Saunders mentions an example of this phenomenon – the indigenous Peruvian tribe Matsés whose people believe that humans gain strength and hunting abilities when they acquire the countenance of jaguar. That is why the adults of this tribe tattoo their faces so that it resembles jaguar's mouth (SAUNDERS 1996:66-67).

However, old literary texts of the native pre-Columbian cultures of the Amazon area show us even closer relation between the native inhabitants and some animals like jaguar or eagle.

The Legend of Yuruparí, originating in the North East Amazon, captures a story about the cultural hero Yuruparí, who brings new laws and rituals into the life of indigenous communities in the Vaupés area. It is a work whose different variants were collected and written down in the Ñe'engatú language by the indigenous inhabitant Maximiliano José Roberto at the end of the 19th century and in 1890, it was translated to Italian and published in Rome by Italian anthropologist and adventurer Ermanno Stradelli. In the myth that belongs to one of the most important literary works from the pre-Columbian era, Yuruparí tells short stories about the origin of names for things. Apart from others, he mentions musical instruments that the indigenous people use during their ceremonies and festivals. One of the flutes is named by jaguar which is a sacred animal with an important status in the respective cultures. In the legend, Yuruparí describes the instrument as the following: *"That, which is long as my legs, is called vasmeserené, jaguar, because it is the only animal that resembles man in terms of courage and women by its dodges"* (ROBERTO 2003:68).

The legend mentions jaguar in this regard only once in this place, however, its presence is crucial. What it represents is a link between jaguar and the native people that identify themselves directly with the predator. From all the animals, jaguar is the closest to them. At the same time, the connection between humans and jaguar also lies in the background of sacred rituals that stress the spiritual importance of their union.

Further in this respect we can cite the Chilean author Edmundo Magaña who in his book *Literatures of the Indigenous Tribes of the Amazon* (*Literaturas de los pueblos del Amazonas*, 1992) describes the close relationship of the indigenous people of Wayna tribe with eagle and jaguar. In the myths of the tribe, both predators are associated with human characters to the degree that they can establish blood ties or produce offspring (Magaña 1992:195-196).

In the case of jaguar, we can see this connection, for example, in the legend that Magaña labels under the number M42. This myth tells a story about a man who becomes sick and his wife asks jaguar to heal him: *"My husband is ill. I want you to conjure shaman spells on him"* (MAGAÑA 1992:192). He removes an aching tooth from his mouth and the man rewards him with one of his daughters to marry. One day she gives birth to a baby that later turns into a jaguar. However, after jaguar's son eats another child, he must leave the village together with his mother: *"I will not come back. I will stay in the forest"* (MAGAÑA 1992:192).

The situation in Wayan mythology is similar in the case of eagle. Magaña presents its cohabitation with people in the text M39, which is based on the myths with hunting theme. It tells a story about the fate of a man married to a monkey which turns into a woman. Once

the couple went to a celebration in the jungle with the wife's family present. The wife asked her husband not to laugh at her family – monkeys. However, when he sees the comic way in which they move and dance, he breaks his vow and starts laughing. As a punishment, his wife turns back into a monkey and abandons him at a high tree that he cannot climb down. The man is eventually saved by the eagle Harpia (a kind of forest eagle). Harpia gives him a bow and arrows to avenge himself: *"Later, arriving at the dwelling place of the monkeys, the man strikes an arrow and kills the one which used to be his wife. [...] Then he resumes living with the eagle Harpia"* (MAGAÑA 1992:191).

In the given instances we can see that the relationship between jaguar or eagle and human in the indigenous legends is possible, while with other animals like monkeys, it is not. Magaña sees the reason for this in the indigenous understanding of nature and the distinction of different species. What we find is the so-called hunted animals like monkeys or sloths for example. Then, we have the hunters that include the eagle and jaguar, which are animals that, in the native mythology, stand on the same level as humans – they hunt like them, they share hunting territory and also the hunted animals. This is the reason why kinship between humans and these creatures, that can lead mutual social life with the indigenous people, is possible (MAGAÑA 1992:196).

Monkeys cannot attain human level because they do not belong to the group of hunters but to the hunted animals. Based on this, the marriage in the legend M39 breaks up. The man finally kills the monkey and ends up living with Harpia.

The group of hunting animals whom Edmundo Magaña considers in his analyses could also include other creatures that become part of the indigenous mythology in Latin America. This concerns, for example, anaconda that belongs, together with jaguar and eagle, to the most emblematic animals of the South American forest. In the rest of the world, it could concern sharks, crocodiles, or spiders that are part of different superstitions and myths on other continents. Their symbolism is certainly worth its own analysis.

The lack of solid boundary between the world of the literary characters and the world of animals in the analysed myths in the previous chapter, be it the hunting or the hunted animals, is related to the overall mythology of the South American indigenous cultures. Their understanding of the world differs significantly from the Western thinking and that of the industrially based nations.

Whether we speak about the original high cultures or the Amazon tribes, in both cases the mythical and spiritual world merges with the material world. Life and death, present and past,

the world of the living and the dead…, each dichotomy is related, and all these dimensions communicate with one other in the literary works.

The Peruvian writer and literary critic José Miguel Oviedo in his *History of Hispanic American Literature 3. Postmodernism, Avant-garde, Regionalism* (*Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana 3. Postmodernismo, Vanguardia, Regionalismo*, 2001) in this relation points to the fact that the mythological base of the high cultures such as the Mayas is a *"fantastic, exuberant labyrinth world, utterly baroque, dynamic and time-wise undefinable in which the limit between the real and imaginary does not exist"* (OVIEDO 2001:496).

The situation is analogue with the Amazon tribes. The Czech historian and ethnologist Oldřich Kašpar in his study *Texts of the Native Ibero-America II. The Orality of the Indigenous peoples of South America* (*Texty nativní Iberoameriky II. Slovesnost Indiánů Jižní Ameriky*, 1982) remarks that:

"The most characteristic feature of the primitive myths is the fact that there is no distinction between human and the surrounding nature. People, plants and animals, celestial bodies, mythical heroes, and deities, they all behave in a way that is usual with the particular tribe. Because the original tribes do not have any true knowledge about the physical and psychological relations of the things and beings outside of themselves, they judge them according to their own ideas and feelings. That is why they can ascribe human features and feelings even to inanimate objects. Because of this, their myths feature objects and tools, plants and animals, celestial objects etc. that think and talk like humans" (KAŠPAR1982:7).

After the disappearance of this would-be boundary between the world of the hero and the world of nature that surrounds the literary character, the personification of animals in the American indigenous myths becomes natural. The relation with eagle and jaguar is subject to different rules, that can seem strange for the urban or European reader; it is, however, an ordinary state of affairs for the indigenous people of South America.

Coming back to the novel *City of Beasts* and comparing it with the analysed myths of the indigenous Wayana people, we can see that Allende does not fully elaborate on the question of totemism in the sense of Linton's theory where there is not only a spiritual but also a physical connection between the literary character and the worshipped being. However, the relation of the bearer of the animal features and his totem is evident in the writing of the Chilean author. In the novel, it is primarily Alexander, and partly even Nadia, that finds the new vision of the world, different from the one that he used to know. In the forest, both discover their totem animals and acquire abilities that they use in moments of hardship during their voyage.

Roman ZAŤKO

Symbolism of the Eagle and Jaguar in the Novel *City of the Beasts* by Isabel Allende

After connecting spiritually with eagle and jaguar, they experience a deep inner transformation and they become different and more mature. They can observe their surrounding with the eyes of the forest beings and react more adequately to the obstacles that they face. At the same time, they become the main characters in the composition of the work and their actions and decisions influence the plot of the whole novel. Based on their new personal experience, they can turn the course of the storyline on their side and with the help of other characters as Alexander's grandmother Kate Cold or the anthropologist Ludovic Leblanc they face the enemies of the indigenous tribe People of the Mist and of the tropical rainforests in which this community dwells.

The book ends with Alexander and Nadia's promise that the fight for the exceptional area will continue. At the same time both young people realise that the fight they started is going to be long and uneasy.

This attitude towards the given issue is also shared by the author of the novel who, through the medium of her book, expresses commitment to lead a discussion about the topic in the future. She thus groups herself with the authors such as Vargas Llosa or Sepúlveda, who started dealing with the question in the 20th century and with them the Chilean author wants to continue the effort that aims to bring the cultural and natural wealth of their continent closer to the readers of the whole world.

Conclusion

The expression "indigenous tradition" that was used often in the study is undoubtedly the basic notion that led Isabel Allende to write her novel. After scrutinizing totemism, the main indigenous feature in the *City of Beasts*, it can be concluded that this kind of world understanding permeates all the time and space components of the text and becomes one of the most important indicators of a rich oral literary tradition of the Amazon area. Allende's choice of this element is not random. As it was presented, totemism as a socio-cultural arrangement of the particular community that worships different natural processes, is a phenomenon with an ancient tradition that can be observed until today in the rainforests of South America.

Eagle and jaguar in this vision of world belong to supreme predators that people look up to and towards which they feel deep awe. The animals become life companions to the indigenous people and share their dwellings and lives.

Roman ZAŤKO

Symbolism of the Eagle and Jaguar in the Novel *City of the Beasts* by Isabel Allende

In the *City of Beasts*, the predators accompany Alexander and Nadia, the main characters of the novel, whom they give the inner strength and courage.

From a thematic point of view, Allende managed to aptly incorporate the whole phenomenon of totemism in her book that in many respects follows the trends that began in the 20th century in the Hispanic American literature. Within this trend, her book can be grouped with the so-called novels of the forest.

However, Isabel Allende does not merely depict the elements typical for the subgenre; hostile nature, initiation process, etc. From the composition point of view she uses magical elements like supernatural beings, mystical places (city of El Dorado) that are also extant in the text. From the structural point of view, she creates a hybrid work that borders the genres of a fairy tale and a fantasy, where the supernatural becomes the reality. This technique makes the topos of the forest, its inhabitants, and particularly their unique identity stand out.

How long the admirable and complex world of the indigenous cultures, that the Chilean author enriches with her own fantasy, lasts is not clear. As the book explains, the indigenous communities are forced to face the increasingly frequent plunder of their environment by the different timber and mining companies that selfishly exploit the mineral commodities and natural wealth and they disregard other people's interests. This practice eventually leads not only to the disappearance of forests, but also of the indigenous culture and its orality. If no steps are undertaken, one day it will be lost.

Biliography

AÍNSA, Fernando (2006): *Del topos al logos. Propuestas de geopoética.* Madrid-Frankfurt: Iberoamericana – Vervuert.

ALLENDE, Isabel (2002): *City of the Beasts.* New York: HarperCollins.

CARPENTIER, Alejo (2002): *Los pasos perdidos.* Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

COLLAZOS, Óscar (1971): La otra violencia. In Trinidad Pérez (ed.): *Recopilación de textos sobre tres novelas ejemplares*. La Habana: Casa de las Américas, pp. 186-210.

HODROVÁ, Daniela (1994): *Místa s tajemstvím.* Praha: Koniasch Latin Press.

HOUSKOVÁ, Anna (2010): *Visión de Hispanoamérica. Paisaje, utopia, quijotismo en el ensayo y en la novela.* Praha: Karolinum.

Roman ZAŤKO

Symbolism of the Eagle and Jaguar in the Novel *City of the Beasts* by Isabel Allende

KAŠPAR, Oldřich (1982): *Texty nativní Iberoameriky II. Slovesnost Indiánů Jižní Ameriky.* Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství.

KUČERKOVÁ, Magda (2011): *Magický realizmus Isabel Allendovej.* Bratislava: Ústav svetovej literatúry.

LÉVI-STRAUSS, Claude (2001): *Totemismus dnes.* Praha: Dauphin.

LIDMILOVÁ, Pavla (1995): *PRONOMINARE. Mýty a legendy brazilských Indiánů.* Liberec: Dauphin.

MAGAÑA, Edmundo (1992): *Literaturas de los pueblos del Amazonas.* Madrid: Mapfre.

MORALES, Leónidas (1971): Un viaje al país de los muertos. In Trinidad Pérez (ed.): *Recopilación de textos sobre tres novelas ejemplares,* La Habana: Casa de las Américas, pp. 164-185.

OVIEDO, José Miguel (2001): *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana 3. Postmodernismo, Vanguardia, Regionalismo.* Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

OVIEDO, José Miguel (2001): *Historia de la literatura hispanoamericana 4. De Borges al presente.* Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

RIVERA, José Eustasio (1998): *La vorágine.* Madrid: Cátedra.

ROBERTO, Maximiliano José (2003): *Legenda o Juruparym.* Praha: Dauphin.

SARMIENTO, Domingo Faustino (1997): *Facundo. Civilización y barbarie.* Madrid: Cátedra.

SAUNDERS, Nicholas J. (1996): *Mytická síla zvířat.* Praha: Knižní klub; Práh.

SEPÚLVEDA, Luis (2005): *El viejo que leía novelas de amor.* Barcelona: Tusquets.

TODOROV, Tzvetan (2010): *Úvod do fantastické literatury.* Praha: Karolinum.

VARGAS LLOSA, Mario (1993): *El hablador.* Barcelona: Seix Barral.

ZÍBRT, Čeněk (1960): *Jak a kdy se v Čechách tancovalo.* Praha: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury.

Roman ZAŤKO

Symbolism of the Eagle and Jaguar in the Novel *City of the Beasts* by Isabel Allende

Roman Zaťko is an Affiliated Professor in the Department of Romance Studies at the Charles University in Prague, specialized in the literary anthropology and theory of literature. His research focuses on the verbal art of Amazon native peoples from South America and the influence of the pre-Columbian oral culture on the contemporary Hispanic-American literature. In this respect there are different traditional myths and legends in the Amazon region, whose thematic and formal aspects we can see reflected in writings of the 20th and 21st century. This is the case, for example, of the subgenres of the novel with rainforest and indigenous themes.

sciendo

Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

HUBERT WIERCIŃSKI - NATALIA SADOWSKA - MAŁGORZATA PONIATOWSKA

Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology,
University of Warsaw, Poland
*hubertwier@gmail.com, natalia.sadowska@onet.eu,
m.poniatowska@student.uw.edu.pl*

ABSTRACT

In this article we analyse local community-based concepts and practices related to establishing a new middle-class identity when under social and "environmental" pressure. We based our ethnographic inquiry in "RA" – a Warsaw suburb – well-known as a former village but now a location for industry and waste-processing plants. Its vicinity, despite being populated, is polluted by heavy traffic, noise and an unpleasant odour, all of which recently have become the stimulus for social mobilisation and intense criticism toward the local authorities and an inconsiderate urbanisation policy. A key role here is played by two organisations, both exerting a strong influence on the new middle/creative class living in gated communities – a novel phenomenon for the local sociocultural landscape. We argue that this activism and struggle for a clean environment is rooted in the post-1989 Polish politico-economic transformation and the emergence of new middle-class identity projects. Thus, we reveal that sustainable urbanisation and "green policies" in Poland are embedded in middle-class identities, and gain momentum especially when class identity and image are under threat.

KEY WORDS: ecology, identification, middle-class, social divisions, urbanit

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

Introduction

Recently in Poland, discussion about the state of the environment has gained momentum. It is no longer a secret that the air quality in most Polish cities is some of the worst in the EU. But air is not Poland's sole Achilles heel. Although the state has undertaken much effort to better organise waste collection and processing, there are still many unsolved issues, namely litter and fly-tipping in forests, inefficient recycling, or the common practice of burning waste in private heating stoves. Thus, in 2013[1] a new "Act on waste" policy came into force. Since then, the local authorities are responsible for waste collecting and policy – their task is to protect the environment from waste-generated degradation and promote green behaviour.

