

## PRESENTATION

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**T**he central theme of issue 121 of *Relaciones* is the subsistence crisis that occurred at the end of the Colonial period in New Spain. Life seldom unfolds without all manner of risks that envelop human beings in distress, fear, terror, anxiety and angst. The crises that the articles in this issue address constitute singular moments when existence is forced to change its course by encirclements of clouds of atmospheric violence that affect land, climate, health and co-existence. According to its etymology, the word crisis refers to decisive moments, unexpected situations in which life's elements come to a point that is at one and the same time definitive and defining, one where paths separate and the continuities of daily life are cut. Crisis, from the Indo-European *skeri*, suggests "cutting" and "separation" and thus evokes the irreversible decision that we define in the metaphor of the crossroads. The comfort that comes with civilization, and that is so often interpreted as progress, consists, broadly speaking, in both a rationalization of the powerful world of calamities and the superior forces that loom over humankind, and the unraveling of the laws of nature, as science has come to be conceptualized. Neolithic man personified all atmospheric and climatic phenomena by turning those powerful forces of nature into gods that they were then able to invoke, appease and endear themselves to in pursuit of self-protection, but the more rational man of New Spain shared the very same fears as his primitive ancestors and felt invaded by the same anxiety in the face of calamities of all kinds... earthquakes, epidemics, storms, drought and the resulting famine that filled people with such fear that, as in earliest times, they too transported their everyday life towards the heavens and their world to the domain of the gods, by imbuing their religious spirit

with a series of immediate practices endowed not only with a direct symbolism but also apotropaic powers with which they sought to assuage – through the purest and most natural ritualism – the ire of the gods that, they believed, was vented in the form of cataclysmic events. Truth be told, men have acted in this way in all epochs, creating myths to turn the dangers they face to the heavens, creating Olympuses and gods who will fight for and defend them. The mythologies of all cultures are born of precisely such personifications; thus the attitudes of people beset by perils that overwhelm them go from prayer to diversion, as the circumstances that inspired Boccaccio's *Decamerón* so clearly document. This is because the effects of any catastrophic event, be it an epidemic, an earthquake, a cyclone, a tempest, or a volcano, impact a people's spirit in the same way; they provoke the same blind terror in modern man as they did in our ancestors thousands of years ago. They paralyze us and jeopardize everyday life, fill it with uncertainty and bring mold a crucial role for decision-making. This issue of *Relaciones* examines the crises that affected New Spain in the late colonial period.

The first article, by Sara Ortelli, is entitled "Subsistence Crises and Cattle Rustling in Northern New Spain: San José del Parral (1770-1790)". It focuses on a series of interrelated themes: the drought, famine and mortality that scourged San José de Parral and their relation to cattle-rustling by Apaches and various other bands and multiethnic groups in the northern reaches of New Spain in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The study isolates the moments when the available documentation makes it possible to identify more intense periods of cattle-rustling in the province of Nueva Vizcaya, and attempts to elucidate the relationships among increases in animal theft, productive cycles in the agricultural and mining sectors, subsistence crises, the incidence of drought, outbreaks of epidemics, and crises of mortality. The analysis, which centers on the mining center (*Real*) of San José del Parral and its jurisdiction in the decades of 1770 to 1790, illustrates a means of documenting events that are apparently attributable to the blind forces of nature.

The study traces relationships involving the mortality curve from 1770 to 1790, the effect of productive cycles in agriculture and mining, and climatic variation in an effort to evaluate to what extent these factors coincided with periods marked by increases in cattle-rustling. A future

analysis must probe more deeply into the topic of epidemics as they relate to the case of San José del Parral in order to estimate how disease influenced demographics in this mining zone. What seems to be clear, the author holds, is that in the case analyzed the severe subsistence crisis that historiography has confirmed occurred in the mid-1780s preceded an increase in mortality that had occurred a few years before. Indeed, with 241 and 270 deaths, respectively, 1779 and 1780 are the years with the highest number of burials in the two decades reviewed. For the years 1778 and 1779, we have records of epidemics of smallpox and smallpox with measles in New Spain, references that indicate how the former besieged Parral in the months of May and June, 1780. Ortelli points out that we have not yet found qualitative data to indicate that the increase in the number of deaths in Parral in those years resulted from epidemics in the region; nor do parish records mention such events, as they rarely include the cause of death. Despite the dearth of data, however, there can be little doubt that epidemics were responsible. And it was upon this already debilitated population that the mid-century crisis descended, bringing on the dire effects that would be reflected in Parral's mortality rates until 1787.

