

RE-INVENTING CULTURE: UTOPIAN INDIGENOUS OTOMÍ IDEALISM IN  
MEXICO AND ITS EXOTIC ANTHROPOLOGICAL EXPECTATIONS

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**Introduction**

The philosopher Paul Ricoeur once said that the differences between ideology and utopia<sup>2</sup> were not as marked as one may think (Ricoeur 1986). He argued that there were similarities based mainly on the discursive treatment of social imagination (ibid.: 1). Both ideology and utopia, he said, depended on narratives about creativity and reproduction, which stand in a dialectical relationship with one another. For Ricoeur the main difference between ideology and utopia was the authoritative placement of the Self in the latter. On the one hand, ideology has always been attributed to other people. Thus as Ricoeur points out, 'The ideological is never one's own position; it is always the stance of someone else, always *their* ideology' (ibid.: 2). On the other hand, for this French philosopher, utopias are always authoritative and self-acknowledged: 'utopias are assumed by their authors' (ibid.). However, both terms, according to Ricoeur, have positive and negative sides related to the power of social imagination, and they both place and displace the location of the self.

In this article we would like to focus on the self-referential stance of utopia that exists in the relationship between the anthropologist (or any academic) and the persons we have traditionally defined as 'informants'. Our aim is simple: we would like to explore the potential of the self-referential utopian world view of 'informants' for the assumption and imagination that academics create about others. In this sense, what we present here is a model of cultural imagination and utopian thinking devised by a charismatic and authoritative key 'informant' of the Otomí culture in the central

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<sup>2</sup> In this article, we define 'utopia' not in the sense given by Thomas More (2005), of a place (an island) that is imagined to preserve the commonwealth of individuals with the establishment of specific norms, but as a self-referential discursive genre that is 'situationally transcendent' (Ricoeur 1986: 272), projected into the future, and that refers to an authoritative, identified subject, the subject being individual or collective. The utopian narrative, we argue, bears parallelisms with the work of fiction in the sense that both use the imagination to convince the reader about the existence of a possible world.

Mexican Valleys, Don Pancho,<sup>3</sup> and the active role he performed as an ambassador and creator of his own culture. We consider that the sublimation and invention of culture (Wagner 1981), like the discourses it implies, are not aspects that can be understood in isolation. We argue that we need to see all these aspects in their historical dimension in order to offer a general explanation for utopian thinking.

Don Pancho (see Plate 1), who unfortunately died on 1 May 2015, personally established an agenda to transform his culture into a centred reference for the understanding of the world. In this article we offer a historical contextualization that will help the reader to comprehend the origins of his utopian thinking, while at the same time delving into the details of the discourses and practices that accompany his personal invention of culture. In a sense, this text is a tribute to this indefatigable indigenous intellectual, who was always willing to share his knowledge of Otomí culture with academics and people in general.

The first part describes how indigenous colonial thinking used the world of the utopia as a form of cultural resistance in order to assert a different tradition. Here we analyse the cultural adaptation that indigenous groups experienced from the sixteenth century (after the conquest of their territory) onwards, and their way of resisting and opposing Spanish domination. We state that the intersection between myth and history lies at the core of the foundations of utopian indigenous thought. Finally, we argue that the seeds of this utopian thought in New Spain have their origins in the traumatic context of the conquest and the submission to superior power of the vast majority of the indigenous population.

The second part analyzes some narratives of Don Pancho and his utopian thought. We argue that the centering of Otomí culture – seen as the obligatory reference point for any argument that Don Pancho produced in his life – derived from a form of Otomi-centrism, where invention and imagination intermingled in a sophisticated form of authoritative explanation.

The third part deals with the practical interventions that Don Pancho made into his cultural heritage in order to build his own utopian vision of culture. We analyse the particular case of the manufacturing of artistic ritual masks, the discovery of cave painting and other artistic techniques that Don Pancho used to reproduce his own perspective of Otomí culture.

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<sup>3</sup> His full name was Francisco Luna Tavera, although he preferred his friends to call him simply Don Pancho.