Despite the general goals of the reform being laudable, its actual impact on some local communities and waste processing plants was only revealed later when the new waste policy was already in operation. Currently, the Polish waste policy and resulting actions are a complex maze of regulations and blurry relations between local governments and private or municipal waste companies, raising concern amongst social movements and independent organisations that focus on the environment and sustainable development. Surprisingly, this subject matter still has not attracted sufficient attention, leaving many socially important issues, like the impact of new waste policies on local communities, virtually unknown.

In this article we present the results of ethnographic research conducted in RA[2], a Warsaw industrial suburb until recently dwarfed by one of the biggest waste companies operating in the Mazovian district. RA is located near a protected nature site and has been rapidly changing since building companies began investing in the area and selling real estate in guarded neighbourhoods mainly composed of small apartment blocks or semi-detached houses. These locations have been steadily attracting people who we define as the post-transformation middle (BUCHOWSKI 2006, 2008, 2012) and urban creative (FLORIDA 2011) class, along with their social capital, worldview, values and most importantly – expectations. Unfortunately, the latter, after July 2013 – the moment when the new "Act on waste" policy took effect, were confronted with a shocking change. Suddenly, the calm area of RA was transformed into the crowded site of two waste dumps, producing traffic, emitting noise and a debilitating odour suffocating the vicinity. The local middle class, after the initial

---

[1]   In 2019 and 2020 other reforms came into life, however, in the article we do not deal with their consequences, as they are not fully known yet.

[2]   The name of the district along with the local addresses and names have been coded. We use the "RA" abbreviation to name the location of our fieldwork.

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata
PONIATOWSKA
**Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity
in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs**

shock, began their crusade against the new waste policy and local waste companies, blaming them for unconcerned about the environment, health and a sustainable waste policy. In September 2018, these actions resulted in shutting down one of the RA`s facilities.

We argue that the recent events in RA, namely the appearance of two social movements, repeated protests, visible class stratification and growing internal social divisions between the new and "native" inhabitants, have their roots in post-transformation social reconstructions. Thus, first we pose questions regarding the sociocultural origins of the active members of the local middle/creative class living in guarded communities and new to the area. We demonstrate that the post-transformation shifts, and discourses have visibly shaped their ethos and values, including their strong attachment to social stratification, class identification, and their need for activism. Following the ethnographies of post-socialism delivered by Michał Buchowski, Asta Vonderau and Elizabeth Dunn (BUCHOWSKI 2006, 2008, 2012; VONDERAU 2008; DUNN 2008a, 2008b), we decode class-rooted neoliberal discourses, actions and values in RA related to the environment, sustainable development, and waste policy. We ask how these discourses have impacted RA`s spatial organisation and have shaped middle-class perspectives on locality and social relations. Next, we demonstrate that the impact of RA`s waste facilities – the odour affecting inhabitants` quality of life from 2013 to 2018 – undermined middle-class values and brought to our informants` every-day reality emotions like anxiety, shame, stigma, and experience of isolation. Finally, we argue that in RA, due to the unanticipated effects of the last waste reform, the supposedly emancipating sense of class-belonging has been ruined. The local new middle/creative class has been pushed towards social mobilisation aiming to prove that the residents of RA`s gated communities, despite living in a stigmatising and odorous district, are still "true" members of a middle and creative class able to control their life and social status.

Research Methods

We follow Kirsten Hastrup`s call to re-establish empirical research as a primal source of ethnographic knowledge (HASTRUP 1995, 1996). We designed methodologically holistic empirical research involving many observations and long working periods in the field. We desired to understand and experience a range of elusive factors impacting people`s life conditions and daily existence, like the sounds of noisy machinery and, of course, the notorious odour, whose intensity depends on the weather, humidity, wind direction and – bafflingly – the season of the year. We spent a year staying as close as possible to the ordinary

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

local reality, inspired by the postulates of phenomenology-influenced anthropologies of every-day life, as we believe they:

"have contributed greatly to how anthropologists think of lived experience, illness and healing, suffering, violence, morality, bodiliness, sensory perception, communicative practices, mind and consciousness, creativity and aesthetic efforts, and subjectivity and intersubjectivity, among other themes and topics. More generally, they have helped anthropologists to reconfigure what it means to be human, to have a body, to suffer and to heal, and to live among others" (DESJARLAIS –THROOP 2011:88).

We worked in RA between September 2015 and October 2016, and later we came back in June and July 2018, observing people`s interactions and the contexts in which they appeared. We documented these "small expeditions" – as we called them, to give a bit of piquancy to our "urban hitchhiking" (MALLA et al. 2017:41) – by taking photos and shooting short quasi-documentary films. A "capstone" of our hitchhiking – as Tuuli Malla and colleagues write, "a drift in a city space guided by interaction with another person" (MALLA et al. 2017:41) – was our ascent to the top of "górka śmieciowa" – "the waste hill" – a waste mound dominating over RA. We went there with our guide working for one of the local waste companies and two other activists who were unknown to us. Then, later, we made a cagey approach to the source of RA`s conflict – the prisms, i.e. the containers, where organic by-products were collected and heated to intensify decay, releasing an intense odour affecting local households and public spaces. This hike helped us to change our perspectives and altered all of our senses. We learned that the dump not only had its own characteristic odour, but also colourations and possibly dangerous gas-emitting cracks. The machinery in operation there produced a whole array of sounds, from low trembling to high-pitched whistling, adding gripping sonic effects to this dynamic, yet baleful moon-like place.

We wanted to immerse ourselves in RA and its social issues. As the latter were mostly worsened by the local social movements, we turned our attention to the activists' gatherings. After establishing contact with CB[3], we engaged ourselves in their gatherings and demonstrations. We helped to organise protests, mainly by distributing leaflets, and walking from door to door and talking to people. Later, we were present during these events, where we could participate, observe and arrange some interviews. Unfortunately, that was not the

---

[3]   The CB and CR abbreviations are coded names of the local social movements/organizations involved in protest against waste companies located in RA.

case with CR, which we found to be reserved and closed to outsiders. As we were not journalists eager to advocate against Miejskie Przedsiębiorstwo Oczyszczania m.st. Warszawy (City's Cleaning Venture, CCV), the CR members for a long time ignored our calls, only to give us some underwhelming interviews at the end of our research, where they literally dictated to us their ready statements.

Despite these disappointing reflections on interviews with CR, conversations with people were important to us. We recorded 36 interviews, both individually and in groups, and carried out countless field conversations, which we described in the fieldnotes. Most of the interviews we conducted in informants` houses, and only a few in RA`s unpleasant and almost non-existent public spaces. We conducted 31 interviews with "nowi", mostly thanks to our engagement in CB and participation in the protests, where we also had chances to meet people from CR. Our good relations with CB gave us an insight into correspondence between the engaged inhabitants and the local authorities. We could observe real confrontations between these parties live, during meetings between activists and the authorities that took place in various local government departments.

We have enriched our data with discourse analyses, especially focused on CR`s and CB`s websites and their social media profiles. We have investigated the local press and carefully combed through the websites of the following institutions: Miejskie Przedsiębiorstwo Oczyszczania m.st. Warszawy (CCV), BYŚ, (BYŚ Cleaning Venture, BCV), Urząd Dzielnicy Bielany (Bielany Local Authority Office, BLAO), and the Wojewódzki Inspektorat Ochrony Środowiska w Warszawie (Mazovian Inspectorate for Environmental Protection, MIEP).

Finally, we disseminated a questionnaire where we asked the inhabitants of Bielany[4] about their quality of life, reasons for choosing this location, and their knowledge about RA`s case. We received 52 responses, sketching out the broader sociocultural context of our research topic.

---

[4] Department in Warsaw.

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

The Return of the Middle Class

The middle class has been a vague entity since its early days. Academics have debated how the middle class should be defined, yet they have never determined what precise factors constitute it. They have lost any defining accuracy in a maze of measurable economic factors, political declarations, and clashing Marxist and neoliberal philosophies obscuring class definitions. The ambiguity of the middle class, however, does not only concern Western societies. Mark Liechty, after research in Nepal, concluded that the middle class is itself an extraordinarily complex culture; entrepreneurial and progressive on the one hand, on the other it is Hamlet-like – anxious about the impact of capitalist doctrines on its own identities and values (LIECHTY 2002). Consequently, the concept of middle class has almost been abandoned in favour of discourse, subjectivity and cultural identities (SCHRÖDER 2008). The rapidly blurring class borders – mistakenly interpreted as the end of class itself (CARBONELLA – KASMIR 2006) – have only served to push researchers to entomb the middle class along with related analytical and methodological backgrounds. Thankfully, recently the concept of class has once again been rediscovered and reinterpreted. Here, the contribution of Pierre Bourdieu is of great value: his incisive meditations on social capital and "class on paper," upgraded by symbolic and political activity to "class in reality," (BOURDIEU 1985, 1991) have inspired new waves of academics across multiple disciplines to deliver a wide range of new theoretical and empirical research.

Nevertheless, despite new energy and fresh insights, mainstream study of class still follows the old paths, mostly reclaimed by a clash of neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian perspectives (DEVINE et al. 2005; SAYER 2005; YODANIS 2006). Yet, the refreshed class theory, we believe, has much to offer, especially in post-socialist societies where, as the case of RA illustrates well, social contrasts are starker than in Western "old democracies". Up against such contrastive conditions, post-socialist class formation was a violent event, in contrast to the evolution of Western working and bourgeois social formations:

"Class distinctions were drastically aggravated, however, after the fall of socialist governments through a variety of social processes such as unfettered, unequal, and often opaque privatisation, industrial restructuring, rapidly rising living costs, the decline of the state and its regulatory function, increasing corruption, and differential access to information" (SCHRÖDER 2008:11-12).

The post-socialist classes have emerged from social backgrounds where relations of power and dependency were often established under socialism, and which, despite the new liberal atmosphere, have been – if not fully preserved – then significantly influenced by the

94

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata
PONIATOWSKA
**Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity
in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs**

appearance of new social divisions. Buchowski compellingly revealed the nature of the new stratification being shaped by experiences of internal orientalism, otherness and stigmatisation (BUCHOWSKI 2006). Thus, when speaking about the middle class in post-socialist realities, the role of inequalities and the transformation come to the fore. Researchers have unanimously ascertained that the implementation of capitalism and neoliberal values has comprehensively shaken Central and Eastern European societies (KUBIK 2013; VERDERY 1996; KÜRTI – SKALNÍK 2009). Their heated discussion focuses more on the consequences of this earthquake. Some, like Leszek Balcerowicz or Michael D. Kennedy, glorify the transition (BALCEROWICZ 1995; KENNEDY 2002), and others, it suffices to name just Buchowski and Dunn, in their ethnographies question the transition`s universally beneficial impact (BUCHOWSKI 2008; DUNN 2008a, 2008b). Dunn sees the transformation predominately as a thorough social reconfiguration, which, she argues, has shaken people`s identities, values and roles. Thus, it has demolished the old patterns of power and relations, now replaced by new models of social stratification and class distinctions. In this new setting, many people have lost their agency, though some of them have established a new authority. Here, a certain category of people attracts our attention. Dunn describes them as follows:

"New governing technologies, representing a neoliberal perspective on autonomy and activity, have promised the birth of a new person: active, mobile, decisive. The idea of "being flexible" and producing flexible workers meant to be the antidotes for socialism – a kind of freedom contrasted with communist limitations" (DUNN 2008b:193).

We believe these people, just like our respondents, represent a so-called "new middle class", a social formation which arose after the transformation, in a culture of liberal capitalism and discourses of choice, agency and activity (BUCHOWSKI 2008). Contrary to classical Marxist materialism, where people from the middle class owned some means of production, the "new middle class" defines the individual`s position in relation to production as being only one of many distinctive factors. Thus, its ethos and identity are predominately imagined and socially constructed. Then, the "new middle class" reaches beyond pure materialism, and addresses the issues of worldview, morality, values, authority, knowledge and responsibility when confronted with the new capitalist discourses and culture. The members of this class join based on the shared ground of market values, independence, and activity, all translating into a self-identification dubbed by Vonderau as the "capitalist self" (VONDERAU 2008:114). Individuality, mobility and self-responsibility are the crucial distinctive values for these "new individuals", who are:

95

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

"flexible, mobile, self-controlled, linear and consistent individuals, both in terms of actions and thoughts. The capitalist self is not only structured differently in terms of temporality but is deprived of its social environment – privatised and individualised" (VONDERAU 2008:114).

Such identifications stand in sharp contrast to the groups of people, who, as Dunn (2008a) points out, after the transition were quickly rubbed out from public life, as they have failed to accept the new order. These allegedly passive people, along with their presumed limited social capital, became seen as outdated and unnecessary in the new world. To our informants, who indeed critically spoke about "aborygeni" (informant`s term: a reference to Aborigines, yet without ethnic connotations, however, still strongly negative – a "savage" local people allegedly unable to act, poorly educated, unemployed etc.) they have become bearers of stigmatising anti-self-identifications originating from the disgraced world of socialism. Therefore, the "new middle class" is a political and ideological project built from scratch, and for Buchowski, also a teleological quest for transformation, fixated on the reproduction of "Western" patterns of social relations, or it is better to say, their local images (BUCHOWSKI 2008). This class has fluent borders, and it is composed of people ranging from farmers and small businessman to well-educated city dwellers. Nevertheless, the invention of the ideological "new middle class" was aimed to implement a new liberal socio-economic order and deliver a certain explanatory model legitimising the ongoing changes.

Despite almost three decades having passed since the beginning of the transformation, we believe that the divisions and discourses stirred up by capitalism, liberalism and the transformation are still visible in contemporary post-socialist societies. Poland, with its sharp social, ideological, and economic divisions exposed in policy, public debates and every-day local realities, provides a potent source of examples. Yet, we are aware that accession to the EU and globalisation have inevitably affected class divisions and definitions. Thus, we propose to enrich the concept of the "new middle class". To do so, we employ Richard Florida`s idea of a "creative class", as we believe it illustrates quite well our informants` sociocultural background (FLORIDA 2005, 2011).

Unlike theoreticians of a "new middle class", Florida pays more attention to late modernity and lifestyles emerging from intense urbanisation, making his proposition more progressive and fresher than the slightly clichéd concept of the middle class. The members of the creative class, above all city dwellers, are people who earn money via their knowledge and creativity. They are well-educated technocratic professionals or artists, who create new ideas, technology and knowledge in diverse and more liberal urban settings. Here Florida makes a valuable comment – urban quality of life entails not only money and access to services and

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

pleasures, but a chance to live in an open, safe, clean, and friendly place. RA was supposed to be exactly one such place – a green, calm and safe corner in the never-sleeping Warsaw metropolis.

We believe our core informants represent a local variation of the "creative class", as they mostly occupied positions associated with entrepreneurship and a discourse of progress. Additionally, their response to RA`s disappointing reality was valuable social activism. "Nowi" desired to voluntarily shape their neighbourhood and, when the opportunity arose, their self-image as active and engaged citizens. Thus, they have presented themselves as the emancipated creators of their life-reality. Then, their creativity was not only limited to earning money, but was also the raw ingredients in a struggle for the quality of local space, the environment and welfare. The discourse of creative engagement was a platform unifying "nowi", but simultaneously a factor drawing a symbolic and imagined border between new people from gated communities and the orientalised – according to the informants – passive and uncreative "aborygeni".

The Shadow of the Waste Dumps: A Short Guide

RA became a part of Warsaw quite recently – in 1951, when the city absorbed a number of villages that were already slowly changing into metropolitan and industrialized suburbs. In 1957, just a heartbeat from the place, a new ironworks was erected. That eventually turned RA into a place of rapid industrialization – the waste processing plant was only one of the emerging industrial facilities supporting the ironworks. Others, like concrete manufacture, fuel magazines, and many others quickly dominated the landscape.

