The Mixteco Presence in Tijuana

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A más de 3,000 kilómetros de su lugar de origen, los mixtecos encontraron en Tijuana, Baja California, un territorio base para asentarse y distribuirse. A esta ciudad llegan y se quedan, o bien de ésta salen hacia San Quintín, al sur del estado, o bien hacia el norte, a los campos y calles de California. En ese movimiento se ha ido forjando en Tijuana una comunidad mixteca de más de 5,000 miembros que se llaman a sí mismos paísanos, mixtecos o oaxaqueños y que los demás los llaman inditos, oaxacas, marias, sureños. Se asienta la mayoría de los mixtecos en la colonia Obrera, al suroeste de la ciudad, entre lomas y cañadas que mucho les recuerda a su natal Mixteca o “pueblo de nubes”.

Since 1960, many Mixtecos have migrated more than 3,000 kilometers (2,000 miles) from their home villages in the state of Oaxaca to Tijuana, settling there and using their community as a way station for further migrations south to San Quintín or north to California. In Tijuana a Mixteco community of more than 5,000 members call one another paísanos (fellow countryman), mixteco, or oaxaqueño (Oaxaca), while others call them inditos (little Indian), oaxacas, marias (term for Indian migrant street vendors), or sureños (southerner). The majority of the Mixtecos have settled in the Obrero district in the southeast of the city, among hills and narrow canyons reminiscent of the landscape in their native Mixteca or “country of clouds”.

In the cultural mix of Tijuana, to which indigenous and mestizo peoples from all over Mexico continue to migrate, Mixtecos insist that they are an accepted and recognized part of urban society. At the same time most of them continue to explore their remembered traditional culture. Mixtecos in Tijuana still value this cultural heritage, although they perceive that in their present lives it is of little use to them. They still desire aspects of the life in Mixteca, and they return there when they can to celebrate feasts, to check on land holdings, or for other family matters. Mixteca remains a focus of collective memory.

The Mixtecos have achieved recognition among ethnic groups in Tijuana for the way they celebrate the Day of the Dead. To this traditional feast in the popular religious calendar of Mexico, Mixtecos have added mysticism and symbolism beyond the common Catholic practices in Tijuana. Each year members of the Mixteco community are asked to assist in the design and preparation of Day of the Dead altars at educational and recreational centers. The city’s primary and secondary schools hold competitions in Day of the Dead altars, in which Mixteco influence has become quite evident in expressive styles not commonly seen in other cities of northern Mexico.

In Tijuana Mixtecos speak their own language among themselves but learn Spanish and English for social and economic survival. Each region of Mixteca from which migration comes has its own dialect, but these sociolinguistic differences are minimized in Tijuana.

Mixtecos draw social distinctions on the basis of “having made it” economically, giving prestige to the older and more successful members of the community, to bilingual Mixteco teachers, and to those with relatives on the other side of the border who send support. Mestizos among the Mixtecos often distinguish themselves in the ethnic slurs they use, the fights they provoke, and the socioeconomic advantage they take. On their
Curriculum in the Escuela Bilingüe El Pipila includes Mixteco language and culture. Photo by Ricardo Garcia