

Collective Memory of Rural Life in an Original Village in Mexico City

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Edited by

Teresa Mora Vazquez

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Courtesy of the neighbors of the Village of San Jeronimo

Courtesy of Elena Garcia Arteaga

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INTRODUCTION

MANUEL MARTINEZ SALAZAR

In Mexico City there are still a number of villages founded within its territory during the viceroyalty period, housing peoples of pre-Columbian origin, whose heirs have kept their identity, despite having contributed with work, products, and natural resources to the overwhelming urban growth over the course of five hundred years.

This text gathers memories of the recent past of one of these villages, today named San Jeronimo Aculco Lidice, and popularly known as San Jeronimo, located south of the City. This story is told through the childhood and youth memories of those who are now grandparents, and comprises a period that goes from the thirties until the early seventies of the XX century, when irrigation water started to be scarce and affected the production of most of the orchards and farmlands, resulting in the loss of what had been their main economic activity.

This book comprises essays of longer ethnographic research, developed at the request of the dwellers, and which substantiates the historic continuity of San Jeronimo as an original village of Mexico City. This book was developed based on a collaborative research methodology, for which a team was formed, integrated by members of the Neighborhood Council of the Village of San Jeronimo (*Consejo Vecinal del Pueblo de San Jeronimo*), who undertook the meticulous and precise task, through discussion and consensus.

The Neighborhood Council was founded in October 2010 with the purpose of strengthening the awareness of being an indigenous village, recovering the historic value of the community, promoting civic-social and cultural development, and improving the standard of living on a daily basis, as well as fighting for recognition of their collective rights, bestowed in Agreement 169 of the International Labor Organization, The Mexican Political Constitution and the new Constitution of the City of Mexico.

The rural life of the village of San Jeronimo is illustrated by testimonies and data collected in public and private archives and libraries. Topics and testimonies drawn from the 48 interviews conducted with people over 60 years old, give an account of memories that make up a cultural estate of the heritage recognized by this indigenous village. Such cultural heritage is the creation of a community which envisages its village as a symbolic universe integrating heaven, the Earth, and the underworld, in a man-nature coexistence which configures their conception of the world, and the foundation of their identity and native collective memory.

Various authors participated in the making of this book. The first chapter “Aculco, a Village Under the Sign of Water”, by Cristina Barrios, presents some data about the historic background regarding the pre-Hispanic and colonial origin of San Jeronimo Aculco Lidice. The second chapter, “Natural Resources”, by Manuel Martinez, offers information about the ecosystem’s resources: flora, fauna, soil, and the fundamental role of water springs and rivers in the economic and socio-cultural life of the people. Also, with Manuel Martinez’ authorship, Chapter Three, “The Land in San Jeronimo”, refers to the quality and quantity of lands given to the people from the viceroyalty until the endowment of the *ejido* in the 20th century, as well as their use, benefits, and actions, undertaken with the purpose of preserving them. Chapter Four, “The Territory of San Jeronimo”, by Teresa Mora, starts off by considering the territory as a space which is appropriated and valued in a symbolic manner, by human groups, as well as a means of survival, and a privileged ecological environment of natural beauty. Chapter Five, “The Reapings of the Land”, written by the same author, gathers testimonies of productive agricultural activities developed in orchards and farmlands, for sales as well as for self-consumption, in which the procurement of products and their preparation as nourishment is included. Chapter Six, “Healing Knowledge”, again by the same author, presents the uses of medicinal plants, transmitted orally from generation to generation; healing knowledge that is endangered due to the disappearance of natural resources. In Chapter Seven, “The Dwellers”, Teresa Mora refers to the framework of day-to-day events preserved in the memory of the elders, who are the nucleus of San Jeronimo’s collective memory. In Chapter Eight, Maria Teresa Figueroa Islas presents, with data obtained from different archives, the genealogical trees of San Jeronimo’s ancient families. The families’ framework makes up a system of kindred that roots the sense of belonging into an inherited territory. In Chapter Nine, Teresa Mora refers to the main aspects of traditional celebrations of the festive cycle which gives identity to the dwellers, and through which they thus collectively appropriate their territory.

Location. The village of San Jeronimo Aculco Lidice is located in southeast Mexico City, part of the mayoralty of La Magdalena Contreras. It adjoins the Colonia del Maestro and the Independencia residential unit to the East, colonias San Jeronimo Aculco and San Francisco to the South, and Luis Cabrera¹ Avenue to the West. This Avenue separates it from Colonia Lomas Quebradas. To the Northeast, streets Presa Reventada, Rio Amazonas, Lomas Quebradas and Privada Avenida San Bernabe, from Colonia La Malinche, set the limits, closing the perimeter at Barranca Texcalatlaco (Map 1 San Jeronimo).

Extension and patrimonial characteristics of its territory. San Jeronimo's territory extends to approximately 420 acres (Martinez 1995, 43), which represents 12.6% of the total urban area of Magdalena Contreras (GDF 2005, 8). It is completely integrated within the urban area of Mexico City, and consists of 77 blocks, in which its *area de conservacion patrimonial*² is included.

In the village, there are four buildings included in the *Historical Monuments National Catalog La Magdalena Contreras, Distrito Federal 2000* (GDF 2005, 78).