Currently the vicinity is rather grim and scruffy and supports Jeremy Seabrook`s sceptical reflections on rapid urbanisation, leaving landscapes socially and environmentally degraded (SEABROOK 2004). Next to the monumental industrial facilities installed there as early as the second half of the 20th century, detached and semi-detached houses dominate in RA, usually facing the main, yet narrow, artery – A. Street – overcrowded with heavy traffic. Most of the houses have their best years behind them. Their inhabitants, labelled as "aborygeni" by those who moved to RA quite recently, have been living there since they were born, they work nearby in one of the industrial installations or run a small business. Some of their houses are not even made of bricks but of wood. These outliers keep alive memories of the former rural character of this place.

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

The neighbourhood is a place of extreme social and architectural contrasts. Next to old housing new buildings are located, with private access roads and gardens, frequently organised according to the latest trends in landscaping. These are the bastions of "nowi" – as the locals call them – the people who have moved to RA recently, mainly from neighbouring districts or from outside of Warsaw. One such community – let us name it "The Flowers" – was one of our main points of interest. All its buildings are hidden behind massive fences and represent a classic gated community, resembling more dispassionate non-places than socially vibrant neighbourhoods. However, such segregated locations provide access to specific lifestyles and self-identifications (ŚPIEWAK 2016). The inhabitants, usually recognised as the middle class (BUCHOWSKI 2006, 2008, 2012), prefer to maintain relations with people occupying similar job positions requiring a certain level of education and creative skills (TITTENBRUNN 2016). Although "The Flowers" was the birthplace of CR – a local social organisation that fights to improve environmental and living conditions in RA, many times we witnessed people leaving their houses to just rush through the neighbourhood in their distinctive cars, hardly ever walking and practicing Michele De Certeau`s "walking in the city" (DE CERTEAU 2008:91), a *sine qua non* for establishing meaningful relations between people, urban agents and local spaces.

So, even for some of its inhabitant's RA is social and spatial *terra incognita*, a place where they live, albeit unwittingly and unwillingly. There are no places where people can meet, socialise or spend their free time. There are no cafes, restaurants, libraries, shops or public squares. Ironically, when walking down A. Street, one still can find large-format posters advertising new houses in the vicinity. The adverts promise that RA is a bulwark of nature at the edge of one of the biggest nature reserves in Poland. How grotesque the advertisements were when juxtaposed with the heavy traffic, smell, and constant noise of machines emanated from RA`s most dominant landscape features – the waste dumps.

The City`s Cleaning Venture (CCV) and BYŚ Cleaning Venture (BCV) – both waste companies located literally in the backyards of RA`s households – shape the local landscape and establish spatial webs channelling emotions like anger, frustration and distrust.

The history of city governed CCV has its roots in the early 50s, when an unregulated waste dump was turned into a professional installation collecting garbage from Warsaw and the vicinity. Many years of intense exploitation resulted in the formation of a waste mound towering over the area. The local inhabitants named it "Górka śmieciowa" – "The waste

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata
PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

hill"[5]. The hill no longer accepts waste and there are plans for its re-cultivation into a ski slope. Next to the mound there was a processing facility and there the infamous prisms were located. This upset the local community – especially those people new to the area.

In 2012, just before the implementation of the reform reshaping waste policy, CCV applied to the Urząd Marszałkowski (Marshal`s Office) for an "integrated licence for collecting and processing waste", a license in fact legalising potentially hazardous-to-the-environment waste installations. The licence was awarded for four years, and the CCV`s processing capacity quadrupled. The previously small sections with prisms expanded, providing space for more than 150,000 tonnes of odour-generating waste. Just after the new waste policy's implementation, CCV won a tender for collecting waste in Warsaw and created the Regionalna Instalacja Przetwarzania Odpadów Komunalnych (Regional Installation for Processing Communal Waste, RIPOK). Importantly, the installation was located at the edge of an environmentally unique area protected by the Nature 2000 programme – Puszcza Kampinoska (Kapinos Forest). According to the Wojewódzki Plan Gospodarki Odpadami (The Plan for Managing Waste in Mazovia, WPGO), the whole facility was supposed to close in 2007, however, this date has been postponed many times, mainly due to administrative and procedural inaccuracies. In April 2012, the final year of the waste dump was set as 2014, however, the new law in 2013 once again changed the situation. "The waste hill" was finally closed at the end of 2016, and the prisms two years later.

In 2014-2015 a group of experts from Warsaw University of Technology conducted research in RA and investigated the intensity of odour and its maximum range. The results confirmed the source of the odour to be the prisms and estimated its maximum range as being one and a half kilometres. However, the range of "medium-polluted", yet not harmful air, was recorded as being only six hundred metres. Surprisingly, the local school and playground are just outside this line, leaving many residents suspicious and anxious about this coincidence. Although the results have pushed the CCV management to invest about two million Polish Zloties (about 500,000 Euros) in sealing the prisms and improving the process of storing and processing the most malodorous waste, the local community was incredibly disappointed, as the experts`had concluded that the situation in RA was acceptable.

The story of CCV is just the first act in the local environmental drama. The second facility, owned by private company BCV, is located nearby, on W. Street. This company employs

---

[5]   Interestingly, the mound sometimes goes as "Uluru" – yet another striking "Australian" reference.

about one hundred people, and similarly to CCV, many of them live in RA or neighbouring communities. BCV can be recognised by its distinctive blue chimneys producing billows of smoke, easily spotted from many locations. BCV is a heartbeat away from occupied areas, thus making many people anxious. This private company is more enigmatic and less transparent than public CCV`s facility, easily investigated by citizen patrols accompanied by municipal police and CCV`s employees. During our research we visited the whole of the CCV`s installations, including the closed "waste hill", but never were we able to observe BCV`s work. Instead, we have discovered that the company is currently preparing to apply for permission to expand its facilities to a size even bigger than the closed CCV`s processing plant.

Community and Social Movements

RA's community is diverse. The core of the population is made up of smallholders and workers living in multigenerational houses, occupying low-income positions or only just making ends meet thanks to a meagre pension. Nevertheless, we found them to be emotionally entwined with their vicinity, and its natural assets hidden under the cover of industrial facilities. For them, RA has always been a safe home:

"Generally, I am accustomed to it [the odour]. My grandparents are in their eighties now and they also live here. [...] It is fine for me, cause I have a small plot, where my kid plays. So, I don`t have to, like I would have to do in the blocks, stroll with a pram" (interview 15, female, age 33).

Surprisingly, they turned out to be a reserved community. We managed to get only five interviews with these people and much of our knowledge about them is based on field observations or second-hand comments. Usually, they were defined as follows:

"There are a lot of people here, most of them from here, as we call them - ´aborygeni´. And I think they are… You know, I don`t want to say anything more…" (interview 11, female, age 50).

We were – somehow – shocked. What exactly she did not want to tell us? Was she trying to be polite, however, simultaneously suggesting that her neighbours were backward and socially degraded people? Well, now we know the answer was – yes.

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

Next to the local people, in "The Flowers" and similar communities, newly arrived middle class communities live. They constitute our core research group. "Nowi" – "the new ones" – as aborygeni have often labelled them, are well-educated people with creative and prestigious professions. Mostly, they live in nuclear families, separated from their surroundings by walls marking out arranged spaces sharply contrasting with the rest of local suburban tissue. These people settled here over the last dozen years, bringing to RA new values, aesthetics and social capital. Most of them moved from other parts of northern Warsaw:

"They say that most of us here are the locals, but in these new quarters only new people live, you know, migrants coming from Warsaw, mostly from Bielany" (interview 3, male, age 53).

We value this remark, as it demonstrates that RA has its own unique sense of location – even people from Warsaw are migrants there. They were drawn by the idea of living in the suburbs, next to the forest, but close to vibrant city districts. At the turn of the century, the concept of a slow life in the suburbs was popular, especially among new Polish post-transformation social groups, paying more attention to the size and quality of their living space (PAWLICKA 2008), yet still significantly poorer than the Western middle class (GÓRKA 2007). They have accepted commuting, as living on the city`s outskirts are supposed to be healthier, more prestigious and more comfortable. RA seemed to be the right place – despite its industrial character – as the price of real estate was lower than in other popular locations, and ready properties were for sale. Many of our informants took out bank loans in Swiss Francs – as the loan was over all cheaper than in Polish Zloty – and bought, it would seem, the perfect real estate. However, their loans are much higher now, as the Swiss Franc exchange rate has almost doubled, and the value of properties has significantly dropped, as their location is now unattractive. Many of the informants also claimed that they only flicked through the local plans for new development.

Both the investigated groups – "aborygeni" and "nowi" – used the CCV and BCV installations to sketch mental and spatial maps of RA. However, only the latter group entwined the history of the facilities with their own biographies. "Nowi", as we often heard, divided their life stories into two periods – before and after July 2013. The sudden change in their living conditions was a stimulus to reconstruct their values, social relations, and most fundamentally, their relations with the local space. This change was also a starting point for intense social mobilisation, intensified by the frustratingly long process of closing the noxious installations.

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata
PONIATOWSKA
**Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity
in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs**

CR and CB: A Harsh Neighborhood

For a long time, RA was dotted with handmade posters blaming CCV and Warsaw`s
authorities for the drama taking place there. They were distributed by CR – an organisation
established by "The Flowers'" inhabitants, one of two social movements operating in the
area. A second organisation, CB, began focussing its attention on RA a bit later, as it
represents the interests of bigger district. These two organisations occupied opposite
positions in the discourse and actions focused on RA`s environment. Characteristically, the
members of these organisations originated predominantly from the new communities. The
participation of local people was minimal, which significantly shaped their negative
reputation among "nowi", as our socially engaged respondents saw their engagement as a
source of positively distinguishing capital. Let us now briefly characterise the engaged
informants by considering their affiliations.

Informants, mostly from "The Flowers" community, to express their disappointment with
administrative decisions affecting their life quality, established CR. This social movement
shares many features characteristic of "new social movements" (PICARDO – NELSON
1997; BUECHLER 1995). It declares itself to be apolitical and focused predominately on the
environment, sustainable development, and civil rights. Its members fight for "environmental
justice", which:

*"can be distinguished from environmental inequality […], which refers to a situation in
which a specific social group is disproportionately affected by environmental hazards"*
(BRULLE – PELLOW 2006:104).

This is how one of our informants explained CR`s mission to us:

*"It was founded because we, as individual people, didn`t have access to any documentation.
That`s why we established an association. More people joined us, because of this smell. This
is our third year now. […] In 2013, in September, the association was founded. The impulse
was of course the increasing odour from the installation, the primary cause of our actions.
Just as B. said, at the beginning there were some attempts and small individual crusades,
everyone tried something individual, but this was very unsuccessful. So, we came up with the
idea to organise, to open doors to the documentation. And secondly, a group is always more
effective than a single person, especially in such long-lasting cases"* (interview 6, female,
age unknown).

CR`s goal was to close all CCV`s installations. The organisation appealed to basic emotions,
like the aforementioned one of safety, but also to parental love and care. The organisation`s

102

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

discourse contained a dose of anxiety and struggle with the invisible danger lurking in the polluted vicinity.

CB, the first organisation which we established contact with, like CR, is a "new social movement", declaratively apolitical and focused on local sustainable development and social matters. However, CB is a more comprehensive organisation criticising not only CCV, which CR restricted itself to. Its members attempt to reveal BCV`s actual scale of operations and its future plans for expansion posing a threat to the local community. The following quotation defines this group well:

"BCV has better papers than CCV. […] CCV aspires for 230,000 tonnes of rubbish processing yearly, but as I have calculated, BCV aspires to do 2,300,000 tonnes. So, they can do anything. They can bring a dead cow here because they have permission to store waste right here. Later, they will apply to process, store and so on. […] They bring the rubbish here, nobody knows what they do there, and later they send the waste back" (interview 5, female, age 51).

Despite such conspiracy theories, CB is more muted than CR and aspires to establish a legally grounded voice in the process of administrative decisions concerning waste processing. Therefore, the organisation corresponds with the goals of social movements arising since the 1970s and 80s, i.e. community-based grassroots organisations exerting legislative pressure on the authorities and other involved social actors (BRULLE – PELLOW 2006).

Consequently, both organisations can be counted as "environmentalist" movements, which are composed of people concerned about the environment and advocating for its preservation. However, we consider CR to be environmentally extreme, defined by Danielle Tesch and Willet Kempton as "radical preservationists" who act loudly and emotionally (TESCH – KEMPTON 2004). CB should therefore be considered as moderate "conservationists" – meaning "a less extreme type of environmentalist" (TESCH – KEMPTON 2004:73). Regardless of definitions, we found engagement in these social movements to be a confrontational and political act. Some of our informants, after leaving CR in an atmosphere of scandal, joined CB. They accused CR of supporting BCV and suggested that the organisation was sponsored by the company. A rather reserved answers for our questions regarding the relations between the aforementioned organizations encourages us to indeed consider CR as surprisingly uncritical about BCV. Here is the example from a key figure in CR:

"Well, indeed (pause)*…Yes, there is a certain…* (pause) *Scuffle around BCV. And, what some people consider us to… that we only* (cough) *do one thing. BCV... But the answer is very easy*

103

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata
PONIATOWSKA
**Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity
in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs**

(dramatic change of tempo). *We fight. The work here is so tremendous, that we simply can`t take care about everything and save the world at once. There are two organizations, two installations, each of us takes care about its own. We certainly can support each other and take part in some protests. If one thinks about nuisance, well, you can`t compare. BCV is also disruptive, but not on such a massive scale!"* (interview 14, male, age 51)

Interestingly, the waste installations showed up here to be somehow attached to organizations. Yet, this goes deeper, as we have also been told that the person chairing CR is a close relative to W.B., one of BCV`s owners. However, apart from the following conversation[6], we do not have any reliable proof of this. Here is the part from the meeting with some people attached to CB:

M.C.: *"Is it not surprising that there are two organizations almost having no contact? Do you even talk to each other?"*

T: *"Yes, once on the phone with their chairwoman – she told me she had no time, `cause she is so busy and so one, she will email me later."*

A: *"She`s W.B` cousin."*

M:P: *"Is she? I didn`t know that!"*

T: *"Mrs. B, yes."*

A: *"She has sold him a land recently."*

M.P: *"I`ve heard a word from a lady living nearby."*

A: *"You now, there is a KRS[7] and so, but we are not prosecutors, we are not police officers. We know who steals and cheats here…You know, they might get me out to the forest, it happens…"*

M.C.: *"But still, what about two organizations?"*

A: *"It used to be one."*

---

[6] This conversation was held with help of our colleague Magda Cibicka, who was part of the research team. We would like to thank her for sharing with us with this material.

[7] Krajowy Rejestr Sądowniczy (National Court Archive) a database containing a vast number of administrative data concerning institutions, entrepreneurial companies, partnerships and associations.

104

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

M.P: "As far as I know, Mrs. G has left CR and later has founded CB."

A: "And constantly they slender us, even in the last post."

M.C.: "I`ve noticed that."

A: "But we sometimes strike back, you know. Yet, they have some connections in the administration, you know, somebody there has had to give them permissions, somebody has suggested the place and later has sold the land. Don`t you think this is a bit thin?"

M.P: "Ok, so who is responsible for the mess here?"

A: "Well, somebody has simply failed to keep an eye on that, offices, the municipality. Somebody has delivered to them all the approvals; this must be somebody with money. Once a city guard has told me that BCV years ago has started as septic-trucks company. There was no plumbing here. So, they cleaned sceptics and throw it all into the woods. Nobody has ever controlled them" (interview 16, male, ale 45, female, age 47).

