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MEXICAN DRESS

The translation of the Mexican huipil from a Cultural Expression to an economic commodity in the twentieth century.

By

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INTRODUCTION

> In ancient Mexico costume differences not only set the rich and powerful apart from the poor; they also indicated the weavers cultural group and place of origin. Today there are still over fifty different Indian peoples living in Mexico, many of whom have kept to a particular style of dress, with variations to distinguish each village within a community. This sort of traditionalism has become increasingly rare in most areas of the world, as is shown by the widespread adoption of business suits, T-shirts and blue jeans. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that when tourists from Europe and the U.S.A. visit the remoter parts of Mexico they are impressed by the spirit of Indian villagers wearing elaborately woven or embroidered clothing in their everyday lives.
> (Sayer, 1985, p. 9).

In August 1996 I was given a gift of a Mexican huipil (traditional Mexican woman's dress) by a Mexican woman. I had never seen a piece like this before so naturally it aroused my interest in finding out more about Mexican costume.

When beginning my research, I found a lot of the work on Mexican dress and textiles was mere descriptions of work. The Cordry's have documented excellent descriptions of traditional dress from many parts of Mexico in their book Mexican Indian Costumes (1968). This serves as a good record of different garments from different regions which can be used as an encyclopaedia to refer to but it lacks any discussion of Mexican dresses' social and cultural role in society. Other work of Mexican costume highly romanticised the production of textiles by not mentioning that a lot of garments are now mass produced for the commercial and tourist

market (e.g. Textiles De Oaxaca 1993). Few ever mentioned the effects that western input may have had on textiles in the last century. However, Waterbury's article "Embroidery for Tourists" in Cloth and Human Experience 1989, and Wade's article "The ethnic market in the American Southeast 1880-1980" in Objects and Others 1985, explained how producing garments for the western market has led to changes in Mexican traditional craft production. It raised many questions for me on just how traditional are the garments produced in Mexico today and led me to question articles that glorified and romanticised how meaningful and symbolic Mexican costume is.

As part of my research, I spent three months in Mexico. This allowed me to see many examples of traditional Mexican garments of different regions. More importantly, I saw that most shops in towns and cities sold cheaply made garments minicing the "typical" styles of Mexican dress. These garments more than usually are bought cheaply as souvenirs by American or European women.

This thesis focuses on how the symbolic value and inherent qualities of Mexican dress have changed or have been lost in order to appeal to the western market today.

CHAPTER 1.

A Brief History of Mexican Dress and Textiles.

Chloe Sayer, in her book Mexican Costume (1985) gives a concise synopsis of Mexican history placing emphasis on Mexican dress and textiles. It is mainly from her accounts that I have taken the information used in the following chapter.

It has been widely accepted that the first immigrants to Mexico arrived from Asia some 20,000 to 40,000 years ago. They came across the Bering Straits from Siberia to Alaska. Gradually they spread down North, Central and South America. Separate cultures developed over a long period of time with no proof of any outside influence until the arrival of the Spanish in 1519.

Unfortunately the study of costume is relatively new, and because of this, cloth and ancient costume's importance has often been overlooked by archaeologists. Also because it is highly perishable, few pre-Hispanic textiles have survived. Yet despite these hazards, some pieces of textiles have been discovered. These pieces that have been found can give some indication to the size, shape or function of the garment. The pieces can also tell us of the weaving and dying techniques used. Another record of ancient Mexican dress was recorded by the people themselves. Thousands of clay figurines only a few inches high have been found from over 3,000 years ago (Fig 1 +2). These models give us some idea of the garments worn at the time. Some suggest not only the garments but also the decorative motifs of