The second essay is David Carbajal López' "The Years of Hunger in Bolaños (1785-1786): Mining Conflicts, Corn Shortages and High Mortality", in which he sets out to explain the high mortality rates recorded in the mining center of Bolaños during the so-called years of hunger in 1785-1786, in a setting characterized by localized mining disputes and corn shortages that affected large areas of central-western New Spain. The author analyzes the victims of that subsistence crisis on the basis of both global head counts and an analysis of the Christian and family names of the deceased. Carbajal López affirms that the agricultural crises brought on by drought and frosts, together with scarcity, speculation, high corn prices, social conflicts, migratory movements, hunger, disease and the high mortality that affected broad extensions of the territory and population of New Spain to different degrees in 1785-1786, are phenomena that have not been overlooked by late colonial historiography and that, indeed, have been examined from different perspectives. In this scenario, one can perceive at least three postures concerning the causality and impact of those agricultural crises on nutrition, disease and mortality in relation to the population: agricultural crises are the cause of

epidemics; alimentation does not play a central role in the recurring outbreaks of epidemics; and agricultural crises and their repercussions—corn shortages, inflated prices—may or may not coincide with the propagation of pathogenic agents or favor their development. The author arrives at the following conclusion, based on global counts of victims and his study of the families that lost members: in and of itself, hunger does not explain the increase in the number of deaths registered in Bolaños, though it did create the conditions that allowed certain contagious diseases—in the form of epidemic outbreaks—to impact, primarily, the adult population. Those illnesses made no distinction as to economic level or access to food, as several cases in which members of the local elite succumbed to pathogens are clearly documented.

In the third contribution, “The Impact of the Crisis on Two Rural Parishes and Population Movements, 1785-1787”, Cecilia Becerra Jiménez analyzes the impact of the crisis of 1784-1787 on the region now known as the Altos de Jalisco (Jalisco Highlands). The author delved into the parish records of two churches that are representative of that area (Santa María de los Lagos and Jalostotitlán) to show how, because of the crisis, the inhabitants of remote localities in the countryside came to settle in cities in an attempt to secure the resources they required to confront that alimentary and sanitary emergency.

The article concludes that migratory flows accelerated by demographic crises may either attenuate or aggravate the effects of high mortality, a finding that underlines just how important it is to study the few documental sources available as a means of deepening our analyses. In the case of the two parishes examined in her research, Becerra Jiménez found that the *pueblos de indios* were affected especially severely during the fatal two-year period of 1785-1786, not only by the loss of life as reflected in mortality rates that reached their highest levels in that century and affected both adults and children, but also by the exodus of people to other towns in search of relief. We cannot assume that recovery came quickly after that double impact; indeed, testimonies suggest that the “year of hunger” may represent the starting point of a migratory flow of people from the southern highlands towards Guadalajara, a topic that will have to be explored to determine whether or not it put an end to the epidemic and grain shortages.

The Thematic Section of this issue of *Relaciones* closes with an article by América Molina del Villar: "Santa María de Guadalupe, Atlacomulco during the Ill-fated Years of the Early 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Local Conflicts, Agricultural Crises and Epidemics, 1809-1814". Here, the author analyzes the impact of the agricultural crisis of 1809-1811 and the 1813-1814 typhus epidemic on the general curve of burials, baptisms and marriages in the parish of Atlacomulco. Her research shows that those were independent events that had differential effects on the population. Also, it reveals that typhus caused the largest number of deaths.

Molina del Villar's study came to this conclusion despite the fact that her original intention was to probe the relationship that has been posited among subsistence crises, famine and epidemic outbreaks on the basis of the demographic variable as a means of exploring to what extent the repercussions of these phenomena had immediate impacts on the number of burials, baptisms and marriages in that parish. A second objective was to contribute to the historiographical debate on the connections among subsistence crises, famine and the outbreak of epidemics. Finally, Molina del Villar sought to link those conjunctures of crisis with land disputes, an important antecedent of the local revolt that occurred in 1810. Her research shows that those problems followed on the heels of the agricultural crisis of 1809 and the 1813-1814 typhus epidemic, though it seems that the first of these two phenomena was not so severe. The typhus epidemic, in contrast, had a much greater impact. In addition to the deaths it caused, it markedly reduced the number of baptisms and marriages. The author concludes that the decade of 1810 was an ill-fated period for Atlacomulco, as the local uprising and insurgent movement were not the only scourges that plagued the population: the terrible typhus epidemic of 1813-1814 also sent thousands of people to their graves. That epidemic was one more result of the poverty and deteriorated living conditions of the people that compounded the effects of the conflicts and wars that occurred in that decade.