Space, Class and Activism in RA

Most of the informants – surprisingly including even the "aborygeni" – spoke about class or made subtle allusions about belonging to one. Even when asked to briefly characterise their vicinity, the informants, after sketchily describing the intense odour or other neighbourhood drawbacks, turned their attention to social matters and distinctions between the active and engaged civilians – mostly from "The Flowers" and similar communities – and passive "aborygeni" allegedly uninterested in the quality of public spaces, the environment and sustainable waste policy. But the local people never refrained from making bitter comments about "nowi", for them pretentious Johnnies-come-lately, who have never respected the local inhabitants and, by publicising matters relating to RA, have deliberately invaded their privacy and values. They had not understanding nor sympathy for their distressed neighbours. A short comment delivered by one of the informants – emotional, as related to one`s place, and bitterly ironic, as on people who have aggravated it, encapsulates it well:

"I tell you, this is a very sensitive topic for those, who have moved here to these houses (ironically, points at the wall of "The Flowers"). And I have lived here since always! I live

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

here! Soon it will be 44 years. And yes, the dump stinks, as stinks flipped compost. Yes! Today stinks, yep. Like they were flipping some compost" (interview 17, male age 43).

We were overwhelmed by the number of similar class-related practices and declarations – after all, even the abovementioned speech relates to classes, was provoked by the class and aimed to embarrass it. Class distinctions were visibly strengthened by certain slogans repeated by informants, namely "the environment", "sustainable development" and "reasonable urbanisation and waste policy". Class belonging manifested itself in architecture, materiality and spatial arrangement. Next to old chaotic developments, a new and cohesive architecture signalled to us where we should look for the local middle/creative class. One telling detail was even the guarding agents chosen; even they made a difference in RA. The "aborygen`s`" houses were usually decorated with signs with folksy declarations, such as: "Danger. Beware of the dog". "Nowi", instead, hooked up their residences and equipped them with advanced CCTV systems. From time to time, an automatic gate opened, and swish cars left these protected neighbourhoods. Usually, the driver was a relatively young person, with a high chance that s/he belonged to CB, or more probably, to CR.

Our middle/creative class informants rarely spoke to people in the street. They spent time outside RA or entirely within the borders of their closed communities, either in their houses, or when the odour was less noticeable, in their gardens. Admittedly, it was a certain obstacle to us – we were, exactly as the others unwanted – pushed out behind the walls. Yet, this unsettling condition was indeed a great ethnographic lesson to all of us. The following part from Hubert`s fieldnotes encapsulates this well:

"We are randomly hanging around RA and desperately trying to contact anybody from the other side of the wall. Who are these people? Why there are not here? It stinks a lot, but they live here, where are they?" (fieldnotes, September 2015)

We had the impression that they had established enclaves where they lived according to their imagined standards, namely in detached houses near attractive natural preserve, with a piece of own grass and a car – or two – as good, as only could be. Thus, they have dreamed about – and expected – a certain material confirmation of their own status. However, material structures and objected like cars and houses aimed to emanate their owners from the surrounding urban tissue composed of rather unappealing and densely populated residential constructions. In other words – the informants wanted a space, both material and imagined, a space for their projected individualities and identities. This was, however, only an illusion, as RA, with all its inconveniences, was still there. Factors which ignored all the fences and cameras – the shrill sound of machinery working at the waste dumps and the odour –

106

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

reminded them of that almost every day. Nevertheless, the area occupied by "nowi" was controlled and organised, as they told us, exactly as it should be. The opposite space – the crowded street and the two waste processing plants – were symbolically discarded and pushed outside this space. These private neighbourhoods, with their own greenery and small-scale architecture, were independent from the local authorities' services which, according to the informants, were evidently incapable of organising a safe and friendly place to live.

Bearing this in mind, gated communities, as Jacek Gądecki states, are sociocultural constructs which should be interpreted as a response to the post-transformational state`s failure to provide proper security to its citizens (GĄDECKI 2009). Although he speaks mainly about the crisis of personal safety and private property, we believe the category of safety also covers the most basic and existential aspects of everyday life, including a healthy environment, sustainable development and sustainable policy. This crisis has resulted in the observable privatisation of safety in Poland, as we argue, characteristic of the local middle and creative classes, which, to fully appreciate their self-identification, require certain guarantees of stability and foreseeability (SCHRÖDER 2008). The lack of the latter leads to a collapse of the sense of "class's" ontological security, which, despite writing on a bit different issue, Rosemary Hiscock and colleagues have illustrated well here:

"It has been said that people need the confidence, continuity and trust in the world which comprise ontological security in order to lead happy and fulfilled lives, and furthermore that ontological security can be attained more through owner occupied than rented housing" (HISCOCK et al. 2001:50).

To compare, let us hear from our informants:

"We lived in a kind of obliviousness. There was no odour. We simply lived our lives, and we were happy. Since 2013 we have lived under pressure, actually a kind of stress, I would say. Perhaps now, or if not yet, then maybe in the next hour, we will just go out for a moment to check – a load off my mind – [the odour] *is not here"* (interview 7, female, 46).

And another:

"We can`t use our garden, because it is actually useless […] You never know when the smell will arrive, and you never know if the intensity will allow you to invite any guests. So we don`t invite anybody. I`ve stopped inviting people" (interview 12, female, age unknown).

Therefore, the Polish gated communities fit well into the urban chaos arising since the 90s – a result of the absence of zoning rules in cities, ruthlessly exploited by construction companies, often informally supported by local governments. This architectural and spatial

107

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

chaos was clearly visible in RA. Not surprisingly, the advertisements distributed by the local building companies contained slogans vaunting class and spatial segregation. But to go back to the last informant`s comment, it is obvious that people from RA`s guarded communities were not living their middle-class dream. They were isolated, both physically and socially. They did not integrate with the locals, nor did they invite their friends' round or even freely use their gardens, as the smell – or the fear of it lurking nearby – stopped them from enjoying these tiny personal islands of greenery. Thus, the guarded communities, despite in RA being certain enclaves of imagined safety, prosperity and aesthetics, failed to support broader social networks and in fact intensified social stratification, or, as Buchowski would say, contributed to the orientalisation of "the others" outside (BUCHOWSKI 2006).

It is fair to say that attitude in RA towards the odour and, more broadly, to issues related to the environment and sustainable urban development, were a primary cause of deep social divisions and class stratification. Unsurprisingly, this gulf was a symbolic border between the active "nowi" and passive "aborygeni". Our middle-class informants created sorts of social "norms", like the aforementioned "engagement" and "environment" – slogans ubiquitous in their declarations, yet never well-defined, in relation to which they segregated the local community and established class-defining standards. People who saw themselves as engaged in the struggle for RA`s "environment" – we purposely use the self-perceiving mode, as the core of the engaged individuals was rather small, with the rest of the informants supporting them only from time to time or only on social media – defined themselves and their engaged neighbours as the local elite. Their dedication was an identifying factor only appreciated by those who possessed a certain social and intellectual capital. Here are some examples of this discourse:

"I don`t talk to all the neighbours I know because there are some weird people here. The people I know are rather engaged in this issue, as they participate in demonstrations. I believe this is a consequence of one`s intellectual capabilities" (interview 15, male, age unknown).

And another:

"For example, I use the local photocopying point […]. They are autochthons, and they have lived here for a while. The father and son work there together. But they only observe, you know. They observe what is going on. When I often visit them, I tell them what is happening. They seem to follow me, as they don`t support BCV, and so on. But they have this attitude – I live here, nothing can be done, so I won`t trouble myself, no protests, no engagement in anything" (interview 29, male, age 50).

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata
PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

We concluded that the poorer and not-engaged people of RA were treated – at least by some of our informants – not as subjects, but rather as non-reflexive objects of distrust, anger, and slightly – compassion. We consider this division to be a reference to the widely discussed, yet criticised, distinction between the "winners" and the "losers" of the transformation (BUCHOWSKI 2006, 2012). The latter are usually seen as people who could not adapt to the new liberal conditions since they were deprived of valuable sociocultural capital supposedly required to initiate a process of post-transformation emancipation and to seek new self-identifications (DUNN 2008a, VONDERAU 2008). They were like *homo sovieticus*, who, according to the dominant stereotype, were culturally and socially retarded*,* passive, dependent, and demonstrated a lack of any interest in the common good (DUNN 2008a).

Homo sovieticus, exactly like the "aborygeni" – as we were told by informants – unwittingly accepted the authorities` opinions and verdicts. They considered social activism and civic movements to undermine the social order. To some extent this explains why the "aborygeni" participated neither in CR, nor in CB. Additionally, as was suggested to us, the local people – via their passiveness – purposely avoided any responsibility for the area, and thus their own and their neighbours' health and quality of life. Several of our informants complained that their non-engaged neighbours expected others to put themselves at risk by engaging in conflict with the authorities and waste companies. They were also blamed for being blind to such abstract and – for them – "far-fetched" and "new money" ideas such as the environment and sustainable urbanisation. Therefore, people from the gated communities considered them to be "non-modern" and "backward thick-heads" (respondents` epithets), rejecting liberal new middle-class values, namely independence, activity and responsibility for one's own life. They have never come closer to Vonderau`s concept of "capitalist-selves" (VONDERAU 2008:114), and mentally stayed in the long-gone RA-as-a-village on the outskirts of the city of Warsaw. This, however, was not true since the local people, similarly to "nowi", were, after all, also owners and some of them ran small businesses. We found them, like Jeremy Seabrook who researches the poor in cities, to be "an invisible resource" (SEABROOK 2004:475), having much economic and social potential. Nevertheless, only our middle/creative class informants saw themselves as creative and sophisticated "winners". But were they "winners" at all?

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

New Middle/Creative Class, Odour and Stigma

The sense of smell, along with sight and hearing, is inseparably intertwined with memories and the cultural images of spaces and their inhabitants. However, when speaking of human dwellings, smell has an exceptional potential to segregate. Therefore, as George Simmel suggests, we can distinguish between fragrant and malodorous districts, the first occupied – stereotypically – by fragrant and noble people, the latter by noxious dissenters (SIMMEL 2006). Smell absorbing places and their social images are more than just a physical phenomenon. It is, following Bourdieu, a symbolic violence, which turns places into repulsive no-man`s-lands occupied by people deprived of capital and socially valued resources (BOURDIEU 2006). In RA Bourdieu`s theoretical works, turned to be grounded in empiricism, as we saw how the odour from CCV has dominated the vicinity and established relations of dependency, which our desperate middle/creative class informants, following their class identification and ethos, tried to cut or upset.

However stigmatising and exclusionary their declarations and actions appear; marks of exclusion and stereotypes have also affected those from the gated communities. Our research revealed levels of experiencing and defining odour that were related to class divisions. The "aborygeni" were astonished that, for the middle/creative class, the odour was not only such a great reason for mobilisation but also for shame and concealment. We hypothesise that living surrounded by an unpleasant odour, predominately associated with poverty, slums and dirt (SIMMEL 2006), has undermined "nowi`s" class self-identification. As Ivan Illich would say, they were people who had been brought up in the anti-odour utopia of modern urban architecture, yet now confronted with "aura" – the smelly mark of human dwellings, yet only recently weeded out of inhabited spaces (ILLICH 2004:375).

As we have already mentioned, the turning point for RA`s issues were July 2013, when CCV increased the volume of processed organic waste. Before, according to our informants, living in RA was good, despite some inconveniences, like a rare and slight smell of "a cowshed". *"We thought that a cowshed here is better than car fumes there, right?"* – one of the informants said (interview 8, female, age unknown). But in 2013 suddenly, the vicinity was "overtaken" by an intense odour and the local streets clogged with heavy traffic. Many of our respondents recalled this time as the beginning of their personal tragedy, a turning point in their biographies. We have noticed that the respondents often complained that overnight they were even forced to abandon their earthbound habits:

"Before I used to walk my dog more often, when she was eager to walk at all. Now the odour is so terrible that you can`t walk. It smells so bad!" (interview 5, female, age 51)

110

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

And a second example:

"Involuntarily, when we leave our houses, [takes a sniff] *we check if it stinks. Shall we call for the city service or not? Then, fast, into the car! Really, it is unpleasant, I can see that clearly. Earlier people were in the streets, many things happened in our gardens. Before 2013, right? It was a normal life"* (interview 16, female age 48).

A sudden change in the way the informants perceived and used their vicinity has left marks in "nowi`s" social self-identification. First, they became aware that they could not live their dream life any longer, as they had been deprived of fundamental middle/creative class values – agency and control. Consequently, many of them regretted their decision to move to RA, that is to say – taking out a bank loan and currently occupying a property whose value has significantly dropped. These thoughts, however, did not only pertain to real estate and financial issues. We found them to be a comprehensive appraisal of the informant`s new life settings and social identification. Along with these reflections, apparently regarding the odour and sustainable urban policy, "nowi" conducted a deep mental and phenomenological reassessment of their status. They have combed through their biographies and class knowledge, searching for reasons for, and possible solutions to, the problem they have been exposed to. Therefore, RA was a land of people changing, of the location for a failed middle/creative class project, and the site of a post-transformational drama, where peoples` expectations and identifications clashed with a malodorous and disappointing reality. This was a place of tensions and self-directed grievances assuaged by criticizing "the others", passive and immune, for – as our informants said – their personal and social tragedy.

When speaking of the "tragedy" in RA, two important elements should be considered, namely shame and stigma. Our informants often directly spoke about the latter making references to their present situation. Obviously, "odour" holds many meanings, mostly negative. Odour, as Erving Goffman says, stigmatises those who are affected by adverse smells commonly symbolising poverty and low status (GOFFMAN 1963).

While talking about odour, the informants often personalised it. They talked about "the odour attacking," or "lurking odour". We saw this anthropomorphisation as a platform for developing a common language to speak about a shared problem – when a threat has characteristics, it is less dangerous. Thus, when the informants gave the odour an agency, they profoundly reconstructed their narratives and left the discourse of victims to become the active party in the conflict. This strategy corresponded with their class values because it restored – to some extent – their faith in controlling their surroundings. Nevertheless, the odour undermined the status of "nowi", as it was virtually impossible to hide it. Odour was

111

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

one's first experience when entering RA and for a long time it stayed in the memories of those who personally experienced it. Certainly, it ruined the elaborately constructed picture of "nowi" as true members of a middle/creative class living in the charming and safe suburbs and bringing home the bacon thanks to their exceptional intelligence. Such a situation provoked negative feelings like shame and reproach, well-illustrated here:

"I can`t stop blaming myself for being such a fool and moving. I lived in Żoliborz[8] and I left it for the problems here. I`ve made a terrible mistake, a personal, unimaginable mistake. I invested some money here, but I did not think about officials' mentality. […] I only saw this place as land with potential. […] Obviously, it is embarrassing, as it is related with the air, right? The air, the lifestyle. And it is shameful to admit that you have made such a wrong decision. I`ve just stepped into this odour. I mean, I let myself down, I didn`t check everything, I was naïve. A this hurts me, this makes me so mad! It is killing me. I`ve simply fooled myself" (interview 7, female, 46).

Despite trying our best to understand the informant`s situation, many times we had the feeling that they were ashamed to speak about it. We observed and experienced a tension marking our encounters that was present in the respondent's language, voice, and body language. It was striking that "nowi", when asked about the odour and their current situation, immediately lowered their eyes and voice. To speak about odour, they employed many strategies, like digressing, making generalisations, changing the subject, or even making obviously forced jokes. This was especially characteristic of the narratives told by the members of local social movements. When speaking as a collective, the informants appeared to be engaged and professional, however, the individual interviews revealed a picture of insecure people, visibly preoccupied with their complicated situation, and separated from the values and lifestyle they had dreamed about. They considered themselves to be the objects of potential stigmatisation, as living in a malodorous area was – according to them – a reason for social ostracism:

"Well, it is awkward, especially in front of people, who don`t live here. Let's say they live in Śródmieście or Mokotów[9] – they have a different set of problems. Let`s be honest, it is much easier to say – at least I think so – that your place is a bit noisy than it stinks so badly!" (interview 20, male 37).