1. The architectural ensemble of the Temple of San Jeronimo is composed of an open chapel and the temple itself. The first building dates from the 16th century, and was first registered in the council registrars of Mexico City on October 1 1543. The second construction was completed in May 1713; both buildings were declared historical monuments on September 7 1933.
2. The remains of the factory of Jeronimo de Leon, whose establishment was authorized by the city council of Mexico City on October 1 1543, was part of the main building of the extinct Rancho de Anzaldo, where a private nursery currently operates.

¹ Luis Cabrera Avenue was constructed during the second half of the 1970's, over a part of the San Jeronimo river. The river was piped in the limits with Colonia San Francisco, and with the irregular settlement that, years later, would be regularized to form Colonia San Jeronimo Aculco.

² The Urban Development Program (*Programa de Desarrollo Urbano*) defines the heritage conservation area as the historic center of the traditional villages of La Magdalena Contreras, therefore they are an essential part of their identity.

3. The house, business, and office, located on the corner of Heroes de Padierna street no. 104, and Morelos Street, dates from the 19th century.
4. The house and business are located in the corner of Cerrada San Jeronimo, and Jose Maria Morelos, also from the 19th century. However, these historic buildings are not the oldest in the village of San Jeronimo; there is evidence of pre-Hispanic settlements, and the archaeological remains of Anzaldo, including a small pyramid and pottery” [...] essentially Aztec [...]” (IPGH 1935) discovered in 1934, when the dam by the same name was built.

CHAPTER 1

ACULCO, A VILLAGE UNDER THE SIGN OF WATER

CRISTINA BARRIOS VALERO

Imagine for a moment, Mexico's South and Southwest basin area, two thousand years ago. Today, it is still possible to be delighted by the view of the Contreras Canyon, the top of Mazatepetl mountain, or part of the skirts of the Ajusco mountain, but back then, the dwellers of these areas enjoyed forests and lush vegetation, thanks to the water springs and runoffs that came down as rivers from the mountains; a privileged situation.

Among these rivers, the so-called Magdalena River stands out. It springs at 3,600 meters above sea level, at the foot of an ancient volcano, San Miguel, which is part of the Sierra de las Cruces. There, on Gavion's site, it is possible to view the great dam where the spring originating this abundant river is found. Some time ago, it was fed with water from other springs and rivers such as the Eslava River, as well as its tributaries, the rivers San Jeronimo, Providencia, Chico, and San Angel. Then it would join the Mixcoac River, and both reached Churubusco River, until finally reaching Lake Texcoco (HyCS 2009).

During different periods, in its surroundings, and along the river's path, there were important settlements such as Cuicuilco (which was a great political, economic and religious center), Zacatepetl, San Miguel Ocoatepec, Mazatepetl, Acoconetla, Tizapan, Tenanitla (now San Jacinto), Copilco and Axotla.

Of course, the village of Aculco also figured. The landscape changed after the Xitle volcano exploded, covering a large extension with lava and volcanic rock. The rest of the population continued their lives, spreading throughout the hills and outskirts, developing their activities thanks to the fertility of the soil bathed by the water tributaries. It was precisely the water which determined their life, and Tlaloc, the God of Rain, as a consequence,

was the most important deity, as is revealed by the archeological remains. One of them must have been located in the Sierra de las Cruces, and, more precisely, on the hill of San Miguel, close to the site where the Magdalena River is born. Nowadays a hermitage dedicated to Saint Michael is located there, which must have been built on top of a shrine dedicated to Tlaloc, since Saint Michael is linked to the ancient water deity due to its sword, which evokes lightning.

Another location where remains, such as small pots in the shape of Tlaloc, a frog and several *tepalcates* (ceramical fragments), related to the cult of this God, have been found, is *Coconetla* (originally *Acoconetla*, which comes from *atl*, agua, and *coconetl*, child), a site located at the top of a great stone wall which can be seen from the Contreras Canyon. There, Tlaloc representations are to be found carved in rock. On a recent date, a bas-relief on rock, showing the image with its distinctive blinders, and which could be a replica of the one found in Mazatepetl, was retouched or carved. Until recently, food was offered there, on Santa Cruz day, to beg for rain.

Other footprints of this ancient water worship in the Magdalena channels have been found in the lower levels. A beautifully decorated stone box that retains its original colors and represents four Tlalocs (water deities) was found where the Tizapan waterfall was located. The Tlalocs point to the four directions, according to their colors (black, white, yellow, and red). The box also displays four corn plants which are born from a *chalchihuite* (its color blue relates it to water). In its interior there is a *Chicomecoatl* figure, the Goddess of maintenance, very finely carved in jadeite (Lopez and Gonzalez 2016, 77).

However, the most important site, without doubt, is Mazatepetl Hill, in the Village of San Bernabe Ocoatepec, located in La Magdalena Contreras. Some 1,400 years ago, a temple dedicated to Tlaloc was constructed there. Its base is 30 meters per side, made with material brought from the Contreras Canyon, and its double stairway is still preserved. There is the remains of a ball game, a turtle with a jaguar tail is carved on the stone, and a big sized Tlaloc is also carved in stone. The sculpture is 2.80m high and 3.60m wide. It weighs several tons, and its style is Mexican.

Archeologist Francisco Rivas Castro, who was in charge of the exploration and consolidation of the site, published the findings of other representations of the aforementioned God, but they were very damaged, carved on the location's rock, as well as numerous Tlaloc pots (Rivas and Vargas 2012, 149-169).

