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Living art in the weavings of Venustiano Carranza, Chiapas

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ABSTRACT

This article presents some interpretations about the textile art of the municipality of Venustiano Carranza, Chiapas, as a way of approaching the cultural richness that make up tissues and typical embroidery of this place. Textile art of the indigenous peoples expressed their cultural identity and is an activity that is part of its tradition. Decoding the secret that saved forms and symbols represented in the tissues implies an understanding of ancient history in its relation to the modern. Textile art is creative and that creativity is expressed from the first generations of native peoples and responds to mythical beliefs, which have been transmitted in family and community socialization processes. In the case of the inhabitants of Venustiano Carranza, that learning is evident from an early age, when girls begin to capture different motives on the fabrics and embroideries, usually with clear allusions to nature. Reminiscences of maya origin are making the dress of the inhabitants of this municipality, since each part integrates elements of that great culture through a combination of yarns, colors, shapes and symbols. This last allows understand that making a handmade product, as typical costumes, goes beyond the needs of dress; It represents the creativity and the permanence of meanings that give form to the cultural identity of this village.

Keywords: crafts, tissues, art, culture, traditions, identity.

HANDHANDCRAFTS, A LIVING CULTURE

Handhandcrafts are studied by anthropologists, historians and many who admire culture in its various manifestations and are interested in understanding the symbols present in handcrafted products. In this paper we present the analysis of weavings of Venustiano Carranza, a village consisting of Tzotzil Indians, whose handcrafts express their identity.

We consider it necessary to note some definitions of handhandcrafts and their characteristics such as being indigenous, traditional folk and contemporary, which combine a number of creative manifestations. They represent the identity of peoples and are based on a way of seeing and interpreting the world. Handcrafts, according to Fernandez (2003), can be defined as a productive and creative activity of a plastic, manual and traditional inspired character, with a design, manufacture and serial planning embodied in objects, works or pieces that respond to a need or everyday functional, decorative, magical, or religious use with an aesthetic or decorative quality necessarily present as an ingredient. They are manufactured in a small domestic or professional workshop, without outsourced processes; by manual and non - manual but noble, genuine and personal control by the artisans' techniques, whose production is intended for a restricted and reduced market, fairs, or commercial sales which are known by the artisan.

Artisanal products have different meanings depending on the people who produce them. They are an expression of man's creativity, his sensitivity and imagination to convert simple inert materials into works of art or items and utensils that will make your life and that of others less difficult. Angelotti (2004), citing Euan, Burgos and others, notes that handcrafts are handmade objects, made by people from the interior, peasants and indigenous people, follow a tradition and are produced mostly by ethnic groups that represent a culture. These objects are bearers of a historical, cultural, utilitarian or aesthetic value, that meet socially recognized function, made by craftsman, individually or collectively, using simple techniques.

Handcraft production does not produce identical units as in industrial production. Each handcrafter, in each product, used their creativity to make it different. Where you want to make several identical objects , it will be difficult to achieve. The craft can be seen as imperfect or defective art, for the lack of uniformity in the development of products. Each craft product reveals the individuality of the craftsman , although some of his creations present coincidences, so that many of the artisans tend to employ a kind of signature to these creations, bringing as a consequence that these will stop being anonymous. Regarding handcrafts, UNESCO (2015) states that they are "are made by artisans, either completely by hand or with the help of hand

tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most important component of the finished product “(Artesanía y Diseño, paragraph 2).