---

8   Department in Warsaw.

9   Departments in Warsaw, the latter considered as especially liveable.

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

Thus, many informants had stopped inviting friends' round and hanging out in the area, as they preferred to spend as much time as possible outside RA. However, their fears and sense of shame exceeded these purely spatial matters, touching upon the foundations of middle/creative class identification, namely educational background, independence, responsibility, and general smartness that allows one to occupy certain social and professional positions. "Nowi" realised that, because of RA`s rather miserable appearance and the mark made by the waste dumps, they were no longer credible in their middle/creative classiness. The local effects of the new waste policy have bitterly undermined their high expectations. Thus, their story is a tale of a wounded middle/creative class with ruined dreams caught up in a sudden and painful clash with a poorly developed suburban reality, unpredictable political decisions and misguided choices regarding their financial and housing plans. Most of our informants unanimously, and with more than a little embarrassment, claimed that their present life was not the one they had imagined, expected, or worked for.

Discussion

In recent decades, due to intense urbanisation, the former village of RA has been absorbed by an expanding Warsaw, bringing in many new people, mainly from nearby districts, but also those new to the city. Thus, RA is a socially and culturally diverse area, where people of different values, worldviews, and economic backgrounds live next to each other – former and still working small-scale farmers, the self-employed, and various workers share the neighbourhood with a creative class working in the city centre or in modern office districts. Hence, RA is a place where anthropologists can observe the ongoing process of a rapid reconstruction of the local social structure, but also steady rearrangements in spatial organisation, architectural landscape and associated values shared by a complex local community exposed to pressures resulting from urbanisation and sociocultural shifts.

These changes have been additionally stimulated by the unexpected results of the Act introduced in July 2013, aiming to tighten up legislation on waste policy and management. Consequently, the local waste companies, generally benign and anchored in RA`s landscape (as they were present there long before the first new inhabitants chose to move there), drastically increased their operational capabilities, producing traffic, noise pollution and emitting an intense odour that has overwhelmed the vicinity until September 2018. Consequently, a populated area located at the edge of one of the biggest and most precious

113

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata
PONIATOWSKA
**Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity
in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs**

nature reserves in Poland has been turned into a malodorous and unattractive hinterland for waste from Warsaw and beyond.

This situation raises many concerns. First, one should question the rationality of a policy supporting huge waste dumps and waste processing facilities in a populated area. It is true that RA has been steady transformed from a rural to an industrial landscape since the early 1950s, however, the proximity of a protected natural area and rapid urbanisation bringing new settlements should have encouraged successive authorities to follow more accurate and reflexive spatial planning and policy. RA as a growing suburb is a fact, nevertheless the local government seems to either turn a blind eye or ignore this situation. RA`s issue has been additionally complicated by imprecise communication from the administrative institutions and courts of various instances, adjudicating conflicting decisions and often clashing verdicts, easily questioned by the local waste companies, which only fulfil their legally established cleaning mission, legitimised by binding contracts signed with the local authority. Consequently, RA`s space has been turned into a chaotic maze, occupied by both "native" populations, well-accustomed to the area`s character, and also disappointed "new" inhabitants, blaming the former as well as the authorities for their personal and class drama. RA has no quality spaces or places capable of bringing people together, regardless of their sociocultural background. The streets, dominated by heavy traffic, noise and car fumes, are socially empty and unfriendly. The vicinity, despite its apparent assets, like the nearby forest and vibrant city districts, according to our informants, turned out to be repelling and incapable of serving the new middle class's needs and expectations. The green protected areas, instead of providing much-needed space for relaxation and social integration, became yet another argument in the struggle with the waste companies and local authorities. The inhabitants of "The Flowers," and similar communities, have closed themselves within their dedicated bastions, which they were unable to enjoy them in accordance with their dreams and expectations, as the odour has forced them from their backyard gardens and blighted social events like barbecues or enjoying a simple cup of coffee with friends. Thus, our informants felt deprived of their class self-identification and lost in an abyss denuded of ontological safety, dignity and hope.

We saw the rise of the local social movements – CR and CB – as an attempt to free the local new middle/creative class from the impoverishment and social discrediting resulting from occupying a commonly stigmatising noxious neighbourhood. We do not question the official and obvious motives for establishing these social organisations, namely a drive to improve the quality and aesthetics of the local space and its environmental conditions thereby translating into inhabitants' improved health and safety. However, the social structure of the

114

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

organisations – explicitly composed of "nowi" – and associated liberal discourses, i.e. stressing a need for self-emancipation, control, activism and self-responsibility as the core attributes of a modern person, suggested to us that the actual reason for establishing these organisations lay deeper, at the level of informants` self-identification, or more precisely, its crisis. Thus, the struggle for a better environment – a standard slogan for both CR and CB – might be nothing more than a class-anchored solution for identity and a representational crisis amongst "nowi", supposedly knowledgeable, far-sighted and, most importantly, responsible for their lives. Yet, as the data under consideration has suggested, they became stuck in RA of their own volition. The informants regret that they never carefully checked the local zoning plans and building applications, or cheerfully believed the official propaganda and building companies' PR advertising RA as a land perfect for those who had higher expectations and a certain social status. Then, the local activism and engagement in the struggle for a clean environment, reasonable waste policy and sustainable urbanisation, should be read if not as the only, then the most credible, message to the local social audience, proving that "The Flowers" and other local guarded communities are inhabited by proper members of the middle class, ready to regain control over their space and rights.

Finally, it is time to reveal a lesson we learnt from our research: perhaps it is now obvious but to us it is still most striking. In Poland, the concepts often heard by us in the field, namely "green policy", "the environment", "sustainable development" and "health", are very much class-related and class-reproduced. These concepts, as we argue, are almost exclusively reserved for the emancipated middle and urban creative classes, which not only shape and disseminate them across various social contexts, actors, and institutions, but also utilise them to craft their own class-related self-identifications and representations. This prompts us to hypothesise that the puzzling incomprehension of, and lack of concern for, the environment in Poland[10], as manifested in our still quite lacklustre social and governmental responses to phenomena like smog, recycling, and renewable energy, might be a result of our relatively undeveloped middle and creative class, poorer and visibly less numerous than in the greenest members of the EU. Additionally, many critics suggest that even the existing, elusive middle class in Poland is economically unstable. This economic fragility was easy to spot in RA,

---

[10]   https://oko.press/cieniu-zamachu-sady-pis-niszczy-energetyke-odnawialna-straszna-krotkowzrocznosc/ (accessed 28.06.20).

https://businessinsider.com.pl/firmy/nowela-o-oze-zabojstwem-dla-branzy-pis-przeglosowal-zmiany/04flk2m (accessed 28.05.20).

115

ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
Vol. 20, No. 1/2020

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

where even relatively small changes in Swiss Franc were a reason for mortgage holders` financial troubles. Under such strong economic pressure, "the environment" might easily be reduced to luxurious and thus secondary needs, appreciated only by those whose social and economic capital allows them to spend time and money on them. Or – like in RA – a sudden shift in one's life situation might push people to recognise and use "the environment" as an argument in a struggle with external institutions and platforms for social emancipation.

Bibliography

BALCEROWICZ, Leszek (1995): *Socialism, Capitalism, Transformation.* Budapest: CEU Press.

BEECHLER, Steven M. (1995): New Social Movement Theories. In *The Sociological Quarterly* 36 (3), pp. 441-464.

BOURDIEU, Pierre (1985): The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups. In *Theory and Society* 14, pp. 723-744.

BOURDIEU, Pierre (1991): *Language and Symbolic Power.* London: Polity Press.

BOURDIEU, Pierre (2006): *Dystynkcja. Społeczna Krytyka Władzy Sądzenia.* Warszawa: Scholar.

BRULLE. Robert J. – PELLOW, David N. (2006): Environmental Justice: Human Health and Environmental Inequalities. In *Annual Review of Public Health* 27, pp. 103-24.

BUCHOWSKI, Michał (2006): The Specter of Orientalism in Europe: Fpellowprom Exotic Other to Stigmatized Brother. In *Anthropological Quarterly* 79 (3), pp. 463-482.

BUCHOWSKI, Michał (2008): The Enigma of the Middle Class: A Case Study of Entrepreneurs in Poland. In Ingo W. Schröder, Asta Vonderau (eds.): *Changing Economies and Changing Identities in Postsocialist Eastern Europe.* Berlin: LIT Verlag, pp. 47-74.

BUCHOWSKI, Michał (2012): Anthropology in Postsocialist Europe. In Ulrich Kockel, Máiréad Nic Craith, Jonas Frykman (eds.): *A Companion to the Anthropology of Europe. First Edition.* Singapore: Blackwell Publishing, pp. 68-87.

CARBONELLA, August – KASMIR, Sharryn (2006): Rethinking the Anthropology of Social Class. In *Anthropology News* 49 (8), pp. 8-9.

DE CERTAU, Michele (2008): *Wynaleźć codzienność. Sztuki działania.* Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press.

DESJARLAIS, Robert – THROOP, Jason C. (2011): Phenomenological Approaches in Anthropology. In *Annual Review of Anthropology* 2011 (40), pp. 87-102.

DUNN, Elizabeth C. (2008a): *Prywatyzując Polskę. O Bobofrutach, Wielkim Biznesie i Restrukturyzacji Pracy.* Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej.

DUNN, Elizabeth C. (2008b): Subjectivity After Socialism: An Invitation to Theory Building in Anthropology. In Ingo W. Schröder, Asta Vonderau (eds.): *Changing Economies and Changing Identities in Postsocialist Eastern Europe.* Berlin: LIT Verlag, pp. 225-233.

FLORIDA, Richard (2005): *Cities and the Creative Class.* New York: Routledge.

FLORIDA, Richard (2011): *Narodziny Klasy Kreatywnej.* Warszawa: Narodowe Centrum Kultury.

GĄDECKI, Jacek (2009): *Za Murami. Osiedla Grodzone w Polsce – Analiza Dyskursu.* Wrocław: University of Wrocław Press.

GOFFMAN, Erving (1963): *Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity.* New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc.

GÓRKA, Kazimierz (2007): Rozwój Klasy Średniej w Polsce. In *Nierówności Społeczne a Wzrost Gospodarczy* 10 (2007), pp. 558-572.

HASTRUP, Kirsten (1995): *A Passage to Anthropology. Between Experience and Theory.* New York: Routledge.

HASTRUP, Kirsten (1996): Anthropological Theory as Practice. In *Social Anthropology* 4 (1), pp. 75-81.

HISCOCK, Rosemary et al. (2001): Ontological Security and Psycho-Social Benefits from the Home: Qualitative Evidence on Issues of Tenure. In *Housing, Theory and Society* 18 (1-2), pp. 50-66.

ILLICH, Ivan (2004): The Dirt of the Cities, the Aura of Cities, the Smell of the Dead, Utopia of an Odorless City. In Malcolm Miles, Tim Hall, Iain Borden (eds.): *The City Cultures Reader. Second Edition*. London, New York: Routledge, pp. 249-252.

KENNEDY, Michael D. (2002): *Cultural Formations of Postcommunism: Emancipation, Transition, Nation, and War.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

KUBIK, Jan (2013): From Transitology to Contextual Holism: A Theoretical Trajectory of Postcommunist Studies. In Jan Kubik, Amy Linch (eds.)*: Post-Communism From Within.*

117   ETHNOLOGIA ACTUALIS
                                                       Vol. 20, No. 1/2020
Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata
PONIATOWSKA
**Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity
in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs**

Social Justice, Mobilization and Hegemony. New York: New York University Press, pp. 27-94.

KÜRTI, László – SKALNÍK, Peter (2009): *Post-Socialist Europe: Anthropological Perspectives From Home*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

LIECHTY, Mark (2002): *Suitably Modern: Making Middle-Class Culture in a New Consumer Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

MALLA, Tuuli et al. (2017): Urban Hitchhiking: Wandering with Others as a Research Method. In *Suomen Antropologi* 42 (3), pp. 41-51.

PAWLICKA, Aleksandra (2008): Mamy Klasę Średnią. In *Przekrój,* 10.01.2008, pp. 35-39.

PICHARDO, Nelson A. (1997): New Social Movements: A Critical Review. In *Annual Review of Sociology* 23, pp. 411-430.

SAYER, Andrew (2005): *The Moral Significance of Class.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

SCHRÖDER, Ingo W. (2008): The Classes of `89: Anthropological Approaches to Capitalism and Class in Eastern Europe. In Ingo W. Schröder, Asta Vonderau (eds.): *Changing Economies and Changing Identities in Postsocialist Eastern Europe.* Berlin: LIT Verlag, pp. 3-26.

SEABROOK, Jeremy (2004): The Urban Poor: An invisible Resource. In Malcolm Miles, Tim Hall, Iain Borden (eds.): *The City Cultures Reader. Second Edition.* London, New York: Routledge, pp. 475-483.

SIMMEL, Georg (2006): *Socjologia*. Warszawa: PWN.

SIMMEL, Georg (2008): *The Ambivalence of Social Change in Post-Communist Societies*. Huddinge: Södertörn University College.

ŚPIEWAK, Jan (2016): Miasteczko Wilanów. In Małgorzata Jacyno (ed.): *Przewodnik Socjologiczny po Warszawie.* Warszawa: Oficyna Naukowa.

TITTENBRUNN, Jacek (2016): Klasa Średnia: Mit czy Byt? In *Studia Krytyczne/Critical Studies* 2 (2016), pp. 62-85.

TESCH, Danielle – KEMPTON, Willett (2004): Who is an Environmentalist? The Polysemy of Environmentalist Terms and Correlated Environmental Actions. In *Journal of Ecological Anthropology* 8, pp. 67-83.

VERDERY, Katherine (1996): *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Hubert WIERCIŃSKI – Natalia SADOWSKA – Małgorzata PONIATOWSKA
Class, Urbanity and the Environment. The Ethnography of the New Middle/Creative Class Identity in Warsaw`s Industrial Suburbs

VONDERAU, Asta (2008): Models of Success in the Free Market: Transformations of the Individual Self-Representations of the Lithuanian Economic Elite. In Ingo W. Schröder, Asta Vonderau (eds.): *Changing Economies and Changing Identities in Postsocialist Eastern Europe.* Berlin: LIT Verlag, pp. 111-128.

YODANIS, Carrie (2006): A Place in Town: Doing Class in a Coffee Shop. In *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35, pp. 341-366.

Hubert Wierciński (1985) holds a PhD. degree in ethnology and cultural anthropology and works in the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Warsaw. His main interests centre upon medical anthropology, environment and post-1989 social transformations. His recent research and publications focus on primary care and Central European healthcare systems, although he continuously expands his interest on areas visibly related to health, namely environment, quality of life, social and economic capital, and policy.
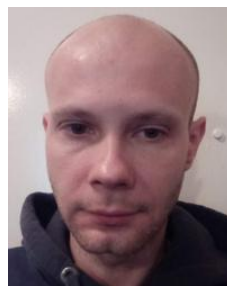
Natalia Sadowska (1992) holds a degree in ethnology and cultural anthropology completed at the University of Warsaw. In her thesis she has revealed unobvious relations between class, urbanity, health, and environment. Her current interests cover urban studies, social critique, activism and engagements, along with virtual reality and fandom societies.

Małgorzata Poniatowska (1993) is a social anthropologist holding a degree in ethnology and cultural anthropology completed at the University of Warsaw. Since 2015 she has been exploring issues related to class, urbanity, ecology, migrations and globalization. Her main interests cover Asian studies, collective identities, social activism, mobility, and globalization.

A History of Koshe Town in South-Central Ethiopia from 1941 to 1991

YOHANNES TESFAYE GETACHEW

Koshe General Secondary and Preparatory School,
Koshe Town, Ethiopia
jonakidnasa4@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Koshe town is the administrative and commercial center of Mareko *woreda*.[1] It is found in Gurage Zone Southern Nation Nationalities and Peoples Regional State. According to the tradition the origin of the name "Koshe" is originated from the plant which called by the name Koshe which abundantly grow in the area. The establishment of Koshe town is directly associated with the five years Italian occupation. Due to the expansion of patriotic movement in the area Italian officials of the area forced to establish additional camp in the area in a particular place Koshe. This paper explores the role of Fascist Italy for the establishment of Koshe town.