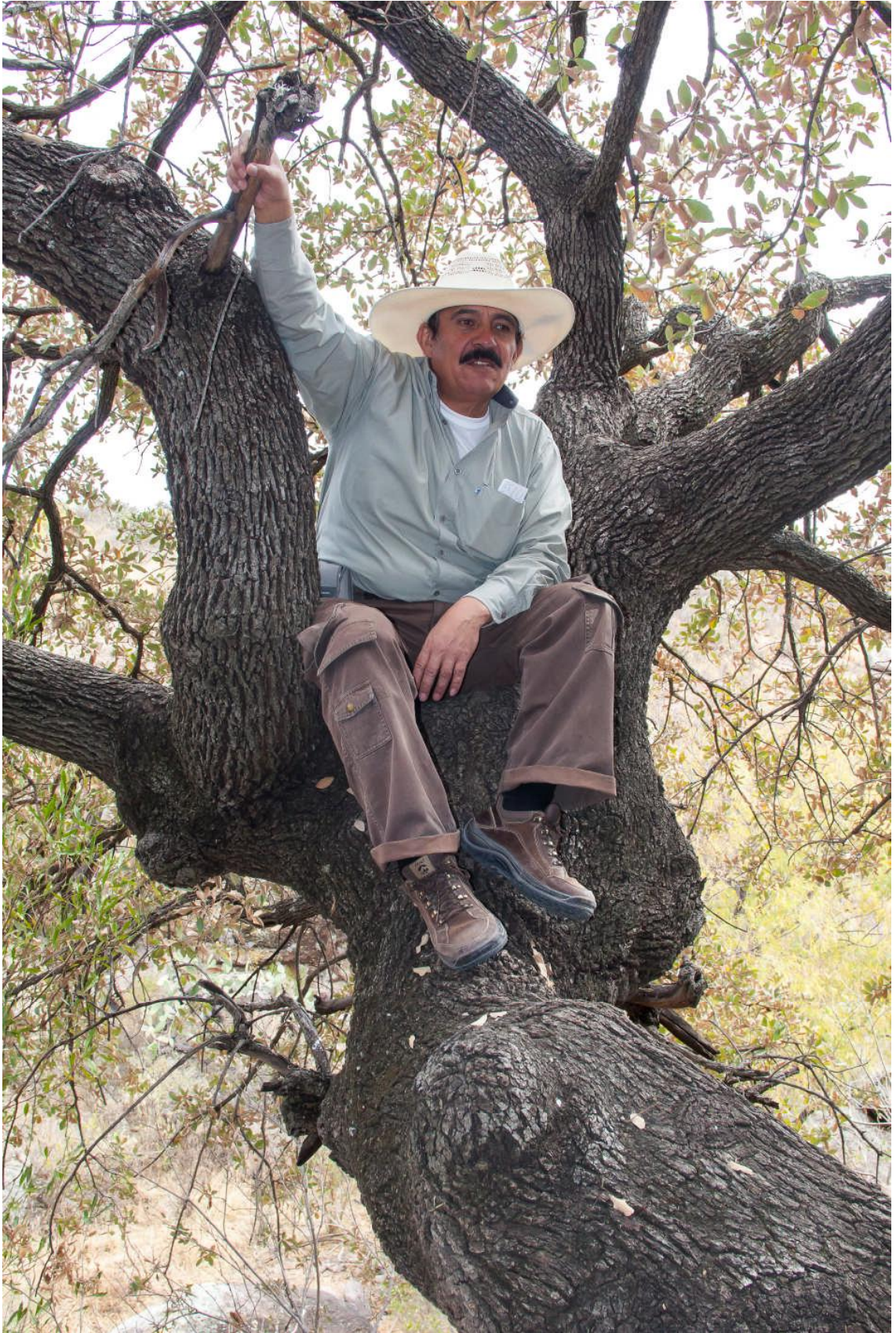


Plate 1. Don Pancho sitting on a tree during one of our visits to Huichapan Hidalgo. Photograph by José Luis Pérez Flores, 6 February 2011.