During excavations carried out by Daniel Castañeda, several ceramic pieces, which could be reconstructed almost entirely, were found, as well as other cooked clay objects and numerous ceramic fragments, which he considered to be of Toltec origin. This information is found in a report dated December 18 1934.¹ Numerous caves and cavities are found in the area, where remains of ceramic and clay have been found.²

With the passing of the years, archeological remains were lost, but their existence is a fact, and there is undeniable proof of the presence of settlements in the area adjacent to Aculco, prior to the Spanish invasion. Two of the three original villages in Magdalena Contreras are related to water: *Atlitic*, ‘place where water is abundant’, and *Aculco*, ‘place where the water turns’ (de la Torre Yarza 2013, 24). From the colonial era to this date, water has been a constant presence in this region of Mexico City. San Jeronimo dwells in the memory with its irrigation ditches, its orchards and flower fields, as we will see further on in this text.

¹ Op. cit., p. 3.

² Id., p. 5.

CHAPTER 2

CLIMATE, FLORA, FAUNA AND THE WATER OF SAN JERONIMO

MANUEL MARTINEZ SALAZAR

Climate. The village of San Jeronimo Aculco Lidice and its environment, flora, fauna, and soil, including springs and rivers, are a consequence of the altitude and climate characteristics. The village is located at 2,420m above sea level, at the foot of the Sierra de las Cruces and Ajusco Mountain, which is Mexico City's main elevation; mountains which are all part of the Neovolcanic Axis.

Due to that altitude and location, San Jeronimo has a mild, sub-humid climate, with summer rains C(w2) (INEGI-GDF, 2001), with colder temperatures than those of the central mayorships of Mexico City, which have an altitude of 2,240m.

The coldest months of the year are December and January, as it is in that period when the average monthly normal temperatures registered re 13 and 12.7°C respectively, from 1951 to 2010, whereas the warmest months of that same period turned out to be May and June (SMN 2016).

During the dry season, which stretches from November to May, isolated rainwater can be present, and during these months, rain is due to the cold fronts affecting Mexico City.

Flora. After a long history of agricultural practices, and later the progress of urban land use and road constructions over the riverbeds, natural flora and vegetation is secondary, and is reduced to certain species of trees, bushes, and herbs, which survive in some stretches of the canyons that remain in open space, and other open spaces lacking permanent maintenance, such as the graveyard and the old railroad track (currently a cycle track), or in the remains of ancient orchards.

Due to the altitude at which it is located, the temperature, and the quantity and distribution of rain throughout the year, San Jeronimo belongs to a temperate forest ecosystem, with species dominated by high trees, in particular a diverse variety of pines and oaks, as well as ashes, alder trees, *tepozanes*, arbutus, *capulines* (*prunus capulis*), willows, weeping willows, and Mexican soapberries, among others. Among the distinctive natural bushes that are a part of the natural landscape are: jasmine, vermicelli, rockrose, jarilla (*Larrea Divaricata*), mosqueta jasmine (*Philadelphus mexicanus*), laurel, bearberry, bayberry, duraznillo (or tlaxistle) (*Prunus annularis*), and wild roses, to mention the best known. The natural landscape also includes a wide variety of mushrooms, such as those known as San Juan, pambazos or cemitas (*Genus Boletus*), duraznillo (*chanterelles*) and the poisonous fly amanita (*Amanita Muscaria*).

Fauna. Just as with vegetation, agricultural and stockbreeding practices scared San Jeronimo's wild fauna away; however, some animal species survived even in cultivated lands, feeding on their products, but they did not survive urbanization.

In ancient times, this must have been the habitat of the white tail deer, lynx and coyote. In addition, there were serrano rabbits, *tlacuaches*, raccoons, flying squirrels, Mexican badgers or coati, frogs, toads, various species of lizards, salamanders, chameleons, foxes, rattlesnakes¹ and *cincuates*, harmless vipers that frighten people because of their size and bright colors.

Don Luciano Romero had a reptile of this type in order to scare intruders away from his orchard, as people often would try to trespass the property and grab the harvested pears, as Remedios Ruiz remembers:

On the other hand, when there weren't so many constructions in San Jeronimo, rain and irrigation water were abundant, and rivers were in the open air, creating the right situation for the habitat of amphibians, such as frogs, toads and salamanders. There were multiple birds which inhabited this area, among them hawks, vultures, royal eagles, owls, barn owls, cardinals, *Cuillacoche* (or curve-billed thrashers), rufous-backed robins, woodpeckers, wild ducks, *pájaro chinito* (*Bombycilla Cedrorum*), swallows, eastern bluebirds (*Myadestes occidentalis*), lovely cotingas, as well as turtle

¹ Surely it was one of these snakes that caused the death of a 40-year-old man in 1848, which was registered in the Village's parish file of that year, S M Martinez. The Mexicans killed during the Battle of Padierna in 1847 (2016) and the neighbors of that time, are buried in the San Jeronimo Aculco Lidice Village's church cemetery. México, mimeo.

doves and hummingbirds, to mention only some of them, which can still be found in San Jeronimo.

Insects such as ants and moths have been very abundant to this date, as well as bees, and cicadas; however, crickets and fireflies that used to light July and August nights abundantly, to the delight of children and adults, are now extinguished. Dragonflies were also very abundant. Children used to tie them to threads and play with them. When agriculture stopped being practiced, urbanization took over, and many species of butterflies disappeared.