The former weekly market shifted its location and established around the Italian camp. Following the evacuation of Fascist Italy the Ethiopian governments control the area. During the government of Emperor Haile Selassie Koshe town got some important developmental programs. The most important development was the opening of the first school by the effort of the Swedes.[2] The Military regime (Derg)[3] also provided important inputs for the

---

[1] It is an administrative unit in Ethiopia, literally means district.

[2] Between 1924 and 1952 the Swedes particularly SEM (the Swedish Evangelical Mission) was active in Ethiopia to assist the country in many sects particularly they opened clinics and schools in all twelve provinces (VIVECA 1977:186).

[3] The term "Derg" is a Ge'ez language means "committee" or "council." The Military government that ruled Ethiopia from 1966-1991 popularly known by the name Derg and even both names used interchangeably through the academic writing of Ethiopia.

urbanization of Koshe town. This research paper observes the development works that flourish in Koshe during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie and the Military regime, and also asses the role of different organizations for the urbanization of Koshe town.

KEY WORDS: Italian occupation, Koshe, Mareko people, multiculturalism, urbanization

Introduction

As the term civilization refers "living in cities" (STANDAGE 2005:25) the establishment of cities and towns play a vital role on the development of over all aspects of human life. The world's earliest towns and cities were places where human beings for the first time modified to some extent, or completely changed their mode of life. Most of the populations of these cities were farmers, who lived within the city walls and walked out to lean on their fields each morning (STANDAGE 2005:24). However, some members of the urban centers completely changed their way of life both working and living in these centers. Among these members "Administrators and craftsmen who did not work in the field were the earliest humans to live entirely urban lives" (STANDAGE 2005:24).

Most of the ancient African urban centers were primarily the result of internal growth (YONAS – ZÁHOŘÍK 2017:46). However the coming of Europeans played its part on the later period of urbanization of Africa. It was part of the undeniable legacies of colonial Europe in which European colonial government had flourished some new urban centers. As part of the continent, the history of towns in Ethiopia divided into three making the short live Italian occupation as frame of reference (HORVATH 1968:44). Most of northern towns are categorized under "pre Italian" period. The towns around the capital, Addis Ababa like Budie, Alem Gena, Sebeta, and Tafkie, Sululta, and Sendafa were all founded during the "Italian Period". Concerning this Horvath marked "the Italians also left their mark on the urban scene by founding towns and stimulating the growth of existing urban centers" (HORVATH 1968:45).

The establishment of Koshe town has a direct relation with the short occupation of Italy in Ethiopia. Based on the classification of Ethiopian towns, Koshe town is categorized under the "Italian period". To control the Ethiopian patriotic movement against colonial Italy in the area particularly at the heartland of Mareko land, the Fascist Italian Officers designed and build their military camp at the center of the present Koshe town. Through evolution this camp became the present Koshe town (YOHANNES 2017:82; DERGU 2014:15).

A history of Koshe town is among the other ignored part of people's history in south-central Ethiopia. This research work will unearth the etymology, origin, and urbanization of Koshe town for the academic world. It also explores the establishment and development of Koshe town into the broader prospect of social, economic, and cultural development. This study covers the history of Koshe town from the year 1941 (its establishment) to 1991 (the downfall of Military regime) due to two reasons, firstly the separation of the former Meskan and Mareko district in 2002 into two separate districts distorted several archival material which has valuable information concerning Koshe town. Secondly, the present ethnic conflict between Mareko and the neighboring Meskan-Gurage hinder the researcher to get some valuable sources from Butajira the former administrative center of the compound district of Meskan and Mareko. This study covers the years from 1941 up to 1991 because the purpose of the researcher is to unearth the establishment of Koshe town and also to explore the role of Italian occupation for its establishment as particular and their role for the expansion of urbanization in Ethiopia as general. In addition to its establishment Koshe town attest its important developmental achievements just within the period 1941-1991. Mareko and Meskan-Gurage are two different ethno-linguistic people. They ruled under different administrative divisions since their incorporation by emperor Menilik into Modern Ethiopian Empire. Just their incorporation both ethno linguistic groups were under Mareko *awraja* (sub-province) its administrative center was at Butajira. Then during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie the name of the district changed and took "Meskan and Mareko district" which stayed until their separation. Due to their geographical affinity they were under one single administration called "Meskan and Mareko district" the center of the district was at Butajira town. However in 2002 Mareko people separated from the former administration and formed a new district that only composed Mareko ethno linguistic group called Mareko district. The study is based on a number of primary sources as well as existing research by either Ethiopian or European researches both published and unpublished.

A Brief Overview of Koshe Town

Koshe town is found in Southern Nation Nationalities and Peoples Region, Gurage Zone in Mareko *woreda*. The astronomical location of the town is between 7°55'-8°04'N and 38°26'-38°33'E. The town is from 160 km to Addis Ababa, 115 km from regional city of Hawassa and 316 km from Zone capital Welkite (DANIEL 2016:68). The town surrounded in the direction of northern by Semen Koshe rural area, in the southern direction by Washe-Faka

rural *kebele*[4], in the eastern direction by Koshe-Akababi and in the western direction by Woja-Jardemka. Koshe is characterized by flat plain with black and clay soils. The town has seven *ketena*[5] (cluster) and one *kebele* in the town, municipality rule began in 2003 (DERGU 2014:15).

The Koshe town is situated between altitudinal ranges of 1850-2000 m above sea level. This altitude is within the range of *woina-dega*[6,] the amount of rainfall 500-1656 mm, temperature of the area 16°-18°C. But in spite of its altitudinal location the climate is extremely hot and reflects the character of *kolla*[7] climate. The type of grass, crops, fruits and vegetable such as mango, papaya and onion are indication of the town warm temperature nature of the climate, the rainfall from June to September (DERGU 2014:15).

According to climate classification of Ethiopia the climate of Koshe has the character of tropical rainy climate type, which has dry months in the winter with average temperature of the coldest month greater than 18°C and rainfall amount ranges from 680 mm-2000 mm (DERGU 2014:15). According to the 2007 Population and Housing Census of Ethiopia statistical report for Southern Nation, Nationalities and Peoples' Region, the total population of Koshe town was 6880. Based on sex composition the total population was 3674 male, and 3206 female (POPULATION CENSUS COMMISSION 2007:1129).

Koshe town has been populated by migrants from different rural areas, *woredas*, zones and regions, and different ethnic groups live in the town. Although, the town is dominated by Mareko people the ethnic groups are diverse. For instance Amhara, Gurage, Oromo, Silte, Hadya and Kembata are the inhabitants' of among the diverse ethnic groups in the town (DANIEL 2016:69; informant: inspector Edamo Kamilo).

Establishment of Koshe Town

According to tradition origin of the name Koshe was driven from the name of the tree locally known as koshe[8] which abundantly grew in the present Koshe town and its surrounding. The

---

[4] It is the lowest administrative unit in Ethiopia which is under *woreda* (district).

[5] Division of one *kebele* by using the road which cross the block based on the master plane of the town.

[6] It is among the divisions of climatic condition in Ethiopia meaning "moderate".

[7] Semi-desert climatic condition.

[8] According to my informant inspector Edemo Kamilo the "term" Koshe is the name of a wild fruit which is sweet, which means "the one which is good, and sweet."

trees of the Koshe cover large areas until the expansion of the town and the increase number of population affected the growth of the tree. The fruit of these trees was eaten by the people, mainly by shepherds and other youths (DERGU 2014:15).

Geographers like Ronald Horvath who studied about the history of towns in Ethiopia remarked that the evolution of towns in Ethiopia may be divided into three periods: the pre-Italian period, the Italian period (1936-41), and the post-Italian period. In each period we may see important changes in the nature of the towns (HORVATH 1968:44). The period of Italian occupation (1936-41) was marked by even more expansion of modem urbanization in Ethiopia. This era not only resulted in the emergence of new towns but also the existing towns assumed new urban functions and characteristics (WORKU 2000:47) Based on this classification the year 1941 was found to be a land mark in the history of the establishment Koshe town (YOHANNES 2017:82; DERGU 2014:15).

Despite its negative and devastating effect in the Ethiopian life, the Fascist-Italian short occupation on Ethiopia played its own positive impact for the establishment of new towns. The role played by Italians can be illustrated by describing the foundation laid for the establishment of Koshe town. The basic cause which forced the Italians to built camp as a branch of their main camp at Butajira the Administrative center of Mareko Sub-province was the escalating security problem in the area. To control and manage the case the Fascist-Italian military officers of Butajira planned to expand their camp in the sub-province particularly in two *mikitle woredas* (sub-districts) namely at Hamus Gebeya the administrative center of Bamo sub-district, and at Koshe *kebele* the center of Dobenna Sub-district administration (YOHANNES 2017:82; DERGU 2014:15). These two areas were identified as the center of frequent ethnic conflict. More over the Italian found that these areas becoming the host for local patriots and decided to nearly check the movement of the patriot. After the Italians built the Ziway-Butajira road to connect their two camps they founded Koshe by constructing an army camp on seized land from local landlord named Gade Lije. One of the old models of rain gauge made of iron still stands in the compound of Mareko District Police Office in former camp of Italian Army at Koshe probably it would be the only fascist artifact in Mareko.

Figure 1: *An Italian rain gauge in Koshe town in the compound of Mareko district Police Office, which was the camp of Italian fascist troops during their occupation*. Photo: author

Following Italians camped at Koshe an existing periodic market known as Oshebe *meera*[9] which is located a few kilometers away from Koshe around northern part, moved to a site nearby to the military camp. The Italians encouraged people to take up house in Koshe in a variety of ways. For example local peasant women began to provide agricultural products mainly animal and animal products like egg, chicken and cattle for selling around the compound of the camp even on ordinary days out of periodic market day (informants: *Ato*[10] Demeke Ahmed, *Ato* Wuletaw Bezabhe). This economic relation between the camp

---

[9]   It is a Mareko language word means market.

[10]   *Ato* is an Ethiopian term which is equivalent to Mister.

population and peasant make Koshe the focal area of Mareko region where most Mareko people meet from different direction. According to informants the first places selling *talla* (local beer) and *tej* (mead) in the small towns were established during the Italian occupation (informants: Demeke Ahmed, *Ato* Wuletaw Bezabhe). Generally the Italian occupation played a ground for the establishment of Koshe town and the beginning of urban life among Mareko people at their own territorial domain.

According to information obtained from the municipality of the town and informants, long before the Fascist-Italian occupation in Ethiopia, particularly before 1937, Koshe was covered with dense forest and was not a favored location for human settlement and habitation except for few persons (informants: *Ato* Demeke Ahmed, *Ato* Wuletaw Bezabhe). By these times that area was used by the hunters who hunt big game animals like leopard, giraffe, buffalo and others, and some farmers who used to come to the area mostly from the neighboring rural *kebeles* of Mareko *woreda,* Silte, Gurage, Oromiya and from far areas of Amhara region, Hadiya zone and Kembata zone…etc. (informants: *Ato* Demeke Ahmed, *Ato* Wuletaw Bezabhe).

According to informants, the period before 1937, people from Butajra, Enseno and Tora went to Ziway the nearby town of Oromiya Region, passing through Koshe. They used to cross this area on foot because there was no road construction for cars. Some sources indicate that there are people living in some places of Koshe. Semen Koshe, a market had known in the present as Oshebe *meera* was established before 1937 (DERGU 2014:16) which later shifted to the present site at the center of Koshe town.

In 1941 the Ethiopian military officers named Major Assefa Gebre-Meriyam and Colonel Qelebesa Daddi arrived in the area. These military officers settled in the area with one hundred eighty soldiers. The objective of their arrival was to restore the peace and security in the area after the evacuation of Italian troops from the area. Soon, these military officers took control over the former Italian camp in Koshe, at the present Mareko *woreda* Police Office (YOHANNES 2017:81). During the arrival of these military officers, in the area there were only five grass houses and two tin roofed houses (DERGU 2014:15). After the soldiers began to live in the area, the people who live in the rural area came to the compound of the town and began to build the home, later during its first expansion period (1941-64) the town expanded in east and west direction, and during its second expansion period (1964-77) the town expanded in north and south direction. Since the year 1964 school, health center, telephone and hydroelectric power service began to manipulate. The road crossed the town

to the nearby towns like Tora town of Lanfaro *woreda*, Butajira town and Ziwey constructed (informants: *Ato* Demeke Ahmed, *Ato* Hailu Gagoro).

Social and Economic Characteristics in Koshe Town

Basically agriculture is not an urban economic activity, but since Koshe is not industrial center many people are engaged in agricultural activities around the town. The climate of the area is favorable for growing of crops and cereals including sorghum, maize, wheat, red pepper onion and tomato etc… the people of the town engaged in agriculture around the periphery of the town (informant: inspector Edamo Kamilo). Among these vegetables and cereal crops red pepper particularly called Mareko-*berbere* (red pepper) has high national demand (MEKDES DESSIE et al. 2018:32; BELETE NEGASH et al. 2012:103).

Trade is the most dominant economic activity in the town and cities. All kinds of business activities including shops, hotels industries, etc… are small petty traders such as small tea rooms, shoe shines, street venders and others are operating to obtain some sort of profit (source: Mareko *woreda* Finance Bureau). Among the population of the town of Koshe most of them carry out trade activities in large proportion so as to sustain the life of their families. However the people are daily labors and casual workers who have no fixed place or permanent job (source: Mareko *woreda* Finance Bureau).

In the area of Koshe there is a good annual harvest of crops, cereals and fruits. These products have been consumed by the dwellers of the area and sometimes when need arises traders from different area buy and take it to other areas. For instance merchants from Gurage, Silte, Addis Ababa, Ziway, Hadya and other as to get profit because the production and merchants join together without any kind of problem that means all of the rural *kebeles* have road so the farmers easily sold their products when the market is found (source: Mareko *woreda* Finance Bureau).

Social Services

The availability of social services is the most important criteria for keeping the quality of a given town or city. The society of the town and cities depends in one way or another on the services established either by private owners, government establishments. Some of the most important the social services in the town include hotels, hospitals, health centers, school,

banks, telecommunication services, electric, and water supply establishment. In Koshe, urban social and physical infrastructure service like school, medical establishments, electricity supply and services are inadequately when as compare the people that live in the town (informants: *Ato* Demeke Ahmed, inspector Edamo Kamilo).

Education and Expansion of School

The Swedes already started building school in the area but now they accelerate the magnitude of coverage in the Sub-province and built two schools in ten year, in Koshe and Tora the administrative center of Lanfaro district (informants: *Ato* Demeke Ahmed, inspector Edamo Kamilo). The habitat of Koshe town warmly well-come the Swedish project and provide labor and moral support. More over the most important support came from the local *čeqa šum*[11] named *Ato* Shibru Gade, who provides part of his *rist*[12] land for school building site (informants: *Ato* Demeke Ahmed, inspector Edamo Kamilo).

It was a golden opportunity for Koshe inhabitants to whom the Swedes built the first modern school, which was inaugurated in 1962 (informants: *Ato* Demeke Ahmed, inspector Edamo Kamilo) and began to enroll students mainly from Koshe and also from the nearby localities. The Swedish program gave an opportunity for Mareko children by providing modern and accessible school.

However the first government sponsors school opened after ten years of silence in 1960 at Hamus Gebeya *kebele* which was the site of Bamo sub-district under Mareko district administration (EDEMO 2006:69-70). Besides its unfair distribution considering the ratio of two schools for one district population its initial success and policy of allowing missionaries to take part seems encouraging since education had been considered as luxury in the eyes of majority Koshe inhabitants.