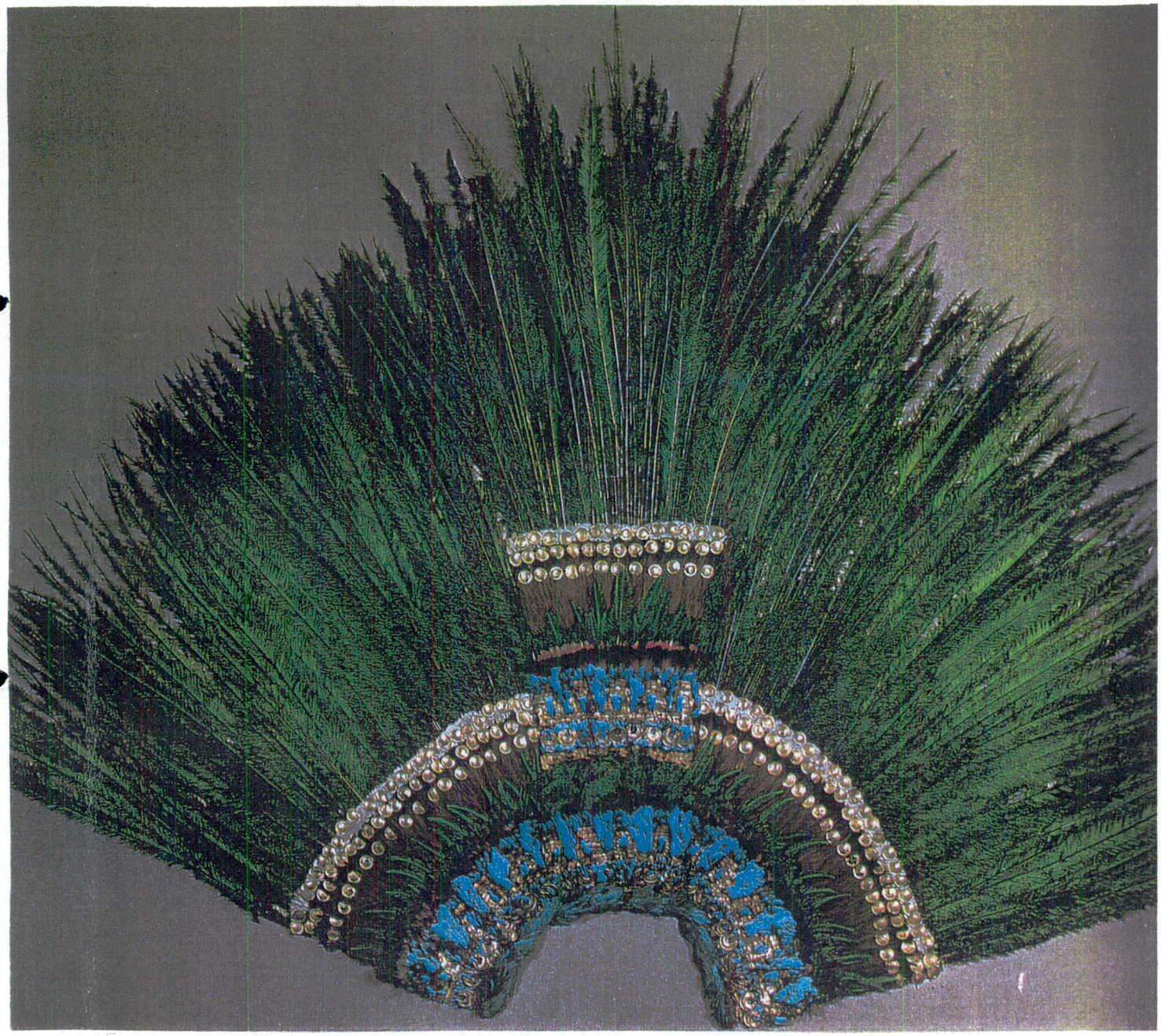
(Fig.1)
Aztec Clay figure
(Circa 500-800 A.D.)

(Fig. 2)
Aztec Clay figure
(Circa 600-900 A.D.)

the fabric. Other documentation of pre-conquest Mexican dress has been made in reports by the Spanish. These accounts offer good information compared to archaeological accounts of earlier periods. The reports are extremely fresh and vivid as they were observing an alien culture. They passionately describe the "savage" and pagan customs of Mexican Indians.