Water. San Jeronimo and the River Magdalena basin's hydrologic wealth might be the reason why, in pre-Hispanic times, sites were established to worship the god Tlaloc² on its main mountains and elevations. Such is the case of shrines found in the hills of San Miguel, Mazatepetl, or *del Judio* and la Coconetla (de la Torre Yarza 2013, 9-30).

It should be remembered that the Nahuatl name of this place, which the conquerors called San Jeronimo, is Aculco. This toponymy means "where the water turns", referring to the changes in the water's stream (Montemayor 2007, 174; Moctezuma 2006, 85).

Magdalena River's Water Use. The water from Magdalena River was widely used by the dwellers of the pre-Hispanic villages established in its basin, for irrigation of crops, as well as for animal raising. Among them were the dwellers of Aculco.

In 1529, once the Conquest was consummated and consolidated, King Carlos the 1st handed the Seigniori of Coyoacan land to Hernan Cortes, as part of the Marquessate of the Valley of Oaxaca. Six years later, the Spanish were authorized to buy land from indigenous people, with the purpose of encouraging economic production in the New Spain. This gave way to the decrease of land and limited access to water for San Jeronimo, and for the rest of the people of the Magdalena River basin. These villages were very

² In ancient times, this river was also called Atlitic, since it is the first village that it touches in its descent to the ancient Tenochtitlan Lake. Later it was also known as the river of Coyoacan, since these lands belonged to that seigniori, and, after the conquest, to the township that was part of the Marquessate of Oaxaca. It was in 1928 that the municipality of La Magdalena Contreras was created, with its headland in the village of La Magdalena Atlitic, from where the name of Río Magdalena is taken.

attractive to the Spanish, because of the abundant resources, as well as good communication routes (Reynoso 2005, 65).

The fuller which was authorized to be established in 1543 by Jeronimo de Leon, next to the church of San Jeronimo, is a clear example of how attractive the Magdalena River was. After that first manufacturing establishment was authorized, in 1565, it is known that the second of four great fullers, with textile plants along the Magdalena River, was given authorization. At the end of the 16th century, in the environs of San Jeronimo, the existence of a third establishment of this type, called Sierra, is known. The fourth great plant with a fulling mill was established in 1636 (Reynoso 2005, 66 and 83).

These four textile plants with fullers, which benefited from the waters of the Magdalena River, were those of Anzaldo, Contreras, Sierra, and Posadas. Additionally, there were other plants dedicated to paper fabrication and wheat milling, as well as raw cotton textile plants of less economic relevance.

These new uses of the water of the Magdalena River, along with the growing needs of the original people established in its basin, gave rise to conflict over its use. Because of this, viceroy Pacheco y Osorio decided to set, as a solution, through Judge don Juan de Canseco, the apportionment of the river's water supply between industries, villages, neighborhoods, haciendas, ranches, orchards, and the *Colegio de San Angel*, among other users.³

Conflict over the use of water between indigenous peoples and residents never came to an end; on the contrary, they became more acute with the installation of electric plants and modern industries that began to be established at the end of the 19th century, as demand increased every day.

According to a document dated November 12 1889, the municipal president was asked for authorization to construct an aqueduct arch in Barranca del Rosal, or San Jeronimo. The work would stop a large amount of water spillage into the canyon which had been due to inadequate wooden gutters which, until then, had functioned as an aqueduct. The neighbors agreed to

³ This colonial distribution of the Magdalena River waters takes place on March 27 1635 and is described by Reyes and Cabañas (1979). A transcript of the same document made by the Ministry of Communications and Public Works, as of September 28 1920 states that the date of this act is March 27 1630. *Archivo Histórico del Agua, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, caja 1282, expediente 17519, fojas 55 a 57.*

build, with the aid of their individual contributions, proportional to the water each of them required for irrigation, quoting each ‘regular size’⁴ (sic) piece of land,⁵ at 1 peso 50 cents. That aqueduct is now the Puente del Rosal, a work catalogued as a historical monument.⁶

Magdalena River’s Water for Villages and Modern Industry. As time went by, the old fullers with plants disappeared, and others tried to adapt and extend their useful life, in order to benefit from the growing market in Mexico City. This caused the amount of water they were authorized to use to be insufficient.

The modernization of some of the factories on the Rio Magdalena riverside started around 1880. This was the case with those in Santa Teresa and Contreras, which adapted their technology in order to use hydraulic power to generate electricity to move their machinery and increase productivity.

In order to take advantage of hydraulic power, they were given concessions by the government so they could dispose of the water flow that would allow the electricity-generating turbines to work. That is how the four dynamos were established on the highest part of the basin, from which only the buildings that housed them, as well as channels, aqueducts, dams and tunnels, survive nowadays.

These forms of water storage, conduction, and control, as well as the productive processes, modified the availability and quality of water meant for agricultural and domestic use by the indigenous villages of San Bernabe, San Jeronimo, La Magdalena and San Nicolas.