In this context it is possible to define some types of crafts that, while they may be qualified based on several factors, maintaining a common denominator: the manual work of a craftsman. In first place we can speak of indigenous handcrafts, which is defined as the production of useful, rituals and aesthetic goods, conditioned directly by the physical and social environment that constitutes the material expression of the culture of communities with ethnic unity and which are relatively closed . This craft is done to satisfy social needs, which are integrated as a practical activity, the concepts of art and functionality and community awareness about the potential of each resource of the geographical environment, transmitted knowledge materializes directly through generations (Naranjo, Brown, Jimenez and Echavarría, 2005). These handcrafts show an interesting hybrid between a tradition charged with symbolic, mythological meanings and a new tradition in harmony with aesthetic values inculcated by contact with the creole culture. According to the Law for the Promotion of Indigenous Handcrafts of Baja California (2001), indigenous craft is defined as:

A good that artisans produce individually or collectively and for their technical or symbolic, religious or cultural elements of an ethnic nature, has a cultural, utilitarian or aesthetic value. Handcrafts can be traditional or newly invented and developed manually or using instruments, tools or machinery (p. 2).

Indian handcrafts are recognized as the livelihoods of many communities struggling to assert their identity through imaginative talent of its artisans. In some cases they even constitute the main source of economy. This is why people should understand that by acquiring an indigenous craft they not only carry home a souvenir, but a small part of the identity of the state or place where the product was purchased and, above all, contribute to an economic activity necessary for survival . Finally, it can be said that when speaking of indigenous handcrafts they can be referred to the set of items that identify and differentiate one from another ethnic community and that, through these assets one can learn about the customs and traditions of each location.

Another expression of cultural value are the traditional folk handcrafts. This type of craft, according to Cando (2012), can be considered as:

It is a historical process of collective creation, which has as a primary motive a creative activity that constitutes a social need. Its realization as

a work tends to reflect an empirical consciousness of cultural property; its essence is considered as the bearer of the popular tradition. Stability or variability of the creative process depends on the popular tradition itself and the extra-traditional processes that influence the activity (p. 96).



Figure 1. Indigenous Handcrafts
Source: Buelna, 2006

Traditional handcrafts, before being an object for the market, is an object that serves as support for the preservation and transmission of memory. It is one of many points of crystallization of a collective imagination. It is said by her that is dominantly anonymous “is done more in series and depends mainly on the manual skill rather than creative imagination” (Bartra, 2005, p. 17).

Another type of handcrafts is so called *contemporary* crafts. According to Dávila (2012), contemporary crafts are “producing useful and aesthetic objects within the framework of the trades and which process technical elements from other cultural contexts that are synchronized and has a characteristic of transition to modern technology” (p. 28). That is, this type of craft is based on the production of handcrafts that has its roots in traditional craftsmanship but has been transformed to fit the existing trends and new needs, keeping features of their national identity and orientation towards application of aesthetic principles of universal or academic trends.

THE ART OF TEXTILES

In the municipality of Venustiano Carranza, Chiapas, craftswomen express their identity and represent their culture through their weaving and embroidery. From the period of colonization to the present day, their weavings are covered with Mayan motifs. The designs are geometric abstractions or have naturalistic forms, depending on the technique in which they are made. The creativity of the artisans is evident in the attractive and bold color combinations for fabrics and embroidery. According to the Center for Textiles of the Mayan World (2013):

Among the geometric Mayan motifs, there are included diamonds, stars, lightning and zigzag lines; among phytomorphs: corn plants or flowers. We also find zoomorphic designs, such as birds, frogs, monkeys, scorpions and butterflies, or anthropomorphic patterns of saints. Some of these elements have been preserved in the weavings from pre - Hispanic times and have been passed down from generation to generation. Each creator imbues these reasons their own ideas, their perceptions, sensitivity and aesthetic sense. Also, they can stick to tradition or innovate it.

The textile art of Venustiano Carranza is a transition from the maya to modern, so craftswomen create designs that refer to a worldview rooted in its historical past. Thus women choose forms, shapes or colors of threads and embody their creative images, taking into account their traditions and customs.

The fabric is an expression that can recognize the particular style of the place. Craftswomen of Venustiano Carranza strive to excel and compete with other municipalities in the highlands of Chiapas, making a difference with their style, patterns, colors, cotton and embroidery. Craftswomenn have demonstrated the living art of culture in national and international events, where it has been recognized beauty of the weavings that form a kind of language to express their place of origin.