The fourth part describes the counter-utopias that analysts have constructed in their study of other cultures. Our main concern here is with alterity and the imaginative theoretical assumptions that academics project into others. We argue that this form of utopia should be conceived as the other side of the coin of the indigenous utopian thought we have discussed in Parts Two and Three. In this way, by analysing both utopian configurations, we are in a position to establish a symmetrical value for the concept of utopia, which is perceived as something inherently human and as something that relates intrinsically to power relations, hierarchies and historical processes.

### **The seeds of utopia: indigenous historical narratives in the ‘New World’**

The documentation of the indigenous past of what is called today Mexico is one of the most fascinating topics in modern historiography. The study of pre-Hispanic cultures, as well as research into the first decades after the conquest of the territory by the Spanish Empire, has produced a prolific number of works that are not exempt from controversies today. However, for many years these kinds of studies, in particular the analysis of indigenous written documents,<sup>4</sup> was neglected, despised and, even in the best of cases, misunderstood by both colonial and Mexican intellectuals.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, indigenous and mestizo chroniclers like Tezozomoc, Ixtlixochitl and Muñoz Camargo, supported by indigenous sources inherited from the pre-Hispanic period, wrote books and documents in Latin and Spanish. This served the purpose of translating both the information found in codices and the phonetic oral tradition preserved by elders.

Apart from the indigenous sources, there exist important works by Fray Diego Durán (2002) and Fray Bernardino de Sahagún (1985), who, supported by indigenous informants, wrote books about pre-Hispanic cultures; Durán mainly wrote in Spanish, but Sahagún intercalated Spanish with the indigenous language Nahuatl.

Historians consider the work by Sahagún to be the most complete register of indigenous cultures in the sixteenth century, due to its extent and quality. The methodology used by Sahagún consisted in presenting his informants with surveys that combined Latin writing with pictographic traditional characters. Therefore, in his *magnus opus*, the *Códice Florentino*, we find a mixture of textual and pictographic elements.

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<sup>4</sup> In this article we will focus on sources written in the Latin alphabet, for the analysis of pre-Hispanic codices require a different methodology that would take us well beyond our aims of this text.



Unfortunately, the majority of indigenous works in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have been lost due to the censorship of the Catholic Church, the destruction of Nahuatl documents and prejudice against indigenous cultures in general. Those cultures were preserved mainly in the cultural memories of travellers, conquerors and missionaries. One of the few exceptions was the works of the Jesuit Francisco Javier Clavijero (1991) in the seventeenth century. During the nineteenth century many of the indigenous sources were again neglected and considered too irrelevant or complicated to translate or decipher by positivist thinkers.

It is not until the twentieth century that we find a change in the study of indigenous sources. For instance, Eduard Seler was interested in the mythology and religion of Pre-Hispanic indigenous culture in the first decade of the twentieth century (Seler et al. 1904; cf. Hanffstengel and Tercero 2003). However, perhaps the most original pioneer in the study and use of indigenous sources has been Miguel León Portilla, who in the 1950s and 1960s began to use indigenous sources directly as a form of interpretation of the past. In works like *La Filosofía Nahuatl*<sup>5</sup> (2006), and *Aztec Thought and Culture* (1990), León Portilla describes the foundations of native philosophies and indigenous poetry in a manner that departed radically from the usual way of analysing history.

In recent decades, more and more intellectuals have used indigenous sources in their works, although how they do so has been the object of an intense debate. Some authors, like Michel Graulich, consider indigenous sources to be representative of mythology rather than a historical record (Graulich 1990: 13-14). Graulich argues that mythological narratives tend to pass as historical evidence even when they are not: 'Myths are not always immediately recognized in our sources, therefore it is advisable to recover what passes wrongly as history, or what is, perhaps, a "matched" up history' (Graulich 1990: 15).

The importance of the increasing interest in indigenous sources in our article resides in what Graulich points out about the intersection between myth and history. Utopian narratives have borrowed some of the projections they intend for the future from mythologies. Sahlins has argued that many local cultures interpret their history as a form of mytho-praxis, narratives permeated by a set of cosmological principles that order social practice (Sahlins 1987: 54). We contend that the scope of mythology also builds an image about the future. In this sense, the myths found among the historical

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<sup>5</sup> 'Nahuatl Philosophy'.

records of pre-Hispanic and colonial indigenous cultures could be seen as a form of utopian thought.