Water Contamination. Another problem that affected the inhabitants of the village was the water’s poor quality, which is why, in 1933, those from

⁴ The resolution includes the agreement to appoint C. Atanacio Alarcón as architect of the work, as well as three (sic) commissioners and a treasurer. Historical Archive of the D. F., Fondo Municipalidades, San Angel, 1889, *op. cit.*

⁵ The Water File, in which documents related to the Water Board of the Magdalena River are located, as well as the Local Water Board of San Jerónimo Aculco, closed in 1984. Archivo Histórico del Agua, Aprovechamientos Superficiales, expediente 33713, caja 2313

⁶ GDF. 2005, *op. cit.* Tabla No. 78 “Monumentos Históricos Inmuebles, Delegación La Magdalena Contreras 2000”

San Jeronimo claimed to be receiving “[...] water contaminated by acids and dyes from the factories”.⁷

In 1933,⁸ residents of San Jeronimo negotiated access to a potable water service, given that both the water that the factories returned to the river bed after having used it, and the drainage discharges of the new settlements on areas through which irrigation channels passed, caused diseases and death from gastrointestinal infections. So it has been recorded in La Magdalena Contreras’ register of deaths, where constant deaths from typhoid, green diarrhea, intestinal pneumonia, acute gastroenteritis, acute enterocolitis, enteritis, chronic diarrhea and dysentery, among others, are recorded.⁹

With these arguments, they managed to open the drinking water service in 1936, which was first distributed through a network of pipes and public outlets, supplied by a regulation tank, and which was completed in 1934, located at the corner of Lerdo de Tejada and Presa Reventada Streets. This water came from the springs of San Bartolo Ameyalco.

During the 1950s, the arrival of new neighbors as water consumers intensified, as the orchards were transformed into ornamental gardens in the residences of the new owners. To some extent, the inauguration of Ciudad Universitaria in November 1952 would be a factor in attracting new residents.

In the same decade, the residential development Jardines del Pedregal de San Angel was built, part of which was planned on land that had formed part of the Ejido de San Jeronimo, an area that also added to the demand for irrigation water use from the river Magdalena.

During the beginning of the 1960s, an extension of the Anillo Periferico and the Unidad Independencia housing complex were built on a large part of these old lands from the ranches or haciendas of El Batan and Providencia,

⁷ Archivo Histórico del Agua, Aguas nacionales, caja 896, expediente 11291, legajo 3, foja 71

⁸ Archivo Histórico del Agua, Aprovechamientos superficiales, caja 1828, expediente 27326.

⁹ In 1933, 39 residents of San Jeronimo, of all ages, died. 17 of them were children who died from gastrointestinal infections. During 1933, in the La Magdalena Contreras municipality, 385 deaths were recorded for various reasons. Gastrointestinal diseases in San Jeronimo accounted for 4.4% of this total. Libro de Defunciones del Registro Civil de La Magdalena Contreras, año 1933.

which caused the urban area to invade the old lands of San Jeronimo Aculco village.

This replacement of owners and uses expanded, both inside and outside San Jeronimo, thus the landscape was transformed from rural to urban, and it gradually became more difficult to keep the irrigation channels free of the construction which obstructed them, and from the drainage discharges which polluted irrigation water.

The village peasants could no longer fight against the growing urban sprawl. Among the last battles fought by those who remained in San Jeronimo, opposing the construction of Contreras Branch of the Colegio de Bachilleres in 1978 should be mentioned, since during its construction, some areas of the channel running on the northern margin of Barranca del Rosal, or the San Jeronimo River, were clogged with concrete, and, even though they managed to have them finally uncovered, the community's agricultural life disappeared.

The official version of the end of the agricultural use of Magdalena River water, is set forth in a document from August 1984, signed by an official of the Ministry of Agriculture and Hydraulic Resources. The official document is addressed to the President of the Magdalena River's Water Board, without specifying a name, to whom it declares that: "[...] you are notified that by virtue of the disappearance of demand for irrigation in the Magdalena River Water Board, given that cultivation areas have been converted into urban areas, the harvesting record is now canceled [...]"¹⁰.

Recreational use of water. Water was very abundant in San Jeronimo, even though there weren't any extraction wells; it circulated along its channels or irrigation pipes, brought either from Magdalena River's second dynamo area, or by channels that brought rainwater to the village.

Additionally, there were two irrigation water storage tanks, as well as the dams of Texcalatlaco, La Coyotera, Anzaldo and the Presa Reventada, which attracted tourists from Mexico looking for distraction, mainly during the warm season, although there were also duck hunters in the winter, in the different dams, as flocks would come and spend the harshest part of the season at this time of the year.

¹⁰ Archivo Histórico del Agua, Aprovechamientos superficiales, caja 23313, expediente 33713, foja 602

In June, on the day of San Juan, many tourists came from different places, for example from the nearby village of Tizapan; that's how it's remembered by some neighbors, Mrs. Victoria Ruiz, and her sisters Hermila and Virginia, among them. They remember that, on the day of San Juan, their father wouldn't sleep in order to take care of the flowers and fruit, because visitors would get in and cut them without permission.

CHAPTER 3

THE LANDS OF SAN JERONIMO

MANUEL MARTINEZ SALAZAR

One of the most ancient testimonies that accounts for the quantity and quality of land for economic production in the village of San Jeronimo Aculco is found in the *Actas de Cabildo de la Nueva España*. One of these describes how, two decades after the Conquest, two cultures and two different economies, indigenous agricultural and Spanish industrial, started competing for territory and resources.

In the record, as of October 1 1543, it is stated that the town council of Mexico City, gave the Spaniard Jeronimo de Leon, through an agreement and the corresponding tribute, authorization to establish a fuller on the river that descends from Sierra de Las Cruces, towards Villa de Coyoacan.¹

The request for permission, and resulting complaints from the Indians, meant that the first location requested by the Spaniard to install his fulling mill was not authorized, highlighting the dispute that was starting to take place for territory and natural resources in the neighborhood, which at that time, was part of Coyoacan.