Turning to the Documents Section, we find Elizabeth Araiza Hernández presentation of her own transcription and translation of a lecture entitled "On the Relationships between Mythology and Ritual", delivered by Claude Lévi-Strauss on May 26 1956 at the French Philosophical Society. Her contribution includes the transcription of the interesting

debate that emerged from this presentation with the participation of several scholars who are now recognized as some of the greatest thinkers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Merleau-Ponty, Michel Leiris, Louis Dumont, Alfred Métraux and Jacques Lacan. The document containing both Lévi-Strauss' original lecture and the series of commentaries that followed was published in French in the same year in the *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie*, 50(3). Recently, Armand Colin Publishers placed a corrected version of the document on line on the Society's Internet site, where it can be found under the menu heading "Conferences". Spanish-speaking readers, however, only had access to an extract of the lecture and a fragment of the resulting debate. Today, the segment with Lacan's comments and Lévi-Strauss' response to them is being disseminated on several web pages under the title "The Significance of the Impossible", or "Lacan Dialogues with Lévi-Strauss". Also, this segment is included in Lacan's book *El mito individual del neurotic*, published recently in Spanish by Paidós.

This document shows that despite the wide diffusion that Lévi-Strauss' works have enjoyed, some significant writings have still not been published, at least not for Spanish-speaking audiences. Araiza Hernández takes as her starting point several postulates that justify the publication of this salient document: first, it has not been published in Spanish; indeed, both the complete version of the lecture itself and, more importantly, the thought provoking discussion that it triggered among attendees have been inaccessible to Spanish readers. Second, never in vain does one return to the classical authors; rather, the student always gleans some new learning as the debates raised provide elements for reflection that nourish contemporary discussions. Third, the constant emphasis placed on Lévi-Strauss' writings on the study of mythology have overshadowed his contributions to our knowledge of ritual. In light of the document presented here, some commonly held assumptions as to the central place often assigned to myth in his works will have to be relativized.

The General Section begins with the essay by Mariana Terán Fuentes, "Narratives of Loyalty. Zacatecas: From the Fortress

Walled by Its Vassals to the Republican City”, which expounds upon the uses of history by actors and institutions of the city of Zacatecas as a means of legitimizing monarchical government. Terán Fuentes analyzes mutations in the series of historical narratives that emerged during the transition period that involved the old monarchical regime, the formation of the First Mexican Republic, and the early years of that Republic. The article takes on the challenge of examining certain cultural expressions that sustained the Spanish and Mexican monarchical imaginaries by propagating narratives of loyalty. In particular, she is interested in elucidating the historical narratives that supported allegiance to the Spanish monarch, loyalty to the Anáhuac empire and the early signs of fealty to the nascent Mexican Republic. Also, the author strives to identify the nodes at which coherent histories (tales of loyalty) were forged to serve as supports for the construction of legitimacy. In short, she attempts to explain that the ruptures and continuities of loyalty on the plane of manifestation (discourses and rituals) were rooted in a long-standing tradition that elucidates, not the invention of new symbols and languages but, rather, their resemiotization and the resulting processes of reinterpretation. This essay responds to the challenge by exploring and analyzing discourses of different kinds in light of the central question of how historical narratives of loyalty were resemiotized and reinterpreted during the transitional period from the Spanish monarchical system to the first years of Mexico’s existence as an independent nation. Terán Fuentes is not interested so much in probing what is meant by loyalty, but in reexamining and reinterpreting the narrative uses that were formulated in accordance with a new hermeneutics that was bound up with the habitual cultural practices that supported such allegiance. The transition from the old order to a republican one allows us to compare not only the narratives of fealty and to document the ruptures and continuities that every shared imaginary presupposes, but also to assess the foundations of the formation of political languages that seek frameworks of legitimacy.

*Relaciones* 121 closes with the article “The Pottery Craft in Tlayacapan, Morelos: A Family Legacy of Technical and Organizational Knowledge”, by Patricia Moctezuma Yano. Here, the author explores a craft tradition that has lasted both over time and in the collective memory of its creators, thanks to several factors, of which pottery production in Tlayacapan brings to light two: first, the importance of certain norms related to social organization—such as residence, descent and succession—for the learning and continuity of this artisanal production; and, second, but interwoven with the first, the gamut of technical and work-related changes brought on by the development of a new rubric in ceramic production: ornamental figures. Thus, traditional motifs currently coexist with novel decorative pieces and provide those artisans with two distinct ways of preserving and developing their craft.

Despite the different options that Moctezuma’s research revealed with respect to variants in ceramic types, it can be said that the craftsmen who elaborate figures with an eye to satisfying demand in external markets, proudly strive to show the authenticity of their clay models as “typical of Tlayacapan”. Meanwhile, those who produce domestic wares recognize that the potters who make decorative clay figures enjoy certain technical and commercial advantages. Both discourses, however, clearly convey the idea that Tlayacapan pottery-making speaks to us of the coexistence of distinct knowledges related to ceramic production, traditional and modern, that are spreading to different artisanal regions around the world. Today, cultural consumption of ceramic objects is paying ever greater attention to tourism as a source. In this way, the tendency towards producing ornamental figures as souvenirs has an advantage in the globalized market, while the consumption of domestic wares is not so favored by tourist-driven consumption. The purchases and use of these latter pieces is subject to the continuance of certain customs that give meaning to the many celebrations to which large contingents of people are invited to eat.