---

[11]   It was a title of a village level governor during the feudal administration in Ethiopia.

[12]   It is hereditary ownership of land in Ethiopia.

Development of Clean Drinking Water in Koshe Town

In 1960 the inhabitants of Koshe town enjoyed health service after the first relatively nearby clinic opened at Hamus-Gebeya *kebele* it was under Mareko district. The establishment of this health center saved travelling time and decrease death caused by curable disease among Koshe inhabitants.

In the coming years some urban features emerged in Koshe. Among these social services the building up of the first clean drinking water was the most important one (SINTAYHU 2010:13). In addition to this the integration of several ethnic and linguistic groups for several economic, political and social background play its role in developing the economic revival of the town (informants: *Ato* Demeke Ahmed, *Ato* Hailu Gagoro).

Local businessmen run several types of small business like mail tea houses, shop, and restaurants. Beyond all business activities Koshe weekly market played the most important role in inviting neighboring communities in Koshe town. The inhabitants of Koshe town, like other rural population of the country suffered a lot due to the absence of clean drinking water and affected by waterborne disease since they used ponds as source of drinking water. It was very difficult during dry seasons since the area weather condition belongs to *kolla* climate when the availability of rain water limited during three months of Ethiopian rainy season in summer. During the vast dry season mothers and girls of Koshe town pass an exhaustive day to day activity in search of available water. Beside remoteness of traditionally build ponds, the absence of treatment and purification for this source of water, water born disease had been common by which several people victim (YEMANE 2002:80; SINTAYHU 2010:12). The 1942 government plan in expanding public services among the mass become functional building clean water source in Mareko district after twenty year. In 1962 the governor of Koshe town receive message from body of Imperial Government to dig water hole in Koshe by participating the localities. (SINTAYHU 2010:13). Then the cooperation work of government and Koshe town dwellers who engaged digging water hole enabled the effectiveness of establishment of the first clean drinking water source in the town.

Health Service

Like other rural and backward population of Ethiopia the availability of accessible health post like clinic was out of the range and unimaginable in Koshe inhabitants during the period under the study. Until the collapse of the Military government (Derg) in 1991, the only option of relatively nearest clinic was at Hamus Gebeya *kebele* (EDEMO 2006:70; informants: *Ato* Hailu Gagoro, teacher Getu Alemu, inspector Edemo Kamilo) which was found at the

adjacent area of today Meskan district with Mareko district. However it had better accessibility for nearby Koshe inhabitants rather than who habitat at center or the opposite sides of the periphery particularly at southern eastern and western corner of the area. These who live in identified parts of livelihood had only one option which was Ziway which was the center Hykochina Butajira Sub-province. At Ziway for Sub-province level there was one Health-center[13] which alternatively provide health service for nearby Koshe inhabitants. Besides its inaccessibility and shortage of transportation most of Koshe inhabitants forced to conduct journey either by foot or horse to get health service.

Koshe town inhabitants live in the area affected by infectious diseases like malaria, diarrheal disease and tuberculosis, which were major causes of mortality (YEMANE 2002:715; SINTAYHU 2010:12; TEKLU 2003:17). Due to this several death toll recorded as the result of absence of nearby health service center and/or shortage of transportation. Subsequently death rate increase among pregnant mothers and infants.

Koshe Town after the Liberation of Ethiopia under the Reign of Haile Selassie (1941-1966)

Soon after the Liberation the Imperial government occupied itself in rebuilding and improving the country. Among these reforms the decree which is known as The Administrative Regulation Decree of 1942 divided the country into the different administrative divisions (ABERRA 2015:49). Based on this reconstruction Mareko people enjoyed some political and social changes. Mareko *awraja*[14] (Sub-province) at its administration center at Butajira town composed its territory, part of Silte people, Meskan-Gurage[15] and Mareko people, under Arsi *kifle-hager*[16] (sub-country) (EDEMO 2006:59).

The post Liberation period brought two fundamental political changes among Mareko people; firstly formerly recognized land lord power ousted and newly emerged local chief replaced. This rearrangement on the power of land lording made based on their loyalty to the

---

[13]   A letter from Administrator of Shewa Sub-country to Mareko *woreda* (district) Administration Office Butajira, reference No. 7898/13861, 1967.

[14]   It is an administrative unit after *woreda* (district) which is equivalent to sub-province.

[15]   They are part of Gurage ethnic group identified by their dialect.

[16]   It is an administrative unit next to country which is equivalent to sub-country.

Emperor during the time Italian war and occupation. Consequently the former influential Medore clan of Burqamo family lost its land lording power after the then *qegnazmach*[17] Oshebe discharged and patriot *qegnazmach* Tujji Anjilo took the power (EDEMO 2006:59). Even if *qegnazmach* Oshebe had marched at Miychew Battle in the side of the Emperor his family member *gerajazmach*[18] Debo Agebo collaborated. Secondly the Imperial appointed officials of Mareko Sub-province at Butajira who learnt the collaboration of Mareko sub-district governor named *gerajazmach* Debo Agebo made important political change which isolated indigenous Mareko people from governorship and he was replaced by a men from Menz locality named Mulunh Biru (SINTAYHU 2010:10). As we have seen above the first power shift was based on loyalty, but the second sought complete distrust on indigenous population and the beginning of organized feudal administrative system in Mareko-land through direct involvement of land lord family members in holding governor position. Concerning this John M. Cohen and Peter H. Koehn stated that "…these entities were far from autonomous and largely operated through the network of subordinate field officials shifted by central government appointees" (according to ABERRA 2015:49).

Beside its attainment in vision merging and intensification of the national bureaucracies, the 1942 reform on administrative division was inefficient to address the mass demand on local Self- administration and economic development.

In responding this mass dissatisfaction the Imperial government made some reforms on the Local self-administration in 1966 (EDEMO 2006:59-60; according to ABERRA 2015:49-50). This reform changes some administrative forms on different Provinces of the country after the Local Self-Administrative Order No. 43 become functional. Accordingly, the former Mareko Sub-province rearranged and changed its name and its boundary. The newly included area was Sebat Bet Gurage which separated from their linguistic group Meskan-Gurage via mountain named Zebider, and the Sub-province renamed Gurage and Mareko. This newly arranged Sub-province also divided into two district administrative divisions; Mareko district and Gurage district, which was based on settlement rather than linguistic base. Then, Mareko District where most Mareko ethnic and linguistic groups live also divided in to three Sub-

---

[17]   It is one of the highest military titles. Literally means "who stands on the right of the king."

[18]   It is among the feudal military titles literally means "who stands on the left side of the king".

District administrative divisions; Dobenna Sub-District, Shershra Sub-District, and Lanfaro Sub-District (EDEMO 2006:59; informant: *Imam* Tuke Ela[19]).

After the 1966 administrative arrangement made on Mareko Sub-Province, Mareko District in which three ethnic and linguistic groups integrated; Mareko people, Meskan-Gurage people, and Silte people who live in Lanfaro Sub-District, the former border disputes on territorial claim among the identified peoples re-erupted and border clashes became part of life here and there (EDEMO 2006:59; informant: *Imam* Tuke Ela).

Officials of Gurage and Mareko sub-province and Mareko district become busy to solve the repeatedly raised border conflicts. Based on the 1966 the Local Self-Administrative order which gave powers for the local administrative arrangement in 1968 the Gurage and Mareko Sub-Province made some arrangements on the name and the boundary of the administrative division. Consequently Gurage and Mareko Sub-Province renamed Hykochenna Butajira Sub-Province, and its former boundary in western side excluded the Sebat Bet Gurage, and adds new area from Eastern side by including Ziway (Batu) and Shashemene where part of Arsi Oromo habitat (EDEMO 2006:59; informant: *Imam* Tuke Ela). Then the former habitats of Gurage and Mareko Sub-District Mareko people, Meskan-Gurage and part of Silte people remained under the rearranged administrative division. The site of this rearranged Sub-Province moved from Butajira to Ziway under Shewa *kifle hager* (EDEMO 2006:59; informant: *Imam* Tuke Ela).

Koshe Town during the Military (Derg) Regime (1974-1991)

Koshe town which has one *kebele* found at the bottom of administrative level under Meskanena Mareko district continued serving as the only socio economic and political center of Mareko people after the revolution. However the new government reforms which holds several proclamations and articles able to change important aspects of socio economic and political life of Mareko people mainly who habitat in Koshe town. Among these reforms 'the reconstruction and readjustment' on urban dwellers and urban structure has significant effect both on dwellers life and the growth of the urban areas. Accordingly urban dwellers formed a form of organization throughout the country. However the government used such

---

[19]   *Imam* is his Islamic religious title under which he is known more (*Imam* Tuke) than under his full name (Tuke Ela).

associations mostly for political consumption rather than changing the life of the dwellers and enhancing the growth of towns (BAHRU 2005:243). Towards the end of 1975 Koshe Urban Dwellers Association was formed and the residents were registered as member of the association by which their residence verified.

Koshe Urban Dwellers Association, which was headed by Koshe *kebele* manager, takes responsibility to implement every concerning reforms and decrees of the urban population. Withstanding the decree and reforms sometimes the association faced strong challenges to manage according to the decree. The most common challenges came across the business communities mainly house-letting and millers. The first was due to the decree on urban extra houses and also associated issues like house-letting[20] and its order, the second was the new reduced fixed service charge for milling.[21]

The direct or indirect involvements of the government hand on economic sect initially antagonize the government and business communities not only at the big towns but also in small towns like Koshe. Due to this in Koshe town there was problem in service providing private business sectors particularly after the Koshe Town Cooperatives Association (KTCA) fixed new service charge on milling.[22] Subsequently lost an opportunity to grow and display some fundamental urban features and stay at silence only with formerly established and started small private businesses.

The revolutionary government of Ethiopia which commonly known as Derg for the transformation of an existing and rearward economic condition of Ethiopia select major areas to give priority for coming plan of action. Among other major selected areas, the government found that the education system as a pressing area which needs immediate solution so that in February 1974 the 'Educational Sector Review' proposed (AHMED 2002:75; ALEMAYEHU – LASSER 2012:65). To eradicate illiteracy in Ethiopia by implementing the proposed plan the government issued a proclamation known as the National Work Campaign for Development through Cooperative, and in early 1975 can mobilize more than 60,000 students and teachers sending them all over the country for two year terms of service

---

[20] An accusatory letter from *Ato* Salo Agebo to Meskanena Mareko *woreda* Administrative Office, reference No. 1465/70, 1970 E.C (1978/79).

[21] An accusatory letter from Meskan *woreda* Administrative office Butajira to Koshe Town Cooperative Association Office Koshe, reference No. 120/69, 1969 E.C (1977/78).

[22] Ibid.

(WOUBET 2006:25; MAMMO 2006:7). The active participants in the Development through Co-operation Campaign were university and high school students, and teachers.

The Military regime worked toward a more even distribution of schools by concentrating its efforts on small towns and rural areas that had been neglected during the former regime. Like other parts of the rural population of Ethiopia the population of Koshe had been considered education as luxury and sought its coverage had restricted only for wealthy and upper class until the first Campaign students arrived at Koshe town.

The establishment of Peasant Association at the bottom of Administration division among the Koshe habitants and the arrival of university students for campaign against social backwardness under the slogan of "Education for All" played an active role in building schools and enhance the participation local people. Campaigners of University students as agent of expansion of education take skillful leadership in creating awareness among rural population of Mareko about the merits of educating children for both family and country. Regarding this Ahmed Hassen   marked that, the students, as well as their position as the organizers and coordinators of the scheme also contributed by giving important labor service (AHMED 2002:60).

The establishment of Peasant Associations beside, their former responsibility now takes additional task to facilitate and manage the expansion of education by enhancing members to actively participate in the whole process of the government plan on education by supporting the Campaigners. The members of Peasant Associations among Koshe town dwellers had multidimensional participation which included giving free labor service, putting their skill, donating ones' own land for building school, providing wood, and grass (AHMED 2002:60; informants: *Ato* Wuletaw Bezabhe, *Ato* Takele Balcha).

With technical assistance from the Ministry of Education, individual communities performed all primary school construction (WOUBET 2006:24; informant: inspector Edemo Kamilo). In large part because of such community involvement, the numbers of primary schools increase significantly in all regions (WOUBET 2006:24; informants: *Ato* Hailu Gagoro, inspector Edemo Kamilo). Subsequently the enrollment of children in school simultaneously increases with the growth of schools in Koshe where the Imperial government left only one school which was constructed by foreigners. However, the primary goal of the educational policy of Derg which gave more priority for the construction of primary schools had side effect on the expansion and construction of secondary schools side by side with primary schools in rural parts of the country (AHMED 2002:75). Due to this short coming of the policy until the collapse of the regime in 1991 there was no secondary school in Koshe town. Subsequently for Koshe children the accessibility of secondary school education was

determined by the economic potential of their families. So that students from well to do family, to whom basic consumption and other pre-conditions facilitated went far away from home to join secondary school at Ziway (informants: *Ato* Hailu Gagoro, inspector Edemo Kamilo). Due to this inaccessibility to continue their education beyond grade six most of Koshe students, during this regime particularly who was from economically disabled family forced to disrupt their school age.

Generally the scope of the expansion of education in Koshe only addressed primary education only up to grade six and most students' hope to sustain and join the following class distorted by the absence of accessible secondary school. Consequently Mareko people like other rural population of the country denied the right and chance to educate their children in producing capable of problem solving generation for the important socio-economic transformation.

Conclusion

Koshe town is the administrative and commercial center of Mareko *woreda*, which is found in Gurage Zone, Southern Nation Nationalities and Peoples Regional State. According to the tradition the origin of the name "Koshe" is originated from the plant which called by the name "Koshe" which abundantly grow in the area. The establishment of Koshe town is directly associated with the five years Italian occupation. Besides the obvious negative colonial rule, the short occupation and Italian rule played a part for the urbanization of Ethiopia. Italian colonial officers not only enhance the prior towns but also build new towns both for military camps and camps for road construction. The main objective of the building of Italian Military camp at Mareko land was to effectively control anti Italian movement made by Ethiopian patriots in the area. Then the former weekly market called Oshebe *meera* (Oshebe market) shifted its location and established around the Italian camp. Following the evacuation of Fascist Italian the Ethiopian governments control the area and the former enemy military camp become police station. (actually the camp still serves as Mareko *woreda* police station) During the government of Emperor Haile Selassie Koshe town got some important developmental programs. The most important development was the opening of the first school by the effort of the Swedes. The Military regime the so called Derg also provided important inputs for the urbanization of Koshe town. It was during the Military regime the first town dwellers association called Koshe Town Dwellers Association was established. The establishment of Koshe Town Dwellers Association by itself plays its role for enhancing the pace of urbanization rate of Koshe town.

Bibilography

ABERRA, Tesfaye (2015): *The Extent and Impacts of Decentralization Reforms in Ethiopia. PhD dissertation*, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Boston: Boston University.

AHMED Hasan Omer (2002): Close yet Far- Northern Shewa under the Derg. In Wendy James, Donald L. Donham, Eisei Kurimoto, and Alessandro Triulzi (eds.): *Remapping Ethiopia: Socialism and after*. Oxford, Athens, Addis Ababa: Ohio Univesity Press.

ALEBACHEW, Kemiso – HUNDAMO, Samuel (2010): *ye Hadiya Hizbe Tarik ena Bahel (The History and Culture of Hadiya People)*. Addis Ababa: Sefir Printing.

ALEMAYEHU, Bishaw – LASSER, Jon (2012): Education in Ethiopia: Past, Present and Future Prospect. In *African Nebula* 5, pp 53-69.

BAHRU, Zewde (2005): *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1991*, second edition. Oxford, Athens, Addis Ababa: Ohio Univesity Press.

BELETE, Negash et al. (2012): Evaluation of Farmers' "Markofana-Types" Pepper Genotypes for Powdery Mildew (Leveillula Taurica) Resistance in Southern Ethiopia. In *International Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences* Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 103-108.

