

I'm Not an *India*, I'm a Tarahumara: Images and Narratives
by Rarámuri people in Ciudad Juárez

No soy india, soy tarahumara: imágenes y narrativas
de personas rarámuri en Ciudad Juárez

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ABSTRACT

The Mexican State has imposed to the Rarámuri an image of a group isolated from civilization and modernity. However, the community from Sierra Tarahumara does not recognize this as part of their ethnic identity. The aim of this article is to analyze the processes by which Rarámuri people living in Ciudad Juárez reconstruct their ethnic identity within the context of appropriating urban space. Feminist ethnography is used to analyze interethnic relations between the Rarámuri and *chabochi* (non-indigenous) populations in Ciudad Juárez, and the narratives based on images of the city captured by participants are analyzed. The findings show that the experiences of discrimination increase in downtown areas of Ciudad Juárez. However, for the Rarámuri inhabitants of Colonia Tarahumara or Kilómetro 30, the strong bonds of solidarity and collaborative pride within the artisan community helps them mitigate their second ethnicization and reconstruct their ethnic identity.

Keywords: 1. feminism, 2. ethnography, 3. indigenous peoples, 4. urbanization, 5. internal migration.

RESUMEN

El Estado mexicano ha impuesto a los rarámuri una imagen de aislamiento de la civilización y la modernidad que esta comunidad de la Sierra Tarahumara no reconoce como parte de su identidad étnica. El objetivo es analizar los procesos mediante los cuales los rarámuri que transitan por Ciudad Juárez reconstruyen su identidad étnica en contextos de apropiación del espacio urbano. Se utiliza la etnografía feminista para analizar las relaciones interétnicas entre las poblaciones rarámuri y *chabochi* (no indígenas) en Ciudad Juárez, y se analizan las narrativas basadas en imágenes de la ciudad capturadas por las personas participantes. Los hallazgos muestran que en el centro de Ciudad Juárez las experiencias de discriminación aumentan. Sin embargo, para los habitantes rarámuri de Colonia Tarahumara o Kilómetro 30, los fuertes lazos de solidaridad y orgullo colaborativo de la comunidad de artesanos les ayuda a mitigar la segunda etnización y a reconstruir su identidad étnica.

Palabras clave: 1. feminismo, 2. etnografía, 3. comunidades indígenas, 4. urbanización, 5. migración interna.

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1980s and 1990s, Mexico's northern border cities experienced an increase in their Indigenous population (Sariego Rodríguez, 2016). According to the State Commission for Indigenous Peoples (COEPI, for its acronym in Spanish), there are between 15 000 and 18 000 individuals of different ethnic groups living in 19 neighborhoods of Ciudad Juárez (Dgarcia, 2018). These Indigenous groups have become a permanent part of the city's diversity. However, due to the ethnic categorization of these populations as "Indigenous" by the Mexican state since the country's independence, which became more deeply rooted from the Mexican Revolution, Indigenous groups are frequently represented as temporary migrants from rural areas whose culture is better suited to a museum (Navarrete, 2004; Medina Ramírez, 2020). In this paper, the term *ethnic category* is used to refer to a homogenous categorization of Indigenous culture imposed by the government (Navarrete, 2004), and the term *ethnic identity* to refer to a process of self-identification, such as the Rarámuri people self-identifying as Rarámuri or Tarahumara (which was the name used by the Spanish).

The Rarámuri or Tarahumara are an Indigenous community originally from the Sierra Tarahumara in northern Mexico. The state has orchestrated a carefully curated depiction of the Rarámuri as isolated from civilization (Sariego Rodríguez, 2002; Pintado Cortina, 2020). Government institutions and private corporations have benefited from this objectification of the Rarámuri culture. In recent decades, both the national government and international industries have promoted the Rarámuri as an "intact" culture, untouched by modernity, as part of a tourism strategy in the Sierra Tarahumara. For example, government institutions, hotels, and adventure parks in the Barrancas del Cobre (Copper Canyon) use the image of the Rarámuri as their logo. However, this has resulted in the depletion of natural resources at the hands of national and transnational corporations, as well as forced expulsion from their lands.

According to Herrera Bautista (2010), media outlets often objectify the Rarámuri by speaking through the voice of the *chabochi*, a Rarámuri word meaning "sons of the devil" or, more broadly, "non-Indigenous people." This representation can also be observed in official government narratives. For example, the official webpage presenting the Chihuahua State Development Plan includes visual and textual references to Rarámuri culture while discussing topics such as the fight against corruption, the promotion of human rights, and democratic governance (Gobierno del Estado de Chihuahua, n.d.). These representations often portray the Rarámuri as endurance runners from the Sierra Tarahumara, reinforcing a cultural narrative centered on their remarkable stamina in long-distance running. Rarámuri runners are internationally recognized for their endurance, as demonstrated in events such as the California International Marathon in 2021. One widely known example is Lorena Ramírez, who competes in ultramarathons alongside members of her family. The term "Rarámuri" itself is often translated as "light feet," reflecting the cultural importance of running within their worldview.

Government discourse in Chihuahua often presents the state as modern and progressive, emphasizing commitments to social justice, development, and human rights (Gobierno del Estado

de Chihuahua, n.d.). At the same time, official narratives frequently highlight Rarámuri culture as part of the state's cultural identity. This representation is paradoxical, as the State simultaneously promotes development projects that contribute to the overexploitation of natural resources in Rarámuri territories. Thus, while Rarámuri identity is symbolically highlighted in official narratives, the material conditions affecting their communities continue to reflect longstanding inequalities and tensions over land and resources.