Historians and anthropologists working on indigenous sources also foment the seeds of utopia. They are in part responsible for either idealizing an indigenous past or for the construction of an image that the same indigenous groups today appropriate as their vision of culture.

For instance, Enrique Florescano also shares the idea popularized by Graulich that mythology permeates cultural and historical formations. For Florescano there is a direct link between pre-Hispanic history and political formations in the sense that all these histories are based on the existence of origin myths. He says:

We can conclude that the main ideological function of the myth that narrates the creation of the cosmos, and the principle of kingdoms was to propagate the idea, which states that rulers descended from gods and had been born to exercise power, while the artisans and normal people's duty was to give sustain to the former. (Florescano 2002: 52)

This relationship between mythology and political formation, says Florescano, was found among all the Pre-Hispanic groups in Mesoamérica. (*ibid.*: 67). Most of the sources refer to migrations, a move from nomadism to permanent settlements, where the origin always resides in a faraway geographical place, and a main god directs people's actions of displacement (Florescano 2002: 89). For him, this is proof that myths had a direct influence in the establishment of pre-Hispanic settlements.

Florescano's view nourishes the idea that indigenous groups oriented their actions exclusively in relation to mythological narratives, as if forces beyond their comprehension were guiding them. Other intellectuals have contested this. For Carlos Navarrete, for instance, behind the elaboration of mythological narratives of origins lie true histories that refer to real facts (Navarrete 1999: 231-232). He argues that not everything about the pre-Hispanic and colonial past is fiction. He points out that archaeologists have confirmed the existence of some of the places found in the pictograms in codices that in previous investigations were initially thought to be only myths. Therefore it is necessary to take into account the separation between a myth's elaboration and its factual foundation.

Florescano, Graulich and Navarrete, although starting out from different theoretical frameworks, agree that social interests lie behind the uses of mythologies as formal justifications of culture. Similarly, Adam Seligman argues that utopian thought plays

with the projection of a structural ideal order situated in the future as a justification for the maintenance of a present hegemonic power: 'Utopian thought and the search for a perfect political and social order were thus not only posited in critique of a given order or attempts to transform it, but were also constitutive elements of dominant systems of order' (Seligman 1988: 3).

During the colonial period, the relationship between indigenous thought and Catholicism was tense. We find that these asymmetrical power relations affected the way indigenous cultures organized their worlds. Although depending on the region, this antagonism was never clear cut, and many indigenous cultures accepted the new religion and its consequences without further implications. In other places, as in the north of New Spain, the influence of Catholicism took time to make itself felt, and many indigenous people remained foreign to its influence for many decades during the sixteenth century and later, well beyond that century. In other cases, there were wars and uprisings against the Spaniards. In the Mezquital Valley, the Otomíes were able to negotiate with the colonial authorities. Although they converted to Catholicism, this was always adopted according to their local cosmology. They preserved their rituals and their form of life, taking advantage of their closeness to the Mexican Valley and the northern territories of the Great Chichimeca.

We are not saying that Otomí culture has remained petrified until the present: what we argue is that some sort of cosmological thought moulds the formation of culture as a set of principles that orders the cosmos. This is also a view shared by many local intellectuals, who say that they are the inheritors of an authentic historical past. They are, as Edgar Morin has recently declared, people engaged in the reproduction of a mythical past that has been lost to all but them (Morin 2006: 136).

In the sections below, we offer an example of how an indigenous intellectual uses his knowledge to produce an 'authentic' and 'original' form of utopian narrative. We will show how these narratives are able to combine mythologies and facts in a single projective figuration. This is not something that our 'informant' Don Pancho invented: on the contrary, he was following an indigenous tradition that used the juxtaposition of myths and facts as a form of cosmo-praxis (Descola 2005), which represents a way to deal with a situation of cultural differentiation.

