

Sabbatical Report

In the original project that I described in the Sabbatical Proposal, I indicated my intention to revisit the U.S.-Mexico border area—specifically, the contiguous cities of Mexicali and Calexico—and re-establish contact with some of the individuals with whom I had worked for a period of sixteen months during the time I conducted fieldwork towards my doctoral dissertation (early November 2002 through late February 2004). My graduate study focused on the particularities of Espiritualismo Trinitario Mariano, a widespread Mexican religious movement characterized by possession performances that take place in order to contact Judeo-Christian Divinities and Native American spirit entities for the purposes of receiving advice for daily living and conducting healing treatments, respectively. In reference to the Sabbatical Proposal, my original intention was to assess the practical and symbolic changes undergone by this popular religious movement in view of the social, economic, and political changes experienced by the participants and their immediate political and social environments during the past thirteen years (such as changes in U.S. migration policies and the exacerbation of the war on drugs). My two goals were: first, to produce an article intended for publication in an academic journal; and, second, to utilize the results of my observations in order to reach a better understanding of the role of the urban shaman—*espiritualista curandera* (a Mexican traditional healer)—and thus incorporate this improved understanding of religious practice to the lectures on religious specialists in both the ANTH 11 (The Anthropology of Religion, Magic, and Witchcraft) and ANTH 2 (Introduction to Cultural

Anthropology) courses. I also planned on incorporating my findings to the existing ANTH 11 SLO#2, “Shamans and Priests.” .

Following the outline of my Sabbatical Proposal, I travelled to Mexicali at the beginning of the Fall 2017 semester. Once I contacted a few of the informants with whom I had previously worked, I realized, to my disappointment, that I would not be able to carry out the project as I had originally planned. There were several reasons that accounted for this realization. To begin with, my main confidant, guide, and friend in the area, Jorge Valenzuela, a professor of Sociology at the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California in Mexicali, had passed away. I also found out that an *espiritualista curandera* who had been a key informant in my study was afflicted with a condition that deemed her unable to work with me as she had done in the past. Most probably, the main factor to which I should attribute my change of plans was the realization that I would not have enough time to carry out an in-depth study that would provide reliable results. In fact, the fieldwork I carried out in the early 2000s lasted, as I mentioned above, sixteen months (I should indicate that, previously to my fieldwork at the border, I had carried out a brief study of *espiritualismo* in Mexico City, where the headquarters of the movement are located). Even though the sabbatical I was awarded was for a whole semester, I estimated that I would only be able to travel to Mexicali for a period of two months, as the rest of the time I would need to dedicate to the writing of the article and to contact different journals for publication. As I stated above, I realized, then, that I would not have enough time to gather sufficient information that could be adequately compared with the data discussed in my dissertation.

In addition, I have to acknowledge that, during my brief stay at Mexicali at the beginning of the Fall 2017 semester, I did not feel completely at ease regarding my safety, a situation completely different than the one I had experienced during my fieldwork several years before.

All these factors suggested to me that I should use the information that I already had on Espiritualismo Trinitario Mariano at the border in a much more productive manner. After discussing my options with my supervisor, Dr. Miranda, the former dean of Behavioral and Social Sciences, we decided that the best way to go about the project was to attempt to publish the findings that constituted the basis for my dissertation as a book. My idea on publishing a book was to revise the original version significantly so that the contents of the new manuscript would be accessible to the wide literate public, including undergraduate students.

With this new plan in mind, I decided to contact several academic publishers and inquire about the possibility of publishing a book based on my doctoral dissertation. I began this process by contacting six publishers, two of which—University of Texas Press and Peter Lang Publishing—replied positively to my request. University of Texas is a highly ranked publisher, whereas Peter Lang, even though it displays a much more extensive distribution, is ranked lower. After I consulted with some colleagues (including Dr. Miranda), I decided to sign an agreement with Peter Lang Publishing, assuming that the revisions required by them would be less demanding than the ones required by UT Press (I knew that I had a limited amount of time to work on the project, as I had signed up to work during the Winter session, and my capacity to dedicate to the project would be severely constrained by the requirements of teaching).