At the time of the Spanish invasion in 1519, the Aztecs were the ruling empire in Mexico. They had established an empire that reached from the Gulf Coast to the Pacific, and stretched Northwards as far as the desert and southwards into the mountains of Oaxaca. Within their borders were an estimated 15 million people, most of whom belonged to tribes other than the Aztecs. The wealth of the ruling Aztec's astonished Spanish observers. Fray Diego Duran (c. 1520-30) a Spanish missionary, wrote of the quality of their products; "Sumptuous cloaks for lords, differently woven and worked, so rich and decorative that some were edged with colours and plumage", and "clothing for women... as cunning and handsome as it is possible to make" (Sayer, 1985, p.48). This kind of wealth and luxury can be seen in the great Quetzal feather headress with gold disks (Fig 3). It belonged to Montezuma, the last Aztec emperor.

Raw materials were very much in demand for making garments. Aztec weavers relied on massive imports of cotton from tropical coastal regions and hot, humid valleys where its growth thrives. Brian M. Fagan gives an excellent account of the



(Fig. 3)
Quetzal feather headress

Aztec markets where trading like this took place in his book The Aztecs (1984). It seems that the Mexican race always had a good sense of business for selling their wares.

White cotton, known as "ichcatl" and the "coyote-coloured" cotton named "coyoichcatl" was worn by nobility in the Aztec empire. In some cases cotton was interwoven with feathers or rabbit fur. This cloth was usually imported but produced also by local Aztec weavers. Onlay work with feathers was another luxurious means of decoration. This could be done by sewing feathers onto cloth or by glueing them on.

> Basic garments worn by members of the lower orders were the same as those commonly worn by the nobility but without the wealth of ornamentation that was enjoyed by the Nobility. Women wore the wrap-around skirt and waist-sash together with the huipil. The loincloth was essential for all Aztec men (Sayer 1985 p. 73).

Hernan Cortes, the famous Spanish conquistador, sent Charles V, King of Spain and the Netherlands treasures and curiosities from Mexico (now called New Spain). These pieces were on exhibition in Brussels when Albrecht Durer, the German painter and engraver wrote the following in 1520,

> I saw the things which have been brought to the king from the new golden land... strange garments, bedspreads, and all manner of marvellous things for many uses..... In all my days of life I have seen nothing that so rejoiced my heart as these things, for I saw among them strange and artful things, and I marvelled at the subtle genius of men in distant lands.
> Sayer 1985 p. 77).

Durer's excitement and appreciation of these exotic pieces would have been shared by many Europeans at this time, and so began the export business of Mexican goods. Spain received shipments of silver from Mexico and other less precious goods such as vanilla, balsam, cocoa beans and dyestuffs such as indigo, logwood and cochineal. In the same way, New Spain benefited by the introduction of European cereals, cattle and sheep.

In 1565, the Philippines came under Spanish rule.

> With Mexico as the transit point for trade between Spain and the Orient, consumers could now enjoy a wide range of luxury produce that included... satins, velvets, brocades and rich silks from China which rivalled Spanish textiles and were sold for lower prices.
> (Sayer, 1985, p. 79).

Spanish tailors now in Mexico worked with these fabrics producing clothes that reflected the trends in Spain.

The Spanish were impressed by the quality of the cotton in Mexico and promoted its growth in all the traditional cotton-growing areas. However they also wanted to have the fabrics they had been accustomed to in Spain. By the 1530's hemp and flax for making linen were being regularly cultivated in Mexico. As for silk, the efforts of the Dominican order from Spain met with great success in the Mixteca region of Oaxaca, which soon became one of the most important centres for silk production in Mexico. In 1526, the first flocks of sheep were introduced into New

Spain at Cortes' request. The flocks adapted well to the conditions in Central Mexico and Oaxaca and wool production thrived. Spanish settlers in New Spain also introduced a number of dyestuffs, the spinning-wheel, the distaff for use when preparing flax fibres, wool cards for entangling newly shorn wool, frames for spun yarn, European-style warping frames, scissors and needles of steel.