### **Utopian Otomi-centrism**

We met Don Pancho in August 2011 as part of a collaborative project we were carrying out at our university. As Pérez Flores, a historian of art, had been working in the Otomí Central Valley of the Mezquital for more than ten years analysing mural paintings from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we decided to pay a visit to his main informant. Don Pancho had been working closely with him during all this time. Later we would discover that this same man had been helping many other researchers in their work (historians, sociologists and anthropologists) since at least the early 1980s. In this way, we began a project in which we wanted to compare historical warlike mural paintings and current ritual practices in the Mezquital Valley. This was why Don Pancho became a key figure in our research, as he was the guide in our academic project.

Don Pancho was a man in his early fifties, no taller than 1.60 metres, well built, with a moustache and a hat. He was a very talkative man who could not stop telling us about the greatness of his own native culture. We went to the church where he had been working for many years in his independent investigations, the ex-convent of Ixmiquilpan (see Plate 2). The murals that adorned the sidewalls were well preserved, showing impressive warlike images dating back to the sixteenth century (see Plate As we walked, Don Pancho gave us a thorough explanation of the possible origins of the murals. He was sure that they had not been painted by Spaniards but by local people, Otomíes. He said that only Otomíes could have painted murals in that style because these were the same patterns he had learned from his ancestors. Some details of the murals were fading or had been erased. However, Don Pancho told us that, if he were allowed to do so, he could easily fill in the missing parts of the paintings and restore them to their original form, as he was sure he knew the possible content of the murals. He told us that his knowledge of history and culture were good enough to guess the patterns that the Otomíes from the sixteenth century wanted to paint, so he could recreate them without problems. We remained silent.





Plate 2. The temple of San Miguel Arcangel Ixmiquilpan. Photograph by José Luis Pérez Flores, 20 May 2006.



Plate 3. An anthropomorphic warrior subduing a 'wild' Chichimeca. Mural painting inside Ixmiquilpan church. Photograph by José Luis Pérez Flores, 21 March 2014.

We knew that the desire to make alterations to historical monuments or paintings was nothing new. As part of the history of many places in the world, buildings experience alterations and modifications, and their uses change with time. Therefore history is always something that is viewed from the present. As we noted in the previous section, rulers of pre-Hispanic empires used the narratives of the past as a means of legitimation in their present circumstances, altering facts and modifying them for political purposes. As the Italian historian Benedetto Croce argues, 'The practical requirements that underlie historical judgment give to history in general a character of "contemporary history"; it does not matter how far away in time those past deeds might look, history in reality relates to the present needs and situations in which the facts reverberate' (Croce 1992: 11). In the twentieth century, the symbolism that places occupy in the social imaginary of people foments the modification of façades, the alteration of motives, and in cases like warlike intervention, the complete obliteration of edifices and historical monuments. Intervention could be violent or symbolic. Places located at the centre in one period may change to the periphery, a theme Iuri Lotman has probed in his semiotics of culture (Lotman 1996). What was regarded as meaningful

can be deemed superfluous in a short period of time. As Utopian narratives may have an influence in this changing of perspectives and values, the purposeful alteration that Don Pancho wished to effect is one example of the practical connotations of utopian thought.

The authoritative and fluid discourse that Don Pancho elaborated gave us a hint about a man who was familiar with academics too. Until his death, Don Pancho worked as a researcher at the local Technological University of Valle del Mezquital,<sup>6</sup> and he had been invited to give lectures and participate in seminars at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. He had also published non-academic texts about Otomí culture. He had been a local politician too. He was the president of Alfajayucan, a municipality in the Mezquital Valley for many years, and his son currently holds an important position in the local government. As Don Pancho was leading us to different places in the locality of Ixmiquilpan he greeted practically everybody, some of them still calling him 'President'. He was, without a doubt, a very well-known person. He embodied what Max Weber would describe as a charismatic aura (Weber 1947).

He also embodied many of the ideal anthropological attributes one expects in the field from 'informants': a person capable of giving extensive and coherent explanations about his culture, someone who can reflect critically about his own traditions in an academic fashion. The only problem we faced was that he appeared to be too good. In fact, his knowledge of Otomí culture seemed to be extensive regarding any topic we discussed. He was able to connect any historical fact to his own local point of view. For instance, when we were discussing the conquest of Mexico and the role that Otomíes had played in the resistance against the conquerors, Don Pancho rapidly tried to convince us that, without the intervention of Otomíes, the Aztec Empire would have never fallen so rapidly. We agreed with him.