Craftswomen begin at an early age in textile art, when they access the tradition and begin to become familiar with the techniques and tools needed for the job. The techniques used in textile art are varied, however most it specializes in the backstrap loom, which is so named because the woven interlaced yarn is made with the body of the weaver; that is, the woman uses the strength of her hands and with the rest of her body pulls the loom backwards from the waist, which is hung from the other end from either from the ceiling, wall or a tree. The loom is made of wood, string, rows of string

and yarn . Craftswomen engaged only in embroidery use threads, rows, yarn, fabric manufacturing and darning needle.

The forms and figures that are reproduced in the looms are seen in shirts, blouses, skirts, handkerchiefs, napkins, rugs, belts, and scarves among other objects. The products are sold within the village without intermediaries and a fraction is sold in San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas. The largest sales of textiles are seen in December.

TEXTILE ART, DESIGN AND CULTURE

The designs in textile art of Venustiano Carranza refer to their Mayan origin and express a way of seeing the world. The creativity of craftswomen shows spontaneity in their attractive combinations of embroidery, which is a reason for the appreciation of their textiles as works of art. To learn more about these designs, in the following paragraphs traditional textile clothing for both men and women are described.

Menswear

Morales (2005) in his monograph essay explains that the typical garb for men in Venustiano Carranza is a short white shirt with an upturned neck 15 centimeters in front; long straight sleeves, to the wrist, without any bends or cuffs, with ornamental fabrics and a pocket on the upper left front of the chest which is considered as a new design. The shirt can be embroidered with colored yarn, mainly red. This shirt is sometimes so short that it exposes a bare belly; it does not go into pants and many of them end with a small fringe.

The pants are wide and gathered at the waist, making a diagonal cut that is reduced the bottom, near the ankle, and thus forms an attractive set of pleats. These pleats are diagonal from outside to inside and from the top down. The inseam of the legs have ornaments isolated in white thread or yarn, making the pants seem mottled. The yarn is red on the pants, with purple welts distributed in several transverse rows, giving a whole Moorish style. The clothing design for males (Figure 2) includes typical clothing used in Classic Maya period figures, which can be seen carved into ancient steles, like the mural of Bonampak. Similar designs are also in the lintels of Yaxchilan 24 and 26.



Figure 2. Traditional men's clothing.

Fuente: Albores, 2014.

Women's clothing

Designs in female outfits make up the strength woven into protecting their cultural identity. The outfits are colorful and differ from those made in other parts of the state by the various figures they contain: butterflies, stars, rattlesnake tails, toads (symbol of rain and earth) of the ancient gods of the sun and the moon, buzzards, eagles, men and women, flowers and corn plants.



Figure 3. Traditional outfit

Source: Albores, 2014

The blouse is short and white with a wide neckline. It has a square neckline with a wide ribbon, and is known as a “huipil”. This garment is woven

and embroidered in total white or in bright colors of a single background. On the shoulder there is wide, thick embroidery.

The skirt is a long sheet of about three meters, divided into two pieces of fabric of about a meter and a half each, joined by an embroidered stitching forming a motif of between five and ten centimeters wide. The skirt is indigo blue with colored embroidery. The female outfit is complete with a hair weaving that women make in their thick braids, into which is woven a ribbon in the same way that a belt is woven, and which is embroidered and has elegant embroidery in the center (Lopez, 2013).

CLOTHING AS DISTINCTION

The diversity of dress and their importance in social practices allows us to understand their cultural significance. Those with a civil or religious office have the name of “principals”; They are heads of districts or indigenous chiefs and used the traditional men’s clothing , described above, which is more showy or colorful. On their backs, in the style of a royal cape, they wear a red cloth the measures more than a square meter and which form diagonal folds. The cloth is woven with a special thread called “thread of Arabia” and in it abounds various embroidery with brightly colored figures. (Figure 4).