Schools were set up for Mexican Indians in mission centres. There, many skills such as shoe-making, hide-training, treadle loom weaving and embroidery were taught. Most Spanish needlework techniques were adopted in Mexico, which already had its own native history of embroidery. These pupils learned a useful repertoire of Spanish stitches and designs which could be passed on to future generations. Now for the first time, Mexican dress and textiles had outside influences. Spain had introduced silk, wool and new dyestuffs as well as new technology for making the production process faster. Mexican dress could now also be influenced by Spanish fashion and by the new embroidery stitches that had been introduced as well as the new textiles from the Philippines.

Mexican dress was also changed by the Spanish in another way. Friars were disgusted by Indian nudity. Men came under great pressure to wear shirts and to wear drawers instead of loincloths. Women's dress, however, went under few changes, although bare breasts were discouraged. By 1570 large numbers of

Indians had accepted many of the external elements of their new Christian faith and had begun to dress like Spaniards.

Centuries later in 1821, after a decade of escalated fighting, independence was granted to Mexico. Mexican society had been oppressed for too long. "Now Spain was renamed Mexico in memory of her great and glorious past under the Aztec, or Mexica" (Sayer, 1985, p. 95). This brought about more great changes for the Mexican people. "Mexico entered a period of chronic economic crisis, political upheavals, rebellions, and foreign intervention" (Sayer, 1985, p. 97).

After the 1910 Civil Revolution, a new attempt to balance wealth among the different classes was made. The Mestizos (race resulting from intermarriage between the Indians and the Spanish) finally emerged as the dominant class and were eager to free themselves from the European influences forced upon them for so many centuries. A new enthusiasm for native cultures and styles of dress emerged. Perhaps the natives resistance to foreign influences helped them to maintain their Indian traditions for so long.

"Indeed, some of the most remarkable fruits of civilisations often flourish .... When a brilliant tradition is betrayed by history" (Los textiles de Chiapas, p. 87, 1996).

Sadly, in spite of tenacious resistance, Mexican textiles, other than the pieces produced for the tourist and commercial market, are rapidly disappearing and soon may exist only as a memory.

CHAPTER 2.

Function, Decoration and Economy.

Changes in the everyday twentieth century Mexican Huipil.

Wade's article, "The ethnic Art Market in the American Southwest" in Objects and Others (1985) tells us that in New Mexico, "pre-tourism" began in the late 1800's when the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad line was built connecting the West coast to the East servicing towns both of indigenous people and of white people. Natives were allowed to ride for free and they were encouraged to set up craft stalls outside stations. It proved to be profitable for the Indians and this mobility helped the promotion of Indian arts. It wasn't long before Indians were tailoring their work to suit white taste. Functional full-sized ceramic jars were made smaller and more decorative so that they were more portable and looked more unusual. Indian groups saw tourists as a source of income.

According to Seaton's article "Whose Culture is it anyway?" (1994), today in Mexico, native indigenous people are numerically the minority. From a peak of 57 million Native Americans in 1492, there are estimated to be only 33million today. Indian communities are concentrated in poorer, less developed regions of Mexico, including tourist trails, heritage sites and potential tourist resort areas. Paradoxically, the success of Mexico's tourism industry is in large part because of its adoption of the Indian Cultural heritage as the image of what is Mexico.

New World. Visitors have the rare opportunity of traveling among the living Maya, direct descendents of those early architects, enjoying their hospitality and observing customs and traditions unchanged for centuries.

WEAVERS IN THE ETHNIC MAYA COMMUNITIES OF CHIAPAS CONTINUE TO USE THE TRADITIONAL BACK-STRAP LOOM.

(Fig. 4)
Taken from Chiapan Tourist Brochure.