As we were talking about this, out of the blue he suddenly changed the subject and told us that actually the real origin of the Aztecs, and also of the Otomíes, was in certain Canadian cultures. His explanation was that the migration that brought the nomadic people down from the north to settle down in the Mexican central valleys was due to their following species of butterflies which migrated from Canada to the south of Mexico. He quoted some unidentified sources which, he said, assured him that the real cause of the migration was not completely mythological but simply a cosmic following

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to mention that Don Pancho did not possess a formal university education, so it is notable that, although he did not have academic degrees, he was considered a man of knowledge and was a figure respected in intellectual circles.



of butterflies in their natural environment. Then he continued telling us about the complex contextualization of the importance of butterflies in the cosmology of the Otomíes. After a couple of hours he assured us that the origin of Otomí culture was in Canada and that historians should rewrite the history of the pre-Hispanic world.

Bizarre though this extrapolation of one's culture may look, in fact this was not the only time we were confronted with a mixture of scholarly and fantastic data mixed up together. I remember him talking about the reason why some Otomí people looked Asian. He said that this was because, during the colonial period, many Otomies were taken as slaves to the Philippines. He ventured the hypothesis that perhaps some cultural traits in this Asian country may be of Otomí origin and that some ancestors of the current Otomíes may be of Southeast Asian ancestry. Here too, we remained silent.

We could cite more examples of this kind. However, our intention is not to provide a 'distorted' perception of a culture or to characterize Don Pancho's view as meaningless. On the contrary, what fascinated us is how this 'Otomí-centric' perspective permeated almost everything Don Pancho thought and reasoned about Otomí culture and how this became second nature to him. On most occasions Don Pancho provided profound and historically supported explanations; he was not a liar or somebody who deliberately tried to pull tricks on people.<sup>7</sup> However, he seemed too eager to confirm at all times the relevance of Otomí culture in any aspect of local, regional, national and even international contexts. His thought had taken him so far in the development of his explanatory system that sometimes it seemed too good to be true.

As we have seen in the previous section, discourses emerging from an indigenous past exemplify a desire to assert subaltern identities in a context of colonial domination (see also Benedict Anderson 1990). These opposing views to dominant discourses mean that indigenous cultures, at least from central regions of New Spain, elaborated a form of resistance that still has an influence in the way they refer to their traditions today. Although we are not arguing in favour of an essentialist continuum from the past into the present (López Austin 2004, López Austin y López Lujan 2009), we do suggest that

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<sup>7</sup> Among his most important findings was the location of the Coatepec, the mythical birthplace of the god Huitzilopochtli, which is a reference place for the Aztecs' journey from Aztlan to Tenochtitlan in the Mexican Valley. Don Pancho's findings were revealed and hinted at many years before archeologists corroborated this information in 2013 ([http://www.milenio.com/hidalgo/Ubican-mitico-cerro-Coatepec-Hidalgo\\_0\\_226177664.html](http://www.milenio.com/hidalgo/Ubican-mitico-cerro-Coatepec-Hidalgo_0_226177664.html)).

the seeds of utopia that we find in Don Pancho's discourses are rooted in the past of the Otomís' culture of resistance.

The utopia of an all-encompassing Otomí culture pervading any form of explanation raises many questions about the motives and limits of ethnocentrism. If, as Lévi-Strauss argued, humans are all ethnocentric at the core when we are faced with the task of valuing our own cultures (Lévi-Strauss 1995: 308-312), then it is not strange to find Don Pancho using his position as an indigenous intellectual to exploit his knowledge about his culture personally and politically. His discourse can legitimately be described as utopian, as it is intended to project a view that locates indigenous culture at the centre of both past and future creations.

His motives may never be clarified, as he left no testimonies about his personal pursuits or his work with other academics. What is true is that specialists knew of his importance and his position as a local intellectual (Galinier 2004, Pérez Flores 2010). Without doubt, Don Pancho has spread his utopian thought to others, affecting the way they perceive the world of the Otomí. But before describing the effects of Don Pancho's utopias on the minds and expectations of researchers, we would like to offer an example that moves from utopia to the realm of cultural intervention, of what we have called inter(in)ventions.