This paper examines Rarámuri ethnic identity, building on the central idea that Rarámuri in the Sierra Tarahumara reject the state's portrayal of them as an isolated, reclusive community. According to Martínez Ramírez (2017), walking along mountain trails connects Rarámuri with their ancestors, strengthening their worldview. This article aims to understand how Rarámuri who instead tread the asphalt of Ciudad Juárez (re)construct their ethnic identity, by exploring participants' photographs of the city. This paper examines how the Rarámuri reflect on their experiences living in Ciudad Juárez, using feminist ethnography to discern the interethnic relationship between Rarámuri and *chabochi*. The participants took photographs allowing them to self-represent and reflect on their narrative (Liebenberg, 2009). This visual approach, centered on participants' descriptions of their images, provides a deeper insight into what Acuña Gómez (2004) calls their identity construction processes. As a researcher, I had the opportunity to better understand the complexity of the (re)construction process of the Rarámuri ethnic identity in order to more accurately report their self-representations.

Background

Regarding the socioeconomic context in Ciudad Juárez from 1942 to 1964, the importance of the Bracero Program is worth noting, this was a binational agricultural agreement between Mexico and the United States which provided Mexican laborers with a temporary three to six-months contract in the U.S. (García Amaral, 2007; Loza, 2016). This program contributed to the rapid growth of Ciudad Juárez as one of the main border crossings for temporary agricultural workers. After the Bracero Program was dismantled in 1964, the Border Industrialization Program promoted in-bond assembly plants known as *maquiladoras*, under a special tax regime where raw materials and machinery were temporarily imported to Mexico for final assembly, with tax only payable on the value added. The final products are re-exported at low cost to their countries of origin, primarily the U.S., taking advantage of Mexico's cheap labor and lax environmental regulations (Carrillo & Zárate, 2009).

During the 1960s, the *maquiladora* program doubled the population of Ciudad Juárez (García Amaral, 2007), which welcomed thousands of migrants from all over the country, especially women and single mothers, seen by employers as the cheapest source of labor. Sánchez and Ravelo (2010) note that these migrant women working in *maquiladoras* were stigmatized as "*maquilocas*."² This massive influx of migrant workers, made up of working-class families and

² A portmanteau formed from *maquiladora* and *loca* ("crazy woman" in Spanish).

single women and men, mostly from Veracruz, Durango, and Coahuila, overwhelmed basic services and resulted in unequal access to public resources.

From 1990 to 2010, private businesses and government leaders failed to invest in the downtown area (Sánchez & Ravelo, 2010). Estimates by López Navarrete and Peña Medina (2017) suggest that 35 percent of buildings in the downtown area are in ruins, this was confirmed while conducting fieldwork. Instead of rehabilitating these spaces, the government—and especially the private sector—invested in subdivisions on the southern and western periphery of the city. These *colonias*, built for the *maquiladora* workers, are located far from downtown. One major problem is that these neighborhoods do not have enough schools, hospitals, or recreation areas.

From 2005 to 2012, some *maquiladoras* relocated outside of Ciudad Juárez, and people from those areas started to leave the city for lack of work, while levels of violence also increased (López Navarrete & Peña Medina, 2017). Today, many houses in the subdivisions of the southern and western periphery of the city are desolate and abandoned. Meanwhile, remaining residents have less access to social services, such as schools and medical care, and live in neighborhoods with higher crime rates (Sánchez & Ravelo, 2010; López Navarrete & Peña Medina, 2017).

Conceptual Framework Ethnic Identity

In Mexico, discussion of ethnic identity may appear straightforward: either you belong to an Indigenous group or you are a *mestizo* (non-Indigenous). That is what children learn in school. However, ethnic identity is a complex, socially constructed process that reflects on how colonial histories, *mestizaje*, and Indigenous resistance have shaped narratives of belonging—ethnic identity becomes a site of negotiation and transformation (Navarrete, 2004). First is the process of colonization, which changed the social order of Mexico's Indigenous and African groups, creating a racially hierarchical society that positioned the Indigenous and Afro-Mexican identity as the “other,” at the bottom of the hierarchy (Quijano, 2007, 2014). The second crucial juncture that explains why Indigenous peoples face exclusion and discrimination is the creation of the Mexican nation-state (Knight, 1990).

In the 20th century, Mexican authorities—both government and intellectuals—constructed the idea of race mixture to eradicate racial divisions and unify the country (Warren & Sue, 2011), and erase any other unwanted ethnic identities in the country, such as Afro-descendants and Chinese and Jewish immigrants (Navarrete, 2004). The state created the ethnic category of *mestizo* as the dominant group, using an ideology of superiority to justify the displacement and land dispossession of the Indigenous groups, creating *regiones de refugio* that compelled many Indigenous communities to move to more rural and mountainous areas to avoid contact with *mestizos* (Navarrete, 2004). The Rarámuri were forced to live as foreigners in their own land when the government sold this land to national and transnational corporations to build hotels and an airport in Creel (Köhler & Ebert, 2015; Pintado Cortina, 2020).