The fight for land and the aforementioned resources can hardly be reduced to the described episode. For the Spanish to settle and form haciendas, ranches, and orchards, as well as establishing fullers, textile plants, and mills, they had to obtain them by dispossessing, or buying from, the indigenous peoples and communities, which were then a part of the municipality of Coyoacan. As Torre Rojas points out:

“The regions bathed by Magdalena River were highly coveted, and were, consequently, a reason for many conflicts and legal litigation during

¹ For the fulling mill, the force of the water was essential in order to move its very rudimentary machinery, as well as water for the processing of textile fibers, fabrics and materials.

colonial times, since it was impossible to install multiple productive units in them, and, at the same time, they kept a convenient closeness to the capital city in order to commercialize their products. The momentum and quality of the liquid, served not only as potable liquid for the population, for irrigation of orchards and maize fields, for livestock and poultry, but also for establishing mills for cereals and oils, and fullers and plants for the confection of wool or cotton fabrics; all which are profitable activities indeed” (Torre Rojas, s/f).

Since the pre-Hispanic settlement of Aculco, the soil resource, on which the neighbors of San Jeronimo depended, was diverse in terms of fertility. In the most fertile soils, a rich layer of arable earth was concentrated, with sufficient depth to harbor the culture of both herbs and shrubs with shallow roots, and fruit trees and ornamental plants with deep roots. These soils are located within today’s perimeter of the patrimonial conservation area. It is not by accident that the original population settled on this land to live and cultivate, hence they have been described as a “[...] small forest [...]” by those who reported events surrounding the Battle of Padierna in 1847, as well as the sites where confrontations between the Mexican and American troops took place on August 19 and 20 (Alcaraz 1848, 231).

Ejido Lands of the Village of San Jeronimo Aculco Lidice

It should be remembered that the territory occupied by the village of San Jeronimo represents only a part of the total land that it contained in past years, due to the territorial loss caused by the establishment of haciendas and ranches, and, in more recent times, Mexico City’s urban growth, as well as the proliferation of horizontal condominiums, commercial plazas, and convenience stores.

This village’s old territory was addressed by the peasants in diverse documents, in order to request their restitution to the agrarian authorities in 1916. The request was made according to what was established in the Agrarian Law of 1915, together with deeds and other supporting documents.

Finally, in 1923, they managed to attain the restitution of 200.81 hectares, which were endowed as an *ejido*. In 1938, an extension of 205 hectares of *ejido* was added to that area.² On 1 August, an assembly was held in the Village of San Jeronimo’s ‘public square’ (in the records, the nature of that

² The 405.8 hectares were originally from Hacienda Anzaldo. Haciendas San Jose and La Providencia were not affected due to their small size. Archivo General Agrario, San Jerónimo Aculco, expediente 23/920, legajo 2, fojas 53 y 54

site was not specified) for the delivery of the *ejido* lands' ownership. In the convention, the new *ejidatarios* elected an administration committee. This committee received the endowment's 200.8 hectares.

It should be noted that the *ejidatarios* of San Jeronimo would have been entitled to a total area of 676 hectares, but the Agrarian Regulation empowered authorities so that the largest area possible could be taken from the affected property, if applicants agreed.³

Ejido's Expansion. Twelve years after the *ejido* was granted, on October 26 1935, Mr. Carlos Moreno and Mr. Adolfo Mejia, President and Secretary of the *Comisariado Ejidal del Pueblo*, began undertaking the formalities to expand the *ejido*, through a trade addressed to the President of the *Comision Mixta Agraria*. They made the petition by presenting a list of 85 peasants and heads of families who didn't have land to meet their needs.

On October 21 1938, only four days after the three-year anniversary of the *ejido*'s extension having been requested by its representatives, the agrarian authorities executed the addition of a total of 205 hectares to the *ejido*, of which only about 14% corresponded to land used for agricultural purposes, while the rest, 177 hectares, was stony field lands, suitable only for forestry and livestock purposes. President Lazaro Cardenas' resolution authorizing the extension of the *ejido*, is dated January 19 of that same year.⁴

Maria Alarcon Rivera remembers that the *pedregal* was part of San Jeronimo, where,

"[...] on the flat parts without stones, they would sow maize, beans, and lima beans, for home consumption. Everything was seasonal, because there was no water [...]. Previously there was a little bridge that we used to cross – over Magdalena River –⁵ to go to the *pedregal*, but from there my father's land was still pretty far. My youngest brother and I used to go twice a day to bring him breakfast and lunch. That was between 1938 and 1940. I was around 8 or 10 years old. In the *pedregal*, there are now some residences with lots of volcanic rocks. That area was full of *nopaleras* and wild flowers one could collect and sell. Those flowers that resembled stars don't exist anymore - they smelled delicious! - People would buy them [...]"

³ *Idem*, foja 44.

⁴ Archivo General Agrario, San Jerónimo Aculco, expediente 271.71/1784, legajo 5, fojas 63 a 69.

⁵ Added by the author.

Maria Consuelo, on the other hand, says that when she was a child, at the end of every agricultural season, soon after de *ejidatarios* picked up their harvest, she and her cousins were taken to do *titixa*, an activity that consisted of gathering maize cobs, bean pods, and Castilla pumpkins, that the *ejidatarios* had left behind.