### **Inter(in)ventions: how to build your own utopias**

As we have said, Don Pancho was also an artist who presented his own works in local and regional museums. Until his death he was a curator of ethnographic and archaeological exhibitions. In 2014 he was actually invited to give a workshop about the manufacture of traditional ritual masks in San Luis Potosí.

During another of our field trips to the Mezquital Valley in 2014, Don Pancho told us that this time he was going to show us something different. He said that he was fed up with churches and that we needed to go somewhere deep in the valley. We took our truck and after a long ride going over endless small hills, we arrived at a small dry field terrain, property of one of Don Pancho's friends. We don't remember his name, but he and his family treated us with respect. We left the truck and then walked for around thirty minutes over the rough terrain. We descended into a ravine in what appeared to be the bottom a dry river (see Plate 4).



Plate 4. Cave painting in Huichapan, Hidalgo. Photograph by José Luis Pérez Flores, 6 February 2011.

We were walking along the path when Don Pancho, who had not stopped talking to us for a second, suddenly climbed up one of the rocky walls. We followed him, and in the middle of the wall, covered by a small rocky protuberance, there was an amazing cave painting. We were very surprised. He explained that this was a sacred place for Otomíes and that the whole ravine was full of similar cave paintings, containing more than thirty sites in total. He also said that more ravines with cave painting existed in the valley and that nobody knows who painted them all or how old they were.

We made a photographic record of the paintings while Don Pancho provided many explanations about the symbols that appeared in them. However excited we were, we were slightly suspicious, as some parts of the paintings looked marvellously well preserved. Don Pancho said that the priests never came here. Therefore the Otomíes had mostly been able to keep these caves hidden from the religious authorities. Some of the other cave paintings we saw were in a bad, faded state, and it was impossible to discern any details.

Our point here is not to make an analysis of the paintings but to ponder on the doubts we had about Don Pancho and the veracity of the paintings. He was an artist, he



even confessed to have made different attempts to recreate the cave paintings in his home. We thought that perhaps he had either painted them singlehandedly or retouched them. Later we would find out that there is actually a register of these paintings in documents dating back at least fifty years (Acevedo et al. 2000). Thus they were not fakes, but we couldn't discount entirely the possibility that some possible retouches had been made recently.

As already noted, Don Pancho was an inventor of culture in the more Wagnerian sense of the term (Wagner 1981). In his desire to preserve intact the Otomí heritage, he may have been an 'interventionist' in culture too, someone who models Otomí patterns in utopian and holistic ways (see Plates 5 and 6). No other local indigenous specialist matched his artistic and discursive creativity. Let us bear in mind that Don Pancho had one of the most extensive libraries about Otomí culture at his home, with documents dating back to the middle of the sixteenth century being part of his personal archive. He seemed a man ready to make his utopias about his culture a reality.

From the different cave paintings we saw, we surmised that they were there for a hidden purpose, hidden away from the public. Don Pancho affirmed that the paintings should be seen as a form of resistance. He said that this was the only way to preserve intact a cosmology that was not compatible with the Catholicism of the region. Don Pancho said that, although the details of the paintings are not clear, they still retain elements that are genuinely Otomi, like the double-headed eagle, the sun on the top of a pyramid and the division between the worlds above and below.

Asking ourselves about the possible interventions of Don Pancho in the cave paintings we saw, we had to acknowledge that we had no obligation to judge them, nor to investigate the veracity of the findings. What we agreed was that utopia has to be modelled in practice and that such practice must be a testimony for the future. It does not matter if the materiality on which practice is impinged is fake or artificially modified – what is important is to be able to refer it as belonging to a past that can be projected to the future, a future ideally constructed by local invention.



Plate 5. Model of an eagle on amethyst, paper. Author: Francisco Luna Tavera. Photograph by José Luis Pérez Flores, 1 June 2007





Plate 6. Original eagle from the presbytery of Ixmiquilpan church. Photograph by José Luis Pérez Flores, 20 March 2014.