Figure 4 was found in a tourist brochure for Chiapas headlined "Maya World- where Man, Nature and Time are one: It tells of how in Chiapas "Visitors have the rare opportunity of travelling among the living Maya..... enjoying their hospitality and observing customs and traditions unchanged for centuries". The caption used for Figure 4 is "Weavers in the ethnic Maya communities of Chiapas continue to use the backstrap loom". Images of ancient sites and ruins and museum collections of ethnic art, provide not only a selling point for tourism, but the symbols and identifications in Mexican society itself.

> The image of the Indian, artefact and heritage site is equivalent to the British Beefeater, of American Cowboy; the difference here is that this "heritage" is still "living", but has little control over it's own culture, or its exploitation
> (Seaton, 1994, p. 838).

The situation is far from the romantic culturally ethnic society the tourist brochures suggest. This may be said also of the production of "traditional" arts and crafts.

The persistence of traditional or ethnic arts and crafts depends on continued demand for the items in this industrial age when people want goods that have personality and distinctiveness. The Mexican Huipil is always in demand from the public. Most are sold to North American or European women. Purchasing a huipil in Mexico will boost their snob status. The huipil, like any "traditional craft" tourist purchase, is connected with international travel, exploration and multiculturalism.

> It has nostalgic impact in a plastic world.
>
> A handcrafted object evokes the aura of human tradition, the sweat and skill of it's individual maker, and - since craftsmanship avoids the repetitive precision of a stamping machine - uniqueness and originality
> (Weiner and Schneider, 1989, p. 245).

Waterbury tells us of how a huge demand for ethnic clothes grew out of the American countercultural movement of the 1960's and early 1970's. This movement rejected narrow patriotism and mainstream naterialistic values and used ethnic and peasant dress as a symbol of this ideology. Ethnic dress in turn diffused to mainstream fashion and style of the upper-middle class. Waterbury tells us the women of Oaxaca benefited from the growing market for the huipil. In order to meet this demand for ethnic clothes, changes had to be made to their traditional production system.

San Antonio is adjacent to Ocotlan, the district headtown, some 30 kilometres South of Oaxaca city. It is not known exactly when embroidery began in San Antonio. Waterbury suggests it was introduced by the Dominican friars during the colonial period. Although it is known that embroidery existed in many parts of Mexico before the Spanish conquest. However the cut of the blouse (as seen in figures 5 and 6) is definitely post conquest. It has a yoke and sewn-in sleeves unlike the pre-conquest huipil which is rectangular in shape (see figure 9). Waterbury tells that the wearing and making of the San Antonio huipil began to decline in the 1930's, but it did not die out completely. A handful of women made

(Fig. 5)
San Antonio Embroiderer

(Fig. 6)
San Antonio Blouse with its yoke and sewn-in sleeves.

traditional garments on special order and sometimes sold two or three to tourist shops in Oaxaca city. After World War II more interest in travel emerged in Western society. Tourism grew in Oaxaca city. This led to greater demand for the regions crafts and shopkeepers from the cities wanted more stock. Older Oaxacan women who still remembered how to embroider began to teach young girls the skill. A few local women seized the chance to establish themselves as intermediary traders by purchasing and reselling to tourist shops. Throughout this period, demand increased steadily. The population process remained traditional. However, factory-made cloth and thread were now used. This made production a lot faster as there was no longer need for the women to weave their own cloth and dye their threads. The cutting, embroidery, and assembling of the blouses were not yet differentiated, so each woman made the entire garment herself.

In the 1960's tourism increased dramatically as with the demand for peasant and ethnic clothing. The traditional production system couldn't keep up, with the result that several women initiated a putting out system. In 1970 the pool of outworkers in San Antonio became insufficient. It was then necessary to seek pieceworkers from outside. The greatest need was for embroiderers. This is the most time consuming step of the production. Young girls from poor families who needed a small supplement to household income or savings for the cash portions of a girls dowry were recruited. Some of these had never embroidered before. No level of expertise was necessary to satisfy mass wholesale standards. Embroidery

therefore was seen as the least skilful of all the steps and was relatively easy to learn.