The outfit used by the principals is prepared by their wives and is a vestige of ancient pre - Hispanic weavings- Mayan heritage that lingers and is retained by indigenous weaving with great art and skill. The costumes are made with fine fabrics found in the state (Lopez, 2013).



Figure 4. Attire of a civil position

Source: Albores, 2014

Another example of attire are the “krincipales” which are used by the chiefs or directors (caciques) of the neighborhood or group. These include a linen handkerchief, with a red background, which is a little more than one square meter, embroidered with figures that are completely connected made of yarns of different colors. Sometimes the handkerchief, which is made up of various diagonal bends that form a band which is wound around the head. In other words, it covers the forehead with the center and with its tips knotted or simply locked or linked in back of the head.

The tips fall towards the back and the tip or corner of the center is on the front, giving the appearance of a Moorish turban.

The chiefs or caciques use a red and embroidered waistband, which operates only as an ornament, since the true fastening for the pants, which lacks buttons or snaps, is a short, thin thread that emerges from the pants. They wear straw hats, which before had a low crown and wide brim, but today have a high crown and large brim, into which they also weave in braids then sew them together without using forms, molds or machines.

Some designs combine signs of the Maya worldview with the Spanish culture; for example, *carrerantes*, riders dressed in a typical costume, use a showy red Spanish style shirt with openings at the angle, complimented with tight white trousers. The jacket that goes over the white shirt has black bars on the sleeves and back. It is open to the front and has a neck and a small handkerchief behind and short small openings below the waist with colored edges. On the neck is worn a waistband loomed cloth with red cotton thread. They carry another blanket embroidered with red on the head with a background adorned with different colors, such as yellow, green, blue or purple (Figure 5).



Figure 5. carrerante outfit.

Source: Albores, 2014.

The traditional clothing of Venustiano Carranza maintains a close relationship not only with the political hierarchy of its inhabitants, but also with other characteristics, such as marital status. In the case of women, the attire of a single woman is a *huipil* with plenty of drawings and a variety of colors. They wear different colored blouses but the main color is white, symbolizing purity and virginity. This is why brides wear clothes in that color. Married women also use white in the *huipil*, but sometimes it is replaced by a cream or beige, with fewer patterns and colors (Morales, 2005).

The clothing also identifies an adult or elderly person. The main feature is the reduced presence of drawings, shapes or figures in both the *huipil* and in the petticoat in the case of women, and the pants and shirt in the case of men (Figure 6). The variety of designs, colors and components, is evidence to the development of the clothing as a collective expression and that the patterns created by the people themselves are followed, demonstrating its tradition and custom.



Figure 6. Traditional outfit of an adult woman

Source: Albores, 2014

SHAPES AND FIGURES IN WEAVINGS

The shapes and figures in weavings represent the living culture of the people and ethnic groups- they reveal beliefs and the original magic of their specific identity. In the case of the weavings of Venustiano Carranza, art and fabric intertwine to express the symbolism of its history. The weavings of this municipality are a rich, complex and beautiful language that has allowed the people to preserve their creative knowledge.

The skilled hands of its weavers not only reproduce their beautiful designs, but also express their feelings and stories through symbols.

Morris (2006) explains that weavers recognize the antiquity and sanctity of the weavings' reasons but are reluctant to talk about their meaning. The same pattern can have more than four names and each reflects a different perspective. Only a few weavers know how to name them correctly, not only describe the motif.

In the culture of the Tzotzil people the craft of spinning and weaving is an explanatory principle of the environment in which they live which reveals their beliefs and meanings. Calvo (1998) indicates the meaning and description of several drawings or figures found in the weavings of the municipality of Venustiano Carranza, which are presented below.

Spiny star (Ch'ix k'anal)

This drawing represents the biggest star that appears in the east of the town which guides farmers when to plant the corn.



Figure 7. Star (Ch'ix k'anal)

Source: Albores, 2014

Rings or diamonds (Ch'okobil)

This drawing is shown on shirts and trousers, embroidered with red, green, yellow and purple yarn. This design is used by people for major holidays.



Figure 8. Rings or diamonds (Ch'okobil)

Source: Albores, 2014

Kapok tree (Yaxte ')

This drawing refers to the men who work planting the corn. The embroidery of this drawing is made with red, green, purple and yellow threads to make shirts that senior citizens use on religious holidays.

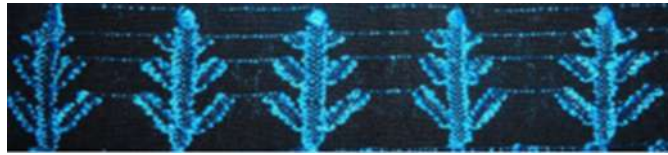


Figure 9. Kapok tree (Yaxte ') (1)



Figure 10. Kapok tree (2)



Figure 11. Kapok tree (3)

Source: Albores, 2014

The variety of shapes with aesthetic standards created by the people entails different meanings that relate to everyday social practices of the inhabitants of Venustiano Carranza and which constitutes their cultural identity. The various meanings, while still keeping its essential features through generations, are subject to interpretations from the processes of appropriation and socialization within the family and as part of the larger group. These meanings, which are expressed in different weavings, allow interactions with the living culture of the people of Venustiano Carranza. Fabrics made with soft textures and intense hues contain codes that tell stories that transcend the present and promise to perpetuate through the hands of craftswomen.

SPATIAL DELIMITATION

This investigation was conducted in the municipality of Venustiano Carranza, Chiapas, which is located in the Central Depression region with mountainous and semi flat terrain, located at the geographical coordinates 16 ° 21 ‘N and 92 ° 34 ‘W. It has a population of 61.341. It is bordered on the north by Totolapa, Nicolas Ruiz and Teopisca, with Amatenango Valley to the northeast , east of Las Rosas and Socoltenango, south of La Concordia, to the west with Villa Corzo and Chiapa de Corzo, and to the northwest of Acalá. It has a land area of 1396.1 square kilometers.



Image 1. Geographic location of the municipality of Venustiano Carranza, Chiapas.

Source: Recovered from <http://chiapas.gob.mx>

It has a warm humid climate with summer rains. In relation to the Grijalva River hydrography , its most important feature is forming part of the reservoir of the Belisario Dominguez dam, known as La Angostura. Among its tributaries include the Blanco and San Vicente rivers and the Siquilhó (Cold Water), Agua Zarca, Pisholtón (stone hat) streams.

TEMPORAL DELIMITATION

In the postmodernist context traditions, culture of the people through their clothes and meanings, currently living art appreciation in the weavings are representative of identity of its inhabitants it stands. It is noteworthy that this research processes developed in the municipal capital of Venustiano Carranza, Chiapas, with the temporality of 4 months for field research.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has generally described some types of handicrafts: indigenous, popular traditional and contemporary, which demonstrate the creativity, sensitivity and imagination of artisans and in the first two cases, represent a culture with ancient roots. The latter is essential to understand the textile art of Venustiano Carranza, which is made up of woven and embroidered textiles with figures of different colors and attractive combinations prepared by craftswomen in accordance with a tradition that has been passed from generation to generation.

The designs of the weavings of Venustiano Carranza are evidence of its relationship to its culture which is expressed through motifs and colors and which make the relationship of clothing with social practices understood. Based on the above, it can be said that the outfits are used to differentiate the social classes within the indigenous group, marital status or age, since these distinctions are also expressed in the different symbols, colors or designs used in the manufacture of various garments. Finally, it can be said that the forms and figures follow aesthetic patterns in different embroideries which reveal beliefs and important meanings in the lives of the people, and contribute in maintaining the essential features of their cultural identity and its maintenance as an indigenous people.

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