BEHARESEBOCH, Meker Bet (2004): *Ye Debub Kelele Beharoch Behareseboch ena Hizeboch Profile* (*The Profile of South Nation Nationalities and Peoples*). Hawasa: Artistic Printing Enterprise.

DANIEL, Mekonen Yilma (2016): Managing Inter-Ethnic Conflict through Indigenous Institutions-case of Siltie and Mareko Communities in Southern Ethiopia. In *International Peace and Conflict Studies* 3 (1), pp. 66-73.

DERGU, Gemachu (2014): The Cause and Consequence of Population Migration from Rural to Urban in Koshe Town. BED thesis, Department of Geography and Human Society. Dilla: Dilla University.

EDEMO, Herego (2006): *Metē*: *Ye Libido/Mareko Behalena Tarik lay Yetedrge Tenatawi Tsehufe* (Metē: the Culture and History of Libido/Mareko People"). Paper Presented on Panel Discussion, Koshe.

HORVATH, J. Ronald (1968): Towns in Ethiopia. In: *Erdkunde*, Band XXII, pp. 42-51.

MEKDES, Dessie et al. (2018): Value Chain Analysis of Red Pepper: The Case of Mareko District, Guragie Zone, Southern Ethiopia. In *Agri Res & Tech* 17 (2), pp. 31-39.

MAMMO, Kebbede Shenkut (2006): *Ethiopia: Where and Who Are the Illiterate?* Education for All Global Monitoring Report, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

SINTAYHU, Worku (2010): A Socio Political and Economic History of Mareko People since 1936-1974. BA thesis, Department of History. Dire Dawa: Dire Dawa University.

STANDAGE, Tom (2005): *A History of the World in 6 Glasses*. New York: Walker Publishing Company Company.

TEKLU, Mulugeta (2003): Socio-Economic, Environmental, and Behavioral Factors Associated with the Occurrence of Diarrheal Disease among Under-Five Children, Meskanena Mareko Woreda, Southern Ethiopia. MA thesis, Department of Public Health. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University.

VIVECA, Halldin Norberg (1977): Swedes in Haile Selassie's Ethiopia, 1942-1952: A Study in the Early Development Co-operation. Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.

WORKU, Neda (2000): *Fanonet*: *Ethno-historical Notes on the Gurage Urban Migration in Ethiopia*. In: *A Journal of African Studies* 28 (2-3), pp. 43-73.

WOUBET, Kiffle Kassa (2006): Human Capital and Economic Growth in Ethiopia. MSc thesis, Department of Economics. Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University.

YEMANE, Berhane and et al. (2002): Gender, Literacy, and Survival among Ethiopian Adults, 1987-1996. In: *Bulletin of the WHO* 80 (9), pp. 714-720.

YOHANNES, Tesfaye (2017): A History of Mareko People-in Southern Ethiopia (1880s-1991). MA thesis, Department of History and Heritage Management. Jimma: Jimma University.

YONAS, Seifu – ZÁHOŘÍK, Jan (2017): Jimma Town: Foundation and Early Growth from ca. 1830 to 1936. In *Ethnologia Actualis* 17 (2), pp. 46-63.

Other sources

Population Census Commission, 2007, Koshe.

Pamphlet from Municipality of Koshe Town, 2005, Koshe.

Pamphlet from Mareko *woreda* Finance Bureau, 2005, Koshe.

Yohannes TESFAYE GETACHEW

A History of Koshe Town in South-Central Ethiopia from 1941 to 1991

Yohannes Tesfaye Getachew was graduated from Jimma University, Ethiopia in 2017 where he studied history and heritage management. His MA thesis is entitled "A History of Mareko people from 1880s to 1991 in southern Ethiopia". He was the first academician to write a history of Mareko people in south-central Ethiopia. He has a particular emphasis in ethnic interaction in South-central Ethiopia the case of Mareko people and their neighbors. Recently he was invited by Jimma university to present paper entitled "Ethnic interaction in South-Central Ethiopia-the case of Wayyu-Shannan of Arsi Oromo and Mareko people" on Annual Research Conference.

REPORT

Search for Indian America 4 [Hľadanie indiánskej Ameriky 4]. Conference Report

RADOSLAV HLÚŠEK

Department of Ethnology and World Studies,
University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia
radoslav.hlusek@ucm.sk

International conference known to the involved public as Search for Indian America, more precisely its fourth year, was hold on February 10-11, 2020 at the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava (UCM), Slovakia. The conference, which has become, as I dare to say, traditional reunion of mostly Slovak and Czech (but not only) Americanists researching on native American cultures, was organized again by the author of this report and Adam Uhnák from the Department of Ethnology and World Studies at UCM in cooperation with Center for Mesoamerican Studies at Comenius University in Bratislava.

Unlike the third year (2019) we, as the organizers, also welcomed two participants from other countries than Czech Republic and Slovakia, namely from Italy and Colombia, even though both affiliated to the universities in Czech Republic and Slovakia. After two years, however, the official languages of the conference (Slovak and Czech) were complemented by English and unofficially by Spanish, as well.

The two days long event, as usually brought together the contributions from various related disciplines such as ethnology, social and cultural anthropology, history, archaeology, religious studies and literature. Organizers also followed an intentional purpose of this conference and likewise previous years this one was not focused on any specific topic. In fact, as I wrote in the last year report, one of the main goals of the conference is to create a network of Slovak and Czech Americanists with ambition to ample it within the course of

REPORT

time more and more abroad. I can say that this goal is slowly getting achieved and the participants keep in touch and cooperate in different fields (conferences, workshops, research, papers, etc.) (HLÚŠEK 2019:127).

The fourth year was divided again in three panels, mostly reflecting the geography of American continent and its cultural areas (North America, South America, Mesoamerica), as well as the subjects of interest and topics of each presented scholar.

After the welcome address spoken by myself Miroslav Černý from University of Ostrava made his speech on topic *Vitalita a ohrožení jazyka západních Šošonů (The Vitality and Endangerment of the Western Shoshone Language)*. After him Lívia Šavelková from University of Pardubice took the word and presented her contribution under the title *Severoameričtí indiáni a jejich účast v olympijských hrách (North American Indians and Their Participation on Olympic Games)*. Martin Heřmanský from Charles University then took the attenders to the sphere of native music by means of his presentation called *Indiánský hip hop jako prostředek indigenního aktivismu (Indian Hip Hop as a Tool of Indigenous Activism)*. First block was concluded by Mesoamerican, more precisely Maya, contribution named *Význam a funkcia nebeského pásu v mayskej ikonografii (Meaning and Function of Skyband in Maya Iconography)*, which was presented by Jakub Špoták from Comenius University.

The second panel was completely Maya and all contributors were from Comenius University. It was opened by Jakub Adámek presenting his recent research in Guatemala under the name *Maíz sólo se come: poľnohospodárstvo vo Uaxactúne včera a dnes (Maíz sólo se come /The Corn Is Just to Eat/: The Agriculture in Uaxactún Yesterday and Today)*. He was followed by Nikol Quardová, whose presentation bore the title *Kakao – posvätná plodina Mayov (Cocoa – Sacred Plant of the Maya)*. Then Maria Felicia Rega made her speech on the topic of *Political and Social Dimension of Ballgame: a Comparative Analysis of Ballcourts Distribution through a Regional Perspective*, and the second block was concluded by Milan Kováč whose contribution was named *Mytologický vzor nebeskej jaskyne pri zakladaní mayských politických centier vo Uaxactúne, Guatemala (Mythological Pattern of Celestial Cave and Its Meaning in the Process of Foundation of Maya Political Centers in Uaxactún, Guatemala)*.

The last panel, which took place next day opened Monika Brenišínová from Charles University with her contribution called *Mexické kláštery 16. století. Čas a náboženské oslavy (16th Century Mexican Monasteries. Time and Festivities)*. Next two presentations were dedicated to the literature reflecting native cultures in Colombia. First one was presented by Lillyam Rosalba González Espinosa from University of Ostrava and its title was *The Legend*

REPORT

of El Dorado in Colombian Children's Literature. The second one, which closed the conference as such bore the title *Symbolika orla a jaguára v románe Mesto netvorov od Isabel Allende (Symbolism of the Eagle and Jaguar in the Novel City of the Beasts by Isabel Allende)* and its author was Roman Zaťko from Charles University.

The fourth year of Search for Indian America can be considered as successful (as well as the previous three years). It revealed that Slovak and Czech researchers on the field of native American cultures are interested in various topics and that their research contribute to the development of native American studies (not only) in both countries. The platform, which was created by the organizers four years ago enables the participants to share their experiences and knowledge and it is more than obvious that this kind of reunions makes sense. Hence the organizers are looking forward to seeing their colleagues next year again. The fifth year, however, will take place for the first time not in Trnava but in Pardubice, Czech Republic. The approximate time remains untouched – the beginning of summer semester in February 2021.

Bibliography

HLÚŠEK, Radoslav (2019): Search for Indian America 3 (Hľadanie indiánskej Ameriky 3). Conference Report. In *Ethnologia Actualis* 19 (1), pp. 127-129.

BOOK REVIEW

Mutual Impact: Conflict, Tension and Cooperation in Opole Silesia

ŠTEFAN IŽÁK

Department of Ethnology and World Studies,
University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia
stefan.izak@gmail.com

The book was written as a result of the research project "Conflict, tension, and cooperation. A case study of mutual impact between Opole Power Station and the community of Dobrzeń Wielki". The leader of the research team and editor of the book is Czech ethnologist Petr Skalník who has been conducting research in the region since 2006. The book deals with various aspects of life in the Dobrzeń Wielki (DW) commune in the context of the expansion of the Opole Power Station (OPS) and following the division of the DW commune. This commune was selected as a fieldwork area of the project that lasted from 2014 to 2017. The ethnically heterogeneous DW commune is located near the city of Opole in the Opole Silesia, also known as Opole Province (Województwo Opolskie), which is the smallest of all 16 polish regions.

The book is divided into seven chapters and written in English. Every chapter is written by a different author and deals with a specific research problem. Authors deal with socio-economic conditions of the commune, migration, intergroup relations, or social activities of women. All chapters are based on fieldwork results of authors. All authors gained valuable and interesting research material, which is processed with appropriate theoretical frameworks and methodology.

Petr Skalník starts the book with a short preface and introduction chapter. In the introduction, Skalník starts with a wider political context within which the expansion of OPS was realized.

BOOK REVIEW

Although the decision of the expansion of the OPS (using coal) is against the EU's climate objectives, it is in line with the Polish national energetic strategy. Skalník continues with the history of OPS. It has begun to be built in the 1970s, four blocks were finished and opened in the 1990s, and the new fifth and sixth blocks were being built from 2009 to 2019. People disagreed with the construction of OPS from the beginning, but they used to it, and OPS is a part of their commune and lives today. OPS brought new job opportunities, development to the region, and people have started to keep positive attitudes toward OPS. The big wave of disagreement within the commune started in 2016 when the new government decided to divide the DW commune and move OPS with five villages under the administration of the Opole city. The introduction contains all the necessary information about population, other research conducted in the region, and about OPS and the DW commune in a historical and political context.

The second chapter, written by Konrád Górny, deals with people's attitudes about OPS and its expansion. The expansion was not discussed with local people, so it was perceived in a negative light. Attitudes toward expansion were ambivalent at first. People were afraid of environmental pollution or higher migration of foreign labor force. It is hard to get a job in OPS, but on the other hand, OPS was paying taxes in the DW commune and produce cheap electricity. Despite this ambivalent relation, OPS is perceived as a part of commune a people are used to it. Now OPS pays taxes in Opole territory, which is lost for the DW commune's budget. The division of the DW commune is perceived as unfair by the population.

In the third chapter, Miroslav Marczyk analyzes the economic consequences of OPS on the local community and people's adaptive economic strategies. People started their small businesses with accommodation, gas stations, small shops (dominant are big supermarkets like Tesco, Dino, Biedronka). Safety and health consulting firms prosper because OPS offers them many opportunities. OPS brings many indirect investments and businesses in the region. Thanks to OPS, it became one of the most prosperous regions in Poland, but after moving, OPS to Opole's future is uncertain for the DW commune.

Marek Pawlak, in his chapter, writes about mobility and migration of the labor force to OPS. Many people from other Polish regions, Ukraine, and Belarus, work in OPS. The author analyzes their mobility patterns in the context of neoliberal capitalism. The locality is not understood as a limited geographical entity but as a complex flow of social, cultural, economic, and political phenomena. Migrant's mobility is fueled by economic rationalization. These migrants are usually people for whom migration is a crucial aspect of their life. They worked in other constructions around Poland and Western Europe. The author characterizes their way of life by terms of mobility, indifference, temporariness, and

BOOK REVIEW

flexibility. Migrants have only small contact with the local community, usually in shops. They spend most of their time at work and accommodation.

The women's aspects of migration are dealt with in the fifth chapter, written by Ewa Kruk. Kruk's analysis is embedded in the transnational / translocal mobility paradigm. Women are members of the host community and, at the same time, members of the community of origin. Migrating women change traditionally accepted gender roles. Research shows that mothers can fulfill their family responsibilities even when they migrate for work to OPS. Some of them migrate with families, some of them without them. Migrating women experience difficult family situations because they are not at home for the most time, but they are active subjects able to take care of their families economically, and they are in constant contact with families.

Another critical question is analyzed in the sixth chapter of the book. Marcin Brocki writes about intergroup relations in the DW commune. The main reference point of intergroup relation is the relation between Polish people and Silesians of German origin. Until 1990 German language and ethnicity were discriminated, but since 1990 revitalization of language and German culture has begun. There are still stereotypes and thinking in binary opposition "we" and "them" between Polish and German people, but there is no open conflict or strong tension between both groups. We can observe more mixed marriages, and a clear border between Germans and Polish people disappears. According to Brocki, local people think that German culture slowly disappears. The relation toward foreign migrants is also analyzed. Local people had concerns about their arrival, but concerns were unfounded, and there are no tensions between locals and foreigners. One of the reasons is that both groups do not have frequent contact between themselves.

The last chapter written by Monika Baer deals with the social activities of women in the DW commune in the dominant anthropological theory. Local women organized various activities in the community cultural center (CCC). They organized lessons about raising children, decoupage, and sewing courses. Women from sewing courses turned it into association and organized many local artist's workshops and events. A group of eight older women had a singing group, and they were singing local German and Polish songs. A local ensemble of majorettes attracts the attention of young people. All these activities were challenging local gender stereotypes about passive women, spending time at home, and doing housework. Baer writes that the activities of these groups help to preserve Silesian culture in the DW commune. Lessons about raising children and singing group canceled their activities when

BOOK REVIEW

OPS was moved to Opole because of personal reasons. Majorettes and artist's association continue in their activities with reduced financing.

The Whole book is an excellent case study of ethnography of late industrialism. Authors show the role of OPS in the shaping of community life from different perspectives. Various aspects of social reality in the DW commune show that OPS plays an essential role in the commune and creates a specific character of the region. Division of the commune and moving OPS to the territory of Opole may bring changes into the DW commune, and the future will show how seriously it will affect it, especially financially. OPS works with two more blocks, and migration from other Polish regions or countries like Ukraine and Belarus will probably continue. The book is valuable because it monitors the time when OPS was moved to Opole territory, and it captures the public's mood at that time. The book shows how one firm can shape the look of the whole region for many years. The results of the research can not be automatically applied to all industrial regions because every region is specific. However, it can be used as a guide or starting point for other similar research in the field of ethnography of late industrialism, not only in Poland.

Reviewed Literature

SKALNÍK, Petr (ed.): *Mutual Impact: Conflict, Tension and Cooperation in Opole Silesia*. Wrocław: University of Wrocław, 2018, 201 p. ISBN 978-83-939353-8-3.