About a month after I submitted a lengthy book prospectus (15 pages), together with an initial draft of the manuscript, Peter Lang Publishing offered me a Publishing Agreement, and provided me with some of the comments made by peer reviewers who read the draft that I sent for consideration. One of the questions asked to the reviewers had to do with their overall opinion of the work, and whether they believed that my study should be published. Their answers were affirmative, indicating their high evaluation of the topic. I read all the suggestions provided by the reviewers, and I considered incorporating them to my revision of the manuscript on the basis of (a) organization of the manuscript, and (b) integrity of the anthropological content and analysis. These considerations, together with the publisher's guidelines, provided me with the direction I needed to take in order to work on the manuscript in the most effective way. Needless to say, I exchanged emails with the publisher several times a week (the individual with whom I communicated on a regular basis is Megan Madden, Editorial Assistant at Peter Lang Publishing). By the end of the Fall 2017 semester, I had completed three rounds of revising, and I believe that the final product is a very good one: it is rich in descriptive detail and anthropological analysis, it provides an intimate account of the fieldwork experience, it is accurate in content, and it is clear and accessible to a diverse audience of readers. I would have liked to carry on with further revisions, but I knew that, before I could submit the manuscript, I would still need to format it to the requirements set by the publisher. This latter part of the process, which could be referred to as technical and required a great deal of Word software know-how, was, without a doubt, the most arduous for me to complete. However, the editorial team at Peter Lang Publishing was tremendously helpful and answered each of my questions very promptly. I felt that,

overall, the publishing experience was very satisfying, to a large extent due to the fact that the publisher worked with me throughout the whole process, always attempting to resolve any potential conflict that would arise (mainly in reference to how my views regarding the organization of the material contrasted with some of the suggestions provided by the peer reviewers).

A week ago, I was working with the publisher on the cover design for the book (at this stage of production, my regular contact at Peter Lang Publishing is Luke McCord, Production Editor), and I was very pleased to learn that they have accepted to include in the cover a photograph of a drawing done for me by one of the *espiritualista* participants with whom I had the pleasure to work with in the past. I am quite disappointed, however, at the fact that many of the photographs that I thought of including in the book were not accepted by the publisher due to the fact that I was unable to secure permission signatures from the individuals featured in those images. As a matter of fact, I was able to take, during the fieldwork for my dissertation, about one hundred photographs of temple ceremonies. Unfortunately, I never considered the possibility that signatures would be needed to publish those images.

Very importantly towards distribution, I have secured endorsements from two prominent anthropologists: Carlos Velez-Ibañez, from Arizona State University, and Eugene Anderson, Professor Emeritus from University of California at Riverside.

Most recently, on March 23rd, I received the copyedited version which I will need to examine and send back by April 6th. I am eagerly looking forward to browse through the pages of the final product. The title of the book is: *Espiritualismo at the U.S.-Mexican Border: A Case Study of Possession, Globalization, and the Maintenance of Tradition.*

The book resulting from this experience, made possible by the sabbatical awarded to me by the members of the committee, will greatly benefit my work as a professor at El Camino College. To start with, I will be giving a presentation/talk to an audience of students on the fieldwork experience, so relevant to anthropology. I will include, in that presentation, a discussion on the writing of the dissertation, as well as on the publishing process. In future semesters, I will include in my ANTH 2 and ANTH 11 classes information relevant to the role of the urban shaman in the process of modernization. Through several phone conversations that I recently had with *espiritualista curanderas* with whom I had worked in Mexicali years ago, I obtained some information which helped me validate early conclusions that I had made. As I suggested in the Sabbatical Proposal, these important religious specialists have a dual role: they are a repository of tradition and, at the same time, they provide their patients—many of them marginalized individuals—with a culturally informed model with which to interpret and utilize elements of the modern world, such as biomedicine. I will incorporate this understanding to my class discussions. In addition, I will discuss with my colleagues the possibility of implementing such understanding of shamanism to the ANTH 11 SLO#2, “Shamans and Priests,” so that it includes such information and, therefore, reflects a more updated consideration of this religious practitioner. Very importantly, I plan on considering the book, the final product of this academic experience, as additional reading in the ANTH 11 course that I regularly teach every semester.