Shortly after the extension of the *ejido* was granted, a modification was registered, although only in terms of configuration and boundaries, since in March 1939, a fraction of 62 hectares was exchanged and given to the *Ejido* de Tlalpan; this *ejido*, in turn, gave an equivalent surface to the village of Copilco, while those of Copilco returned a surface of equal dimensions to those of San Jeronimo.⁶

The Gradual Extinction of the *Ejido*

The territorial extension restored as *ejido* was gradually stolen from the people through various expropriations and swaps. The territory thus subtracted was destined to satisfy the need for urban land in Mexico City. For example, the creation of Ciudad Universitaria, the construction of residential area *Jardines del Pedregal de San Angel*, and the extension of the *Anillo Periferico* to the south of the Federal District, as well as the regularization of the *ejidal* urban area was tolerated, but the agrarian authorities never authorized it (within it, colonia San Jeronimo Aculco was formed).

Urban use demanded by the city, as well as the lucrative real estate businesses linked to it, of both *ejidatarios* themselves and fractionators, gradually brought an end to the land for the return of which the residents of the village of San Jeronimo fought for many years.

The first loss of land was due to expropriation, and it occurred in 1934. Back then, *ejidatarios* delivered 1.99 hectares to build the Anzaldo Dam, and later, this dam had two enlargements, the last one of 1.57 hectares in June 1985. This dam was built with the purpose of regulating the Magdalena River's crescendos during the rainy season, and preventing flooding in

⁶ Antecedentes Agrarios, mimeo del Comisariado Ejidal del Ejido del Pueblo San Jeronimo Aculco Lidice S/F.

urban areas around San Angel and Coyoacan, located on the banks of Magdalena River.⁷

The second expropriation took place in 1946, and it was quite significant, as the surface was destined to build part of Ciudad Universitaria, moreover, it implied losing the 205 hectares granted as an extension in 1938.⁸

On September 25, President Avila Camacho published in the Official Gazette of the Federation, the expropriation decree that affected 32 *ejidatarios*, who were altogether compensated with a total of \$65,010 pesos, while each of them was taken off the list of *ejidatarios* and lost their *ejidal* rights.

Barely eight years had passed since the extension of the *ejido* of San Jeronimo had been favorably resolved, when a total of 48 families who had settled in these lands and built their houses, had to demolish them, which is why UNAM also compensated them with a total of \$9,025 pesos.⁹

In 1950 and 1951, the village of San Jeronimo delivered 124.74 hectares of *ejidal* land, amidst which practically all of the stony field lands and most of the temporary farmlands were included. In exchange, the *ejidatarios* received 201.33 hectares of privately-owned land, 100 of them located in the Ocotepec estate, in Tihuatlan, Veracruz state, and the remaining 101.3 hectares in Rancho Lindavista, formerly Las Tortugas, in the municipality of Metepec, Hidalgo state.

The exchanges were made with the Jardines del Pedregal of San Angel S. A. company, for the construction of a residential area of the same name;¹⁰ works in which not a few neighbors found jobs as masons.

In addition to the land received by *ejidatarios* in the municipality of Tihuatlan, Veracruz, considered in the first exchange, the crops that were

⁷ Antecedentes Agrarios, mimeo del Comisariado ejidal del Ejido del Pueblo San Jeronimo Aculco Lidice S/F.

⁸ *Idem*.

⁹ Archivo General Agrario, San Jeronimo Aculco, expediente 23/920, legajo 2, foja 152.

¹⁰ Archivo General Agrario, San Jerónimo Aculco, expediente 272.2/32, legajo 15, fojas 03 a 06

still standing at the moment of the decree's execution were delivered. This took place on March 19 1950.¹¹

For the second swap, in addition to the land, fractionators of stony field lands delivered \$2,000 pesos to each of the 45 *ejidatarios* who had parcels on the swapped lands. That amount was granted in order to pay for transportation expenses to land received in Hidalgo State.¹²

For each of the 94 *ejidatarios* who would remain in their village, as they were not considered in the swap, the amount of \$500 pesos in cash was given. In addition to this, the group received \$50,000 pesos that were allocated to repair a dam located on the Magdalena River; \$30,000 pesos for the construction of Emiliano Zapata Avenue up to the railway line; \$12,000 pesos to build a 50m³ water storage tank; and \$15,000 pesos for the installation of street lighting on Emiliano Zapata Avenue.¹³

At the same time, between the execution date of the first swap, and the presidential resolution authorizing the second, only 12 months passed, and it was Miguel Aleman Valdes who signed it on April 25 1951. Unlike the first one, between the authorization and execution dates only 51 days passed (the process ended on July 15 1951).¹⁴

The permutations don't seem to have been a good arrangement, given that the village lost *ejidal* lands, and the great majority of the *ejidatarios* who had to move to Veracruz and Hidalgo soon returned to continue their life in the Federal District: they preferred to abandon their lands, rather than lose their roots. The resolution of those 201.33 hectares they received in exchange is a pending issue for the current *ejidatarios*, since they do not know if those lands are still theirs.

Another expropriation that reduced the *ejido* of San Jeronimo occurred in 1965. The public utility which caused it was the construction of the third section of *Anillo Periferico*, which was in charge of the Department of the Federal District, and added a surface area of only 2.12 hectares. The approximate section corresponds to the stretch located between Cerrada Suiza and Calle Oaxaca.