The product itself changed only superficially. Traditionally the dress was short-sleeved embroidered white on white. Now most garments were dress length, embroidered with coloured thread sometimes on coloured cloth. This appealed to a wider market of tourists as it was in keeping with western fashion trends at that time. A band of embroidery down the front had also been added. Some examples had long sleeves with embroidered cuffs. However the basic construction and the embroidery designs remained the same.

Today all San Antonio merchants provide the cloth, pay their outworkers, collect the completed pieces and sell the finished product. Early in the development of the system, piecework embroiderers were required to provide their own thread. However, as many of them skimped on the amount of thread used and chose colour combinations considered inappropriate by buyers, the dress merchants soon undertook to supply the thread.

A more recent example of the changes taking place in huipil producing villages took place in August 1997 in San Felipe Usilla and San Lucas Ojitlan in Oaxaca. These two self-sufficient communities have recently been connected to civilization by newly built roads. These non-Spanish speaking communities (Nahua is spoken

(Fig. 7)
Usilla woman with a backstrap loom

(Fig. 8)
Usilla woman pattern darning
a huipil.

in Ojitlan and Chinanteco in Usilla) are caught between their traditional and self-sufficient ways and the modern world.

The women of these villages make their livings from weaving huipils. They contacted the government agency, Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, for help in coping with the new changes in their lives: money, manufactured fabrics and tourism. The women have been faced with challenges which they were not ready for. Their profits are very small as they are weaving their huipils from cotton on the backstrap loom (fig 7), so it can take them up to three months to complete a one. Figure 8 shows a woman from Ojitlan pattern darning a sumak woven cotton. This is extremely time consuming. Their embroidery motifs are typically very complicated and their colours very loud (fig 9). This is normal in their communities sense of fashion but when attempting to sell to whatever tourists or merchants that make their way to these little towns, the bright colours and complicated designs aren't appealing as garments to be worn back home but rather as just souvenirs. A huipil of this type will cost between $200 to $1000 (pesos) i.e. approximately IR£15 to £76. They would sell better if they served as both souvenirs and ready-to-wear garments.

Jennifer Musi, an artist from Mexico city visited both of these villages on behalf of the agency. Jennifer tells me that she

(Fig. 9)
Usilla women wearing the local traditional huipils.

> suggested simpler designs, dying of the fabric to diminish the clashing of colours and changing the basic shape to something smaller like a blouse-type garment.

Jennifer's idea is that if they are going to be selling to a more western minded people, they can try to make their product more western looking. While in San Antonio in the 70's they made their huipil longer to suit the western fashions of the time, Jennifer is suggesting to make the huipils shorter to suit todays fashion trends, as many western women will wear their huipils with jeans. It will also take less time to weave the shorter huipils and therefore are cheaper to make. The huipils will, according to Jennifer "still be authentic and unique and handmade". She also suggested using manufactured cloth to replace the time consuming woven cotton.

All these proposed changes are in direct opposition to their traditional way of life. The changing of designs, fabrics, colours and shapes are so removed from their usual traditional techniques. Also, according to Jennifer,

> if they decide to use manufactured cloth they will become dependant on outsiders which is a great and difficult change for such independent people.

They have been able to survive for centuries almost completely on their own with their traditional way of life with scarce contact with the outside world. However, now that they have more knowledge of the modern world they want to benefit from it (e.g. with manufactured soap and shampoos, and cement for their houses).

This will bring radical changes in their lives. The concept of money is as new to them as roads or tourists.

> The problem of the women weavers of Usilla and Ojitlan is that they are caught in the cross-roads that every civilization that has been westernised has been in at some point,
> Jennifer acknowledges.

Jennifer pointed out that, she and others like her would need to stay with the women for a longer time and actually teach them how to change the huipils and how to cut patterns. This first trip was to assess the situation. Jennifer is scheduled to return in 1998.

CHAPTER 3

Ceremony, Symbolism and Expression.