### **Counter-utopias**

It is a commonplace of anthropology that its development has focused on the invention and reinvention of native cultures, their exotic character and the fascination for minority groups (Fabian 1983, Sahlins 1999). In the case presented here, Don Pancho appears as a man who has also shaped the imagination and creativity of researchers. His all-encompassing explanation of culture as always related to the Otomíes has made an impact on researchers from different disciplines who have listened to what Don Pancho has told them and believe it. Until recently, if you wanted to do research of any kind in the Mezquital Valley, you ended up working with Don Pancho at some point. Don Pancho had become the man to listen to and to learn from regarding the local indigenous cultures of the valley. Thus he modelled his own vision of Otomí culture as the canonic and authoritative discourse of academics. In some way he was playing with us, tricking us, but also informing us. He fed researchers with what he thought they wanted. In the period we are referring to in this article, we could say that he was instilling in us the seeds of a counter-utopia to the exotic. He wanted us to see Otomí culture deliberately as a true example of alterity, projecting a utopian desire to preserve an ideal cultural form for the future.

We do not know his motives for certain, but following the track of his discourses and practices has been one of the richest experiences we have ever had in the field. He was a wise man, and although he was becoming more extreme in his explanations towards the end of his life, this does not detract from his role as an inventor of culture. He almost singlehandedly created a new version of his cultural heritage. Historians, anthropologists, historians of art and archaeologists were his main channels for the diffusion of this knowledge.

Don Pancho's utopia found an echo in academic research circles, which, he said, reproduced an idealized image of indigenous culture. He actually criticized the findings of anthropologists like Jacques Galinier (2004), who could not understand the differences between the 'authentic' cosmology and the data that the Otomí created on the spot for him as a form of joking around.<sup>8</sup> Don Pancho said that although Galinier

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<sup>8</sup> For a comparative analysis of forms of joking, see Handelman and Kapferer (1972).

had done an amazing job in understanding Otomí culture, he did not realize that his 'informants' were tricking him (personal communication).

In the utopian narratives, humour and creativity assume an important role in the development of authoritative cultures. Don Pancho was an expert in this area. He could, for instance, talk about an important codex in academic fashion and a moment later jump to a hyper-speculative interpretation of the material. He could focus on the symbolism of eagles and weapons in the codex, only to say later that the first ones to use that kind of symbolism were in fact ancestral Otomíes. In general, Don Pancho was always willing to make up information about his culture, so that his utopian discourse became a mixture of fiction and reality, a proper narrative that sought to transcend the limits of historical interpretation.

## **Conclusion**

We have created our own utopias concerning the Otomíes, we have irremediably fallen into the trap of Don Pancho, and we are happy to follow him. How to strike a balance? How much of his explanations are true? Which ones are pure lies? These are pointless questions to ask. Invention means the creative potential of devising new exotic relations that are neither true nor false. Maïté Maskens and Ruy Blanes (2013) have called for a return and assertive commitment to a romanticist anthropology. We agree with them. It is necessary to acknowledge the ideal expectations we have, the utopias we create and the ones we are seduced by, and not be afraid of indulging sometimes in the art of self-confession. Anthropology is created in the field, and it is through ethnography that we shape the world we want to show. This is done by listening to utopian discourses, as well as by following our own romantic expectations about participant observation.

To conclude, we may say that unfortunately our utopian ideals are not always explicit and that we keep them for ourselves, remaining a footnote in our researches or a necessary evil to exorcize. This is an essential part of our world creation. In the case presented here, Don Pancho's apparent inventions were a form of cultural resistance, the by-product of a form of thought that, as for his indigenous ancestors, suggests an intermingling of mythology and factual data. As it is impossible to discern which parts are true and which are false, we have to concede that, although some of his statements may have looked too fantastic to be a reality, they were elicited with the clear intention of affecting our views about his culture. Independently of what we think about the



veracity of Don Pancho, what we can conclude is that in his narratives we can clearly perceive the modelling of a planned utopian world-view that was intended to project an authoritative vision of Otomí culture.

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