In Mexican identity, historical Indigenous peoples are admired and seen as the “real soul” of Mexico. However, to participate in modern society, access better economic opportunities, and avoid discrimination, Indigenous communities have often been expected to acquire a mestizo culture—by speaking Spanish and modifying their traditions. The idea behind *mestizaje* was for Indigenous groups to adopt mestizo culture, rather than the other way around, and it promoted the notion of a homogeneous Indigenous identity. However, Indigenous peoples in northern Mexico have distinct social, economic, family, and cultural dynamics compared to those in other regions. Colonialization occurred more than a century later in the North than in central and southern Mexico (Navarrete, 2004).

Their lifestyles prior to colonialization were different, too. Indigenous groups in the North did not have the same hierarchical societies as in central Mexico, and they were seminomadic due to the desert environment, which made it harder to rely on farming. Therefore, understanding the unique historical and social contexts of each of these groups is essential to avoid homogenizing Indigenous groups in Mexico; it is these historical distinctions that result in differences in interethnic relationships and the formation of Indigenous ethnic identities (Menchaca, 2001; Navarrete, 2004).

Second Ethnicization

According to Oehmichen (2001), Indigenous groups in large cities undergo a second process of ethnicization. The second ethnicization is the process of highlighting Indigenous peoples as part of the glorious past during the 1920s push for unity. However, Indigenous communities are stereotyped as belonging to rural areas, preventing them from being viewed as city dwellers. When individuals from ethnic groups live in urban areas, they are targeted as outsiders, generating discrimination and exclusion. Social interaction between Indigenous peoples and *mestizos* increases in cities, but daily coexistence does not diminish the hierarchical relationships between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

In her research on the Mazahua in Mexico City, the same author found that neighborhoods inhabited by Indigenous communities are criminalized and discriminated against due to the ethnic identity of their residents (Oehmichen, 2001). The government and the media portray the Indigenous as “dangerous” due to their supposed drug addiction and alcoholism. This representation of Indigenous communities has helped justify the expulsion of Mazahua communities from certain areas of Mexico City (Oehmichen, 2001). According to Herrera Bautista (2010), the Rarámuri in the state of Chihuahua experience a similar negative representation by social and mass media. Most news items about the Rarámuri concern high rates of alcoholism, drug use, and domestic violence. For example, a newspaper report published during the COVID-19 pandemic decried the ease of access to alcohol among young children from eight-to-ten-years old and the inaction of authorities to prevent alcohol use at such an early age (Niños tarahumaras, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Feminist ethnography was used, which requires that the researcher spend considerable time as a participant-observer in the community under study. Feminist ethnography incorporates social justice into research and enables a focus by researchers on their own and others' power relations, especially in cultural contexts that recognize ethical responsibility to the community (Visweswaran, 1994; Lengel, 1998; Schrock, 2013). Feminist ethnography guides the approach to participant interactions and requires researchers maintain awareness that both the researcher and the researched are agents that hold power in different ways. Hence, it calls for researchers to constantly reflect on their role in the community (Plankey-Videla, 2012). Reflexivity permeates all stages of research, including asking questions, interpreting the data, writing, and researcher responsibility for how the research product affects the subjects themselves.

Using feminist ethnography heightened my awareness of my position as a non-Indigenous woman. It also allowed for the flexibility to handle both my own multiple identities—as a light-skinned Mexican woman with U.S. citizenship, and single mother of two in my early 30s—and the complex identities of the Rarámuri during our interactions. Indeed, being a single mother helped me forge friendships with a couple of Rarámuri women in Colonia Tarahumara, with whom I still have contact. On the other hand, being a non-Rarámuri woman did not facilitate social interactions with Rarámuri men. They were shy and gave me short answers without many details. Men did not feel comfortable participating in the interviews, and they did not take part in any of the Municipal Women's Institute (IMM, for its acronym in Spanish) activities in Colonia Tarahumara, generally maintaining a low profile.

The interviews began in May 2019 and paused in late March 2020. The interviews continued from May 2021 to September of that same year. All the interviewees were over eighteen years of age. Pseudonyms were used in all the interviews and field notes to protect confidentiality. Almost all the interviews were recorded (except for two male participants who preferred not to be recorded). Out of the interviews conducted, twenty-eight of them were in Spanish, and two interviews were in Rarámuri, the latter required the services of an interpreter. The first participants were the people from the IMM and basketball practices, and then they asked their friends and family if they wanted to participate. I used snowball sampling, which resulted in 30 Rarámuri (25 women, five men).

Participants were asked to use a disposable camera to take photographs of the places and objects that were important to them. Sixteen interviewees (fifteen Rarámuri women, one Rarámuri man) participated and at the end I collected a total of 243 images. However, some of the pictures were blurry and could not be used. This left 208 images that were analyzed for ethnic identity processes. Then, each individual who had taken photographs was met with to discuss the meanings and interpretations of their pictures and their surroundings. They were not told what to focus on to allow them the freedom to choose anything that they wanted to photograph. I did, however, caution all participants that they should be careful not to take photographs in dangerous situations or when

people did not consent or were unaware they were being photographed. In particular, the importance of consent in photography was stressed to all participants.

The interviews and field notes were transcribed and coded with qualitative Atlas.Ti software. The most frequently recurring themes were quotidian spaces (such as streets and public spaces like churches and parks) and feelings of discrimination and pride. The pictures were selected by coding the narratives from the photographs, interviews, and ethnographic notes. Participants received a Walmart gift card for 250 MXN (15 USD) for participating. Participants kept the physical pictures and I kept a digital copy.

Feminist ethnography gave me the tools and knowledge to handle certain situations, such as sexual harassment. This is something that sociologist ethnographers do not address very often, which can lead to the feeling that as researchers, we lack a safe space to talk about some of the dangers that can affect our mental and physical health during our fieldwork, out of a belief that doing so would not be professional (Hanson & Richards, 2017).

I interviewed “Esteban,” a middle-aged man working in construction and apple harvesting. Before the interview, he joked with his friends about having the interview on a nearby hill called *Cueva del amor* (Love cave). Then his friends, all Rarámuri men, burst out laughing and explained that some couples used the hill for some private time together. Esteban agreed to be interviewed at the local park, but once the interview was underway, several times he insisted on moving away from Colonia Tarahumara towards the Love cave. I felt uncomfortable and decided to finish the interview before completing the questionnaire. After this experience with Esteban, I stopped trying to interview more men. I wanted to avoid exposing myself to any more sexual harassment, a term that was not used in field notes. But thanks to Hanson and Richards’ (2017) study, I now refer to that encounter as “sexual harassment” with no fear of not appearing professional.

Ethnographic data was collected in Colonia Tarahumara in May 2018. The women’s basketball team in Colonia Tarahumara needed a coach, so I asked Mariela, a friend of mine and physical education teacher, to help out. Mariela and I trained the team from June to August. I conducted fieldwork at the IMM from January 2019 to late March 2020, when the pandemic made it impossible to continue. They allowed me to teach English because many Indigenous students were studying middle school, high school, and college and taking English classes. The IMM requested funding from the U.S. consul in Ciudad Juárez to help cover costs including books, pencils, and two field trips. This funding was received 2 months after the English classes began.

The IMM grew out of the violence experienced by the women of Ciudad Juárez, a city that gained notoriety in the 1990s for the huge number of missing and murdered women, known as “*Muertas de Juárez*” (“Dead Women of Juárez”) (Fregoso & Bejarano, 2010). In 2014, the IMM was created to implement public policies that promote women’s holistic development and political, economic, social, and cultural participation in the city (Instituto Municipal de las Mujeres [IMM], n.d.). The IMM offers mental health support and legal advice for women who have suffered violence, in addition to self-defense courses for elementary and middle school girls, among other free services. In 2016, the institute opened an Indigenous department responsible for promoting

Indigenous diversity, which organized two large festivals downtown and provided local permits to sell Indigenous crafts behind the cathedral.

RESULTS

Colonia Tarahumara

Colonia Tarahumara dates back to the 1990s when some families from different parts of the Sierra Tarahumara got together to build the neighborhood in Ciudad Juárez. It was built in the form of a snail, with all the homes positioned around the church in the center. “Linda” was a student of English at the IMM. Through her daughter, Linda’s mother—who did not speak Spanish and preferred not to be interviewed—explained that the Rarámuri community began to use the name Colonia Tarahumara because that was how the *mestizos* referred to them. They agreed to restrict the neighborhood to fellow Rarámuri; *chabochi* were excluded as a protective measure because they believed that the *chabochi* “talk a lot and take advantage” (Lara Padilla & Vera Pérez, 2019, p. 83).

The only exception to this rule is the ex-Franciscan priest, Jesús Vargas. According to “Lulú”, a twenty-nine-year-old single mother of two who has just completed her high school diploma and is part of Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro (“Young People Building the Future”) at the IMM, Jesús Vargas was a priest in the Sierra Tarahumara for many years, and the Rarámuri trusted him enough to ask for his assistance. He helped build the neighborhood and so was permitted to live there. When he got married, his wife and two children also lived in Colonia Tarahumara.

Recent Indigenous studies have discussed the importance of place in building a strong community to mitigate the second ethnicization in receiving cities. González Zepeda and Zentella Chávez (2019, p. 27) used the term “symbolic identification” to describe their community’s affective feeling and pride when Indigenous communities work together for the common good in their new location. These scholars interviewed young Mazahua, Nahua, and Otomi who migrated to Tacubaya, in Mexico City, to understand how they appropriated their new spaces, forming a strong coalition that helped them to navigate new social identities (González Zepeda & Zentella Chávez, 2019).

Köhler and Ebert (2015) explained how ethnic identity is not static, and thanks to that flexibility, it is possible for Indigenous communities to redefine and reconstruct their Indigenous identities. They interviewed 15 different Indigenous groups that migrated to Mexico City and belonged to the Assembly of Indigenous Migrants (AMI, for its acronym in Spanish), an organization that aims to create a safe place for members of Indigenous peoples to express their traditions and reformulate their ethnic identities in the city. They claim that having a place to share traditions, such as traditional dress, holidays, and customs, and organize community work helped them introduce changes to some of their traditions to create new combinations and redefine what it means to be Indigenous in the city.

This study finds a similar dynamic among the Rarámuri in Ciudad Juárez. Through their photographs, research subjects defined and defended what it meant to be Rarámuri in Ciudad

Juárez. Some Rarámuri shared feelings of pride, building a sense of self-esteem based on close-knit community ties in Colonia Tarahumara, where *chabocho* are not permitted to live. However, not all Rarámuri felt this same pride. For example, some did not want to take pictures, claiming that there was nothing beautiful in Colonia Tarahumara to photograph.

One essential aspect of the Rarámuri ethnic identity process in Colonia Tarahumara is symbolic identification. According to González Zepeda and Zentella Chávez (2019), symbolic identification is related to affective processes such as pride and interactive behaviors in their new location. The Rarámuri who live in Colonia Tarahumara enact a strong feeling of pride in the neighborhood. They have been working together to improve the community, creating a strong bond between community members that is lacking among the Rarámuri living in Kilómetro 30 or elsewhere.

Thanks to community work and support of various kinds, they now have a church, library, park, community dining room, kindergarten, and elementary school, as well as a rudimentary basketball and soccer field. All participants from the community took pictures of the church and the park and commented that they were very proud of these spaces because of the community work that had gone into building them. “María,” in her late 20s, worked at a *maquiladora* during the week and as a domestic worker on weekends. She had been married for over five years, with no children. At five years old, María was one of the youngest children to arrive at Colonia Tarahumara and she was proud of all the improvements in the neighborhood. She took the following photograph of the church (Photograph 1).

Photograph 1. Church of Colonia Tarahumara



Source: Taken by María, 2019.

There was nothing but houses made out of wooden pallets, and we had to work to build the church and the park in the Colonia. We have had help. Well, a lot of us have. For example, when [the first families] arrived here, there were like ten families, and they started to come little by little. More Rarámuri came here because they had nowhere else [to live]. It was nice because—for example, the church, which we built ourselves—all of us in the *colonia* sold *pinole* in different churches to build our church. That is why the windows are made of glass bottles. (María, personal communication, June 24, 2019)

For María, like many other participants, the church is an essential part of Colonia Tarahumara. Building the church as a community gives it meaning and allows the Rarámuri to feel they belong to Colonia Tarahumara. The church is a replica of a church in the Sierra Tarahumara, so the construction process meant working as a community to reproduce it (González Lobo, 2011). Lulú is another Rarámuri woman who mentioned the importance of the church and the park. She worked six days a week cleaning houses and took the following picture from the entrance to Colonia Tarahumara. In the background, “The Bible is Truth” can be read on the left slope of the hill. The park and the church featured most frequently in the pictures taken by participants from Colonia Tarahumara. As shown in Photograph 2, the park can be seen on the right.

Photograph 2. Colonia Tarahumara



Source: Taken by Lulú, 2019.

The park has been around for several years; we didn't have a park before then. But, in part, the community also noticed what we needed. They all saw that we needed a park and some people donated that... I can't remember because it was many years ago. It's still there [...]. There are many Rarámuri children because it is surrounded by Rarámuri houses, and if the kids are in the

park, you can see them outside and see that they are okay. And if they fight, then you can intervene. (Lulú, personal communication, September 1, 2019)

All the families living in Colonia Tarahumara know each other, helping mothers to feel more secure about their children's lives. The fact that everyone there shares the Rarámuri ethnic identity means that Rarámuri women feel safer there than they do outside the community. For example, "Beatriz," a married woman in her early 30s and mother of two, mentioned that before moving to Colonia Tarahumara—ten years previously—she had been living in downtown Ciudad Juárez, where she had found it challenging to have non-Rarámuri neighbors. She described her experience as follows:

When I lived outside Colonia Tarahumara, whenever I passed [the *chabochi*] by, they mocked me, turned around, and said things to each other. I never felt comfortable. I sensed I was a stranger. Now it's different. Now, I think I belong here because here in the *colonia*, everyone is Rarámuri, and nobody gives you a nasty look. We all have the same customs, and well, no one discriminates against anyone. (Beatriz, personal communication, June 30, 2019)

Living in Colonia Tarahumara allows Rarámuri to create a sense of belonging in the city. Since they work as a community unit for their collective well-being, it is also essential for them to live in a community where everyone shares an ethnic identity. This allows them freedom from discrimination, at least within their community. The Rarámuri of Colonia Tarahumara can relax and enjoy a sense of belonging in the park or church, or just when associating with their neighbors. They do not have to worry about their children or loved ones.

Kilómetro 30

The second Rarámuri community lives at Kilómetro 30, south of Ciudad Juárez, which is currently home to 21 families—fewer than Colonia Tarahumara, where around 90 families live—(Cortez, 2018). Kilómetro 30 was founded around the same time as Colonia Tarahumara but does not have the same snail shape. The residents are working-class *chabochi* because it is not a closed neighborhood; anyone can live there. That is one of the reasons why the Rarámuri living in Kilómetro 30 have not worked together to build a church or a park like in Colonia Tarahumara. Some families living in Kilómetro 30 have relatives in Colonia Tarahumara and they meet up on holidays. "Fátima," an ex-volunteer in Colonia Tarahumara who helped children with their homework, noted that Kilómetro 30 was very far from the city, and that because the *chabochi* did not know where it was, Kilómetro 30 did not receive the same help as Colonia Tarahumara.

Urban mobility was one of the most important issues for all participants, but was especially critical for Rarámuri living in Kilómetro 30. Public transportation, known as *la ruta* in Ciudad Juárez, allows people to move throughout the city fairly quickly compared to travel times in the Sierra Tarahumara. "Astrid," the daughter of "Serafina," is a young single mother of two children. She lives with her mother in Kilómetro 30, where her children were born. She works at a maquiladora producing electrical components for auto parts and appliances. She uses *la ruta* every weekday to commute to

work. On weekends, she helps her mother sell crafts behind the cathedral, which requires a three-to-four-hour round trip on *la ruta*.

When Astrid's mother, Serafina, lived in the Sierra, the closest towns were San Juanito and Creel, where she also used to sell crafts, but which required a two-day trek on foot. The long distances in the Sierra were one reason why she moved to Ciudad Juárez. Now, Serafina is happy with her home even though she lives far from downtown. As shown in Photograph 3, Astrid documented the company-provided transportation she relies on daily for her commute to the *maquiladora*.

Photograph 3. La Ruta



Source: Taken by Astrid, 2019.

I took a picture of *la ruta* (the bus) that takes us to and from work every day. I haven't visited Tehuerichi, my mother's town, for four years and whenever we went, what I didn't like was that there were no stores and everything was far away. If you want something you can't pop out and buy it. But here [in Ciudad Juárez], although we live far away, we take *la ruta*, and it takes us where we want. I was born in Juárez, and I cannot imagine my life anywhere else. (Astrid, personal communication, November 10, 2019)

The local government inaugurated the Ser Fronterizo monument in 2019 in southern Ciudad Juárez, intended to represent the identity of the residents of Ciudad Juárez (*juarenses*). The artist, Jorge Alejandro Pérez Mendoza, split a *ruta* bus in half and decorated it with graffiti. Recio Saucedo (2020) remarked that the southern and western parts of Ciudad Juárez, where new migrants and *maquiladora* workers lived, did not have monuments, in stark contrast to the middle and upper-class north, which is why this was a meaningful symbol for the residents of these areas. *Rutas* are used by the working class for their daily commute and are provided free of charge by *maquiladoras*, so they

have come to take on a symbolic meaning associated with the working class. At the same time, *rutas* represent mobility for the working class in their daily lives in the city. In Astrid's case, public transportation is an integral part of life and reflects a similar connection to newfound opportunities in the city.

Urban mobility was not exclusive to Rarámuri in Kilómetro 30. "Alma," a middle-aged Rarámuri woman and single mother of three, had migrated to Ciudad Juárez nine years earlier to support her young children. She did not live in Kilómetro 30 or Colonia Tarahumara. Alma was able to sell her crafts and products downtown near her house in the city. When she lived in the Sierra Tarahumara, she had to walk for over an hour and a half to the nearest town to sell her products and buy food.

As some of the participants mentioned while conducting fieldwork, life at the border is hard, but life back home in the Sierra is more complicated. Even though some of the participants would like to live in their towns, they stated that it would be impossible to return due to a lack of employment and mobility to access necessities. Alma noted that in the city, you can move around on the "*ruta*" bus instead of walking, but you also have little social mobility. Alma never went to school when she was a girl; she did not know how to read or write. In Ciudad Juárez, she has procured formal education for her children, which would have been very difficult in the Sierra due to the long distance from schools.

However, not everything about urban mobility is positive for the Rarámuri women. Even though they acknowledge the benefits of relatively cheap and fast transportation, they mention how difficult it is to navigate the *chabochi* space. Much of the time, *chabochi* are racist and sexist toward these Rarámuri women who commute using public transportation. For example, "Ana," a single mother of three girls who works in a maquiladora, mentioned that she had experienced sexual harassment from *chabochi* men. She was ashamed of everything the *chabochi* had said to her and did not want to repeat it. She is most frequently referred to as *india* by the *chabochi*. "I always respond that I am not an *India*, I am a Rarámuri." This is an example of how the myth of *mestizaje* promotes the exclusion of Indigenous groups from the North of Mexico; the state represents the Aztecs as the ancestors of Mexico and the Rarámuri do not feel that they belong to that representation of Indigenous communities.

Racialized City

Oehmichen (2001) asserts that Indigenous groups in large cities experience a second ethnicization that results in discrimination. The Rarámuri are no exception. This second ethnicization is felt more in downtown Ciudad Juárez than in other areas of the city. An example of this occurred in 2016, when Rosalinda Guadalajara, the Rarámuri community leader of Colonia Tarahumara, experienced exclusion and discrimination due to her ethnic identity. She and her coworkers from the IMM went to celebrate at the Kentucky Club, the oldest cantina in Ciudad Juárez, where the owner claims to have invented the margarita (Moreno, 2014). Besides being a popular bar, Kentucky is famous for having served Marilyn Monroe, Bob Dylan, and many other American celebrities. The bar is still open and has historically drawn tourists to the downtown area, although recently, fewer visitors from the United States venture south due to the threat of crime (Moreno, 2014). The local government of

Ciudad Juárez promotes the Kentucky Club through the Chamber of Commerce as an essential part of the city's history.

Rosalinda publicly denounced the Kentucky Bar for denying her entry. Despite being a public figure and working at the IMM as a community promoter, she was a victim of discrimination. Rosalinda described her experience in this English transcript published in the newspaper *Borderzine*:

It was my first time going to that place [Kentucky Club]. I always saw it was more for tourists. When we arrived, the guard [...] tells us that there was no more space [...]. My friends began to say, "but the place is empty." Then he starts saying [...] that it was because I had brought sandals, I could not pass because if a bottle fell, there could be an accident. That was when they told us no, "as long as you come with her you do not enter, and if they were going to enter then she had to change first." And there I told the boy, "I told you they weren't going to let us in. Welcome to the world of the Rarámuri, this is what we face every day." (Borderzine Staff, 2020)

"What can Rarámuri who are not in the public eye expect?" Rosalinda asked me when we talked about her experience in the bar. I had no words at the time and was overcome by guilt since it was a bar I frequented myself. As a doctoral student, I remembered reading this story in the news during my first year at Texas A&M. Later, some Facebook friends published dozens of posts criticizing the bar for denying entry to Rosalinda Guadalajara. The next day, the Kentucky Club closed because Rosalinda filed a suit against them, but it reopened after a couple of days. After that, I heard no more news about this story, so I asked Rosalinda what happened after the complaint had been filed.

I didn't ask for much [a public apology from the owner], because I am the representative of my community. It would not hurt me if I were not the community leader. However, if they are doing [this] with the leader, what are they doing to others who are not public figures? (Rosalinda, personal communication, January 18, 2020)

Even though Rosalinda was with coworkers from a local government institution, she suffered discrimination. Rosalinda's case is one example of the high levels of discrimination faced by the Rarámuri in the city. Rosalinda is concerned for Rarámuri women as she is aware of the discrimination against them. In Ciudad Juárez, participants remarked that they preferred not to enter restaurants or supermarkets to avoid mistreatment. The majority reflected on how sometimes, at places like Walmart, Soriana, or S-Mart (grocery store chains in Mexico), security guards assume they are begging or asking for *korima* (in the Rarámuri language, means "sharing").

In the Sierra Tarahumara, it is a tradition to ask relatives, neighbors, or friends for *korima* during an economic crisis. The guards tell the Rarámuri women that panhandlers are not permitted to enter. Some of these women reply, "I do not come to ask for *korima*. I come to shop." Other women never go to malls or international stores to avoid interaction with *chabochi*. They prefer to buy groceries and whatever else they need downtown, where there are more informal, open-air markets, as opposed to large malls or international stores. However, discrimination and exclusion are part of their daily lives, even downtown.

Alma works as an informal street vendor and lives near downtown. For people with informal jobs—such as selling candy or crafts on the street—downtown is the most convenient place, with easy and cheap transport links around the city. In addition, the downtown area is more permissive of street vendors. However, Alma remarked that she was subject to discrimination on a daily basis whenever she went anywhere downtown:

What I do not like here [in Ciudad Juárez] are the people who sometimes disrespect or begin to discriminate against you. You enter a place, and they begin to murmur one in front of the other, saying, ‘Well, what are they doing here?’ You cannot go anywhere because they start laughing amongst themselves and you feel bad. (Alma, personal communication, October 5, 2019)

Alma’s comment is another aspect of the second ethnicization, where ethnic groups experience exclusion in cities because Indigenous people are expected to inhabit rural, not urban, areas. Alma notices how people gossip about why she lives in Ciudad Juárez, making her feel like an outsider unwelcome in the city. All Rarámuri participants described how *chabochi* used the derogatory term *india* or *indio* to offend them. As shown in Photograph 4, Alma captured the downtown park that commemorates Juan Gabriel.³ She mentioned that although she had lived in Ciudad Juárez for more than eight years, she had never been to the Gran Plaza Juan Gabriel. She was surprised to find it was clean compared to other downtown areas. The park was relatively new, having been built just one or two years previously.

Photograph 4. Photo of Downtown



Source: Taken by Alma, 2019.

³ Juan Gabriel was a famous Mexican singer who lived in the city and was memorialized with a park.

While conducting fieldwork, most participants identified as Rarámuri or Tarahumara. Still, very few participants identified as “Indigenous,” a pan-ethnic category. Participants who work or interact with the IMM sometimes said they were Indigenous people but never identified as *indios* due to the negative connotation of this word. Some Rarámuri even say that “Indians” (*indios*) are the Aztecs. For instance, Michelle, a Rarámuri woman who does not live in Colonia Tarahumara or Kilómetro 30 and sells candy downtown at night, explained: “Whenever [the *chabochi*] call me *india*, I reply, ‘I’m not an *india*, I’m a Tarahumara. Indians wear feathers. I don’t wear feathers.’” History books, museums, and mass media like soap operas (*telenovelas*) and movies have continually portrayed the Aztecs, an essential part of the ethnic category as Indigenous imposed by Mexican government, with their traditional dress adorned with feathers (Navarrete, 2004).

Ethnic Identity as Artisans

In 2010, the local municipal government gave several Indigenous groups (the Rarámuri, Mixtec, Mazahua, Huichol, and Zapotec, among other communities) permission to set up craft stalls behind the cathedral downtown. Serafina, a single mother of three young adults, was in her forties and had lived in Kilómetro 30 for twenty years. She had one fixed place to sell herbs, traditional Rarámuri dress, and handicrafts behind the cathedral. For the last ten years, since acquiring this stall, Serafina had not suffered the same levels of discrimination. She mentioned that before having the cathedral stall, when she peddled on the streets, the *chabochi* called her “Indian” (*india*). Now people treated her with more respect and called her an artisan (*artesana*). The opportunity afforded to them by the cathedral stalls has helped them identify as artisans to avoid discrimination. She noted that this protected her from the negative connotation of the term *india* in Mexico. However, Rarámuri who are not fortunate enough to have a stall behind the cathedral still face the stigma associated with their ethnic identity.

The following picture was taken by Serafina (see Photograph 5). It shows her stall behind the cathedral in the downtown area, with a traditional Rarámuri blouse and purses in the shape of a Rarámuri dress, ribbons, and *pinole*, a traditional corn drink that is a staple of the Rarámuri diet in the Sierra Tarahumara. Also shown are baskets handwoven by Rarámuri women. According to Lulú, a niece of Serafina, mothers teach their daughters to make these baskets. When they lived in the Sierra, baskets were one of the crafts that Rarámuri women sold in tourist destinations, such as the Copper Canyon (Barrancas del Cobre). For Serafina, these pictures represent all her hard work in Ciudad Juárez, and she is proud to run her own business.