¹¹ *Idem.*

¹² *Idem.*

¹³ *Idem.*

¹⁴ *Idem.*

This expropriation and the construction of the *Periferico*, besides changing the municipality limits, encouraged the segmentation of a part of the urban *ejidal* zone which today belongs to the Jardines del Pedregal neighborhood and Alvaro Obregon municipality, which, in great part, continues to be inhabited by *ejidatarios* and settlers.

The last expropriation of the *ejido* was 68.46 hectares in 1981. Its purpose was to regularize the urban *ejidal* zone, which had been illegally subdivided, sold, and occupied. Expropriation also meant granting property titles to lot holders.

The expropriation also meant compensating *ejidatarios* and issuing title deeds. This expropriation put an end to the 405 hectares that served to endow the town of San Jeronimo Aculco Lidice with collectively owned land.

The majority of beneficiaries from the regulating process and titling of properties corresponded to residents. Likewise, this proportion makes sense if one considers that, in the early 1970s, the *ejidatarios* census consisted of about 94 members;¹⁵ a convention of *ejidatarios* was held with this membership, in which more than a thousand lots were distributed among *ejidatarios* and residents (Varley 1985, 89).

¹⁵ After the expropriation of land for the University, 32 *ejidatarios*, who lost their *ejidal* rights, were compensated. In 1950 seven more, and in 1951 another 45 lost their lands, leaving only 95 *ejidatarios* with full *ejidal* rights.

CHAPTER 4

SAN JERONIMO'S TERRITORY

TERESA MORA VAZQUEZ

Considering the territory as an appropriate space, and symbolically valued by human groups, also allows it to be understood as a means of subsistence, a privileged ecological environment, with natural beauty, administrative political demarcation, native land, and affective attachment, and bearing a historical past and a collective memory in constant construction (Giménez 1999). From this perspective, we present some data on the territory that left a deep mark on the neighbors' memories.

The name. The natives of San Jeronimo Aculco were neither consulted nor informed about the name change of their village. Some of them found out through the news published by the newspapers *Excelsior* and *El Nacional* between August 26 and 31 1942. However, two sources reported events concerning the search for consent for the name change from the inhabitants.

One of them was announced in the *Excelsior* newspaper of August 28 1942, through an article titled "San Jeronimo will Continue to be Called that Way". In this article, it was affirmed that a "large group of neighbors of San Jeronimo" (without indicating who they were), came "[...] to the publishing department of *Excelsior* to manifest that they had managed to prevent the name of their village from changing, as it was announced in an article which originated in New York". The article in *Excelsior* points out that a group of people, allegedly original inhabitants of San Jeronimo Aculco, came from the "Ministry of Civic Action of the Central Department", whose head, Gomez Esqueda, on behalf of Javier Rojo Gomez, had offered to respect their wishes, as well as guaranteeing that the government would fulfill the commitment of adopting the name of Lidice for some Mexican villages. The change meant eliminating the Nahuatl toponymy 'San Jeronimo Aculco' and replacing it with 'Lidice'.

The origin. 'Lidice' is the name of a place in ancient Czechoslovakia, wiped out by the Nazis between June 10 and 11 of 1942, as revenge for

Reinhard Heydrich's murder. Heydrich was second in command in the SS (Hitler's personal guard), who governed what was then the protectorate of Bohemia-Moravia with great acceptance, thanks to the execution of policies that benefited the population. That sympathy obstructed the offensive of Allied countries against Germany, since in Czechoslovakia resistance against Nazi occupation was scarce, which is why the allies needed to strengthen the resistance. In this situation, Winston Churchill designed a strategy to make the Czechoslovakians aware of Hitler's heavy hand, and, once convinced, they would join the fight against the Germans. In order to achieve this, it was decided to end the life of Heydrich, Hitler's close collaborator, who died on May 27 of 1942 from injuries caused in the attack. The strategy was successful, because Hitler decided to destroy the small and peaceful village of Lidice, and annihilate all its inhabitants, which precipitated the generalized wrath against Germany. An immediate international response was the agreement to give the name of 'Lidice' to every small village in each country in America; Mexico was second on the list, after a location in Illinois, US.

The chronicle of the name change ceremony, published in *Excelsior* and *El Nacional* newspapers, reveals that it was an eminently geopolitical act, whose setting was the War College, located in the Village of San Jeronimo Aculco, and which was designed to achieve an international effect, and transmitted by radio to the entire American continent. *El Nacional* mentions the personalities invited who gave prominence to the ceremony, and two groups of young ladies as representatives of the populations that were twinned, one with clothing in the style of Bohemia, and the other wearing costumes of *China Poblana*. In the article, the absence of the village's sub-delegate, any other traditional authority, and members of the original community of San Jeronimo Aculco, was noted.

It should be added that, in all probability, the majority of the original inhabitants did not learn of the change of name until the day of the event. However, as the events unfolded, it is noted that the elders were sensitive to the tragedy of what had happened to the Czechoslovak leader, and welcomed the name as a courtesy, accepting that San Jeronimo Aculco was chosen to remember and honor a martyred people. At the same time, however, careful that the change did not affect their identity, they decided to keep the toponym Aculco, which precedes that of the Patron Saint, because it identifies the people with their pre-Hispanic roots and it was thus renamed San Jeronimo Aculco Lidice.

One testimony recounts: