



Author Analisa Taylor stands next to a fading reminder of the one-time presence of cultural anthropologist Marie-Odile Marion in the Lacandon Mayan community she portrayed in her almost 20-year-old ethnography. Presented in the style of “*Kilroy was here*,” the cartoonish drawing carries with it a rather disconcerting portrayal of Marion’s role in recording the stories of Mayan women.

In *Entre anhelos y recuerdos*, the late Marie-Odile Marion interweaves the vivid and wistful life stories told to her by six Lacandon Maya women, representing three generations, with her own anguished reflections on her ethical responsibility toward them as their welfare became increasingly fragile toward the close of the twentieth century. Their stories reflect an erosion of the centuries-old kinship networks and symbolic order that had previously shaped Lacandon Mayan women’s identities and livelihoods throughout each stage of their lives. Their stories also spotlight the destructive effects of accelerated deforestation, epidemics, multiple forced relocations, religious evangelization, the introduction of commodities such as processed foods and firearms, and the construction of highways and air strips that connect their villages to distant rail lines, ports, and cities.

Confronted with the realities of enslavement, child marriage, interfamilial violence, and ostracism in widowhood among the women whom she regards as her closest informants, Marion self-consciously renounces the premises of objectivity and emotional distance that had formed the pillars of her academic training as an ethnographer. Calling this text an ethnographic *testimonio*, she emphasizes the intimacy and complexity she has developed with each of these women as they endeavored to remake and make sense of their lives under extraordinarily traumatic conditions.

Testimonio is a form of writing at the heart of grassroots social movements in post-Cuban Revolution Latin America; it can be defined as a text produced through collaboration between two voices: a speaker, often illiterate, who relates a significant personal experience as an agent of collective struggle, and a writer who records, transcribes, edits, endorses, and at times translates the speaker’s oral autobiography. As readers removed from the context of oral transmission as well as textual recompilation of the story, we are in no position to ascertain each oral or written authorial projection embedded within it, even as we might paradoxically

DAUGHTERS OF THE MOON: True Life Stories from the Lacandon Rain Forest

With the support of a CSWS Faculty Research Grant and a CAS Humanities and Creative Arts Faculty Research Grant, Analisa Taylor is working to complete her book, *Daughters of the Moon: True Life Stories from the Lacandon Rain Forest*, an annotated translation from Spanish to English and critical edition of the late Marie-Odile Marion’s ethnographic testimonio, *Entre anhelos y recuerdos* (1997).

by Analisa Taylor, Associate Professor of Spanish,
Department of Romance Languages

cally expect it to be at once wholly engaging as a narrative and wholly faithful as a deposition. Narrative liberties the writer might intentionally or unintentionally take with the speaker’s account include linguistic standardization, chronological reorganization, suppression, embellishment, contextualization, and interpretation. Both speaker and writer sift and knead the story according to specific, sometimes unconscious, and often divergent ethical and aesthetic ends, leading to potential impasses within the text between truth claims and storytelling objectives.

Daughters of the Moon gives us some important stakes to consider when we ask what the ethical responsibilities of the testimonio writer might be, as ethnographer, as participant observer, and as witness—torn between a pledge to protect the identities of real people and a drive to call out exploitation, injustice, and unprosecuted atrocities. I am referring specifically to Marion’s incomplete depiction of the 1993 murder of Nuk García Paniagua by an American citizen, Leo Joaquín Palacios Bruce. Although Marion does not name names or specify places or other identifying details in her account, archival sources and interviews with people familiar with the case suggest that Leo Bruce had come to the remote Northern Lacandon community of Nahá at the invitation of his uncle, the prominent anthropologist Robert Bruce, who introduced him to his main informant, the famed spiritual leader Chan K’in Viejo.

Leo followed his uncle’s lead, ingratiating himself with Chan K’in Viejo and the other elders of Nahá, claiming that he wanted to document their balché ceremonies with his video cameras. Leo had money, and he had liquor by the case, through the sharing of which he was apparently able to win friends and influence people. Nobody seems to quite understand how he convinced Chan K’in Viejo to allow him to marry his twelve-year-old daughter, Nuk. Leo contracted Tzeltal laborers to build him and his new wife a house set back a good distance from the dwelling of Chan K’in Viejo. It was odd for a new son-in-law not to move in with his wife’s family, and the house itself was also odd by Lacandon standards, placed as it was atop high posts made of concrete blocks, ostensibly to keep out forest critters, and furnished with modern conveniences such as a microwave oven and satellite dish. Leo’s notion of what this marriage was about could not possibly have matched that of Nuk or her family; still, even as his abuse escalated over the few months they were married before her death, no one in the family, least



Analisa records notes while talking with Beatriz Mijangos Zenteno. The extraordinary life stories of Doña Bety and Koh María, Chan K'in Viejo's youngest wife and Nuk's mother, are beautifully conveyed in Gayle Walker and Kiki Suarez' book of interviews with women in Chiapas, *Every Woman is a World* (U of Texas Press, 2008).

of all her father and mother, would offer her refuge no matter how much she pleaded with them. As her younger sister Chanuk and other family members recall, Nuk was a happy and carefree child up until the day she was forced to cohabitate with Leo, after which she became listless and withdrawn.

Why does Marion—who tried to protect Nuk, and who was instrumental in Bruce's apprehension by police—write these real people, key identifying details, and her own participation as engaged bystander out of her account of these horrific events? In "Femicidios en Chiapas: Amores que matan" (2013), Marta Durán de Huerta explains that it was in fact Marion who alerted authorities, who then apprehended and jailed Bruce as he attempted to drive into Palenque. When Marion found out about the case, she alerted human rights lawyer Martha Figueroa Mier, who immediately headed out for the long and exhausting journey to Nahá to see the body, collect evidence, and take depositions from witnesses. As Figueroa Mier recalls from Leo Bruce's testimony, he claimed that Nuk's death was an accident, and that she was drunk and had fallen out of the house, striking her head against one of the concrete posts. Apparently, as she was convulsing from the severe contusion, Leo brought her to the health clinic and then, finding it closed, took her to the town police, where he left her outside the door. He returned home, changed clothes, pulled his long hair back into a ponytail, and got into his truck, ostensibly to find medical help in Palenque. At that point, however, it became clear that Nuk was already dead. Her older brother acted to prevent Leo from fleeing the scene.

Leo was apprehended in Palenque and sent to prison in Ocosingo. Figueroa Mier led the prosecution against him, and his trial was set for early 1994. As Marion notes in her epilogue, Bruce was inadvertently freed from the Ocosingo prison before his trial could get underway when in January 1994 the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) threw open the prison gates to liberate political prisoners. Bruce took advantage of the commotion to quietly disappear, and is presumably still at large.

In the communities of Nahá and Lacanjá, I met with women and family members of women whose testimonies appear in this book. I had the privilege of accompanying Beatriz Mijangos Zenteno, known familiarly as Doña Bety. Doña

Bety had been informally adopted by archaeologist Franz Blom and photographer Trudy Duby Blom as a teenager and began accompanying them on horseback from San Cristóbal de las Casas to the Lacandon settlements of Nahá, Lacanjá and Metzabok in the early 1950s. She has continued to guide researchers, tourists, and heads-of-state to these communities ever since. There are probably few, if any, non-Lacandon people alive today with a stronger connection to the families of Lacanjá and Najá, or a keener knowledge of the monumental changes in their way of life over the past six decades.

These recent trips have helped me to relate these women's first-person accounts of displacement and forced acculturation to wider critiques of the Mexican government's coercive and ethnocidal development schemes, corruption, and authoritarianism. When read within the context of state control of the Lacandon Rain Forest and state patronage of Lacandon Maya communities initiated in the late 1970s by then President Luis Echeverría, these stories illustrate the interconnected failings of the Mexican state under the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). These failings are being protested en masse throughout Mexico today: extraction of the country's wealth by fraudulently elected corporate executives masquerading as politicians; gross environmental negligence; and systematically unprosecuted violence against poor and indigenous people, indigenous women in particular.

When it comes to speaking truth to power, Marion's narrative experiment seems to end at an impasse that is as frustrating as it is fascinating to me. Marion starts out by emphatically rejecting the notion that anthropology can supply us with empirical knowledge disentangled from subjective impression, yet to the bitter end she follows the discipline's most hallowed imperative—protecting the identities of the real people who appear in the ethnography by changing names, omitting place names, and suppressing other identifying details. In the wake of Nuk's murder and Leo's evasion of justice, she concludes that anthropologists must begin to take their cue from investigative journalists and lawyers, to apply what they know about egregious goings-on in the societies they study to promote human rights rather than to accumulate expertise for expertise's sake. In blurring the details of what happened, who was involved, where, and when in the case of Nuk's murder, Marion places Bruce's heinous crimes—as well as other unprosecuted atrocities against Lacandon Maya women depicted in this book—within the realm of innuendo and conjecture. In the pursuit of justice and truth, this is not as helpful as facts and evidence.

How and why Leo Bruce never faced a day in court for these heinous crimes, and how this case of femicide received almost no national or international media or scholarly attention, are questions that in and of themselves underscore Marion's thesis, echoed throughout the book, that

Lacandon Mayan women's lives are commodified and devalued within the changing Lacandon society and within the broader Mexican society. Almost 20 years after the original Spanish-language publication of *Entre anhelos y recuerdos*, this makes it all the more urgent to give the book another, more critically contextualized read. ■

—Analisa Taylor is the author of *Indigeneity in the Mexican Cultural Imagination* (University of Arizona Press, 2009). Taylor received a 2015-16 CSWS Faculty Research Grant to support the research on her new book.



Analisa Taylor with Doña Bety and Koh María.