Photograph 5. Serafina's Stall Behind the Cathedral Downtown



Source: Taken by Serafina, 2019.

To minimize discrimination, Serafina preferred to identify as an *artesana* rather than as a Rarámuri. Racism is one of the most challenging issues in Mexico. Mexican discourse about Indigenous groups takes pride in the country's rich Indigenous past, a strategy utilized to unify the country after the Mexican revolution. However, it devalues present-day Indigenous groups and does not erase racial hierarchies (Knight, 1990; Warren & Sue, 2011). As a result, Indigenous groups became the historical representations of Mexico. Ethnic groups and Afro-Mexican descendants are excluded from the present and future unless they become part of the *mestizo* myth. Nationalist discourse creates the false notion that all Mexicans are *mestizos* and that racial differences do not exist in Mexico. This places Indigenous and Afro-Mexican communities outside of the national identity, except in history books. Against this backdrop, identifying as artisans allows Rarámuri to mitigate the stigma that comes with being Indigenous in the city.

Discrimination is a major challenge that the Rarámuri face on the city's streets, but not the only one. "Eliza," a married Rarámuri woman in her 30s, recalls that she had a lot of conflicts with the National System for Integral Family Development, known as the DIF. She mentioned that before having the stall behind the cathedral, in many other places her children had been taken away by DIF officials claiming it was dangerous for her children to be with her when she was working as a street vendor. Eliza knew it was unsafe, but it was the only way she could watch over her children while she worked.

Another problem was police abuse; the police used to seize all the goods being sold on the streets by Indigenous people, on the grounds that they lacked a permit to trade in the streets. After many years of fighting against the system to secure a safe place where they could sell their crafts, they were granted an area behind the cathedral. This provided a safe space, free from discrimination,

crime, and road traffic accidents, not just for the Rarámuri but for other Indigenous groups too. However, the reality is that thousands of other members of Indigenous groups do not have the same opportunity and there remains a stigma surrounding ethnic category in a city that lacks inclusive programs and opportunities for all.

CONCLUSION

This article analyzes how the Rarámuri in Ciudad Juárez have (re)constructed their ethnic identity and describes patterns that were found in this reconstruction. For the participants, downtown Ciudad Juárez plays a critical role in this process because the discrimination they experience there leads to a second ethnicization. The Rarámuri in Colonia Tarahumara live in a protective space; only Rarámuri are allowed to live there. Colonia Tarahumara helps to rebuild ethnic identity by creating strong bonds of solidarity and pride through community work. However, this sense of pride was lacking among some Rarámuri, as evidenced by the fact that some did not want to take pictures, claiming there was nothing beautiful to photograph in Colonia Tarahumara. However, in general, the individuals of this community have worked hard to achieve a Rarámuri cultural environment where the inhabitants feel a strong sense of community and are able to avoid discrimination from neighbors. This physical community provides protective spaces from the daily discrimination the Rarámuri face in the city due to their ethnic identity.

The Rarámuri in Colonia Tarahumara have constructed a physical and social community, absent in Kilómetro 30. Living in Kilómetro 30 or anywhere else where there is no strong sense of community increases discrimination. However, selling their crafts (*artesanías*) at a stall at the cathedral mitigated the experience of discrimination since sellers constructed an identity as artisans (*artesanos*). They belonged to an artisan community that formed a protective space from the second ethnicization, which is ironic given that they were selling Indigenous products and images that hark back to their historical ethnic categorization. However, the site at the cathedral was so small that many Rarámuri lacked that opportunity, and some Rarámuri who lived outside of Colonia Tarahumara and Kilómetro 30 and sold their crafts in the streets commented that they would like to have a space in the city where they could enjoy the protection of a stall, instead of walking or sitting on the sidewalk to work without any protection from crime or discrimination due to their ethnic identity.

Finally, mobility was an important issue for most Rarámuri throughout Ciudad Juárez. Colonia Tarahumara is relatively close to downtown, but mobility was more critical for those living in Kilómetro 30 due to the long distance to the downtown area. For them, the *ruta* bus was essential, which is one of the reasons why Rarámuri in Kilómetro 30 share the *ruta* as a symbol of border (*fronterizo*) identity. The physical mobility offered by the *rutas* also speaks to the social and economic mobility attained in the city compared to life in the Sierra. The pull of mobility is stronger than the push of discrimination they experience within Ciudad Juárez. Mobility is one of the main reasons they stay in the city.

This study of the Rarámuri employed feminist ethnography to create narratives from the pictures they took and reflect on their experiences and lives in Ciudad Juárez. The way the Rarámuri perceive themselves in the city is reported with these methodologies. Importantly, due to COVID-19 and the closure of the U.S.-Mexico border, fieldwork was discontinued in the middle of the study. Even though there was plenty of material to complete the study, spending more time in the field and conducting more interviews with more photographs would have allowed to incorporate more voices. Moreover, it might have been possible to undertake more interviews with different Indigenous ethnic groups to better compare experiences.

This study has shown the need to implement inclusion programs to increase respect for ethnic diversity. Indigenous communities in Mexico and, more specifically, in Ciudad Juárez face discrimination and racism in their daily activities. It is imperative that Mexican institutions adopt comprehensive strategies to tackle racism. Serious discussion is needed to fight the social, cultural, and economic inequalities that Indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants experience every day. Future research should examine Indigenous groups from different parts of Mexico for a broader vision of how they (re)construct their identities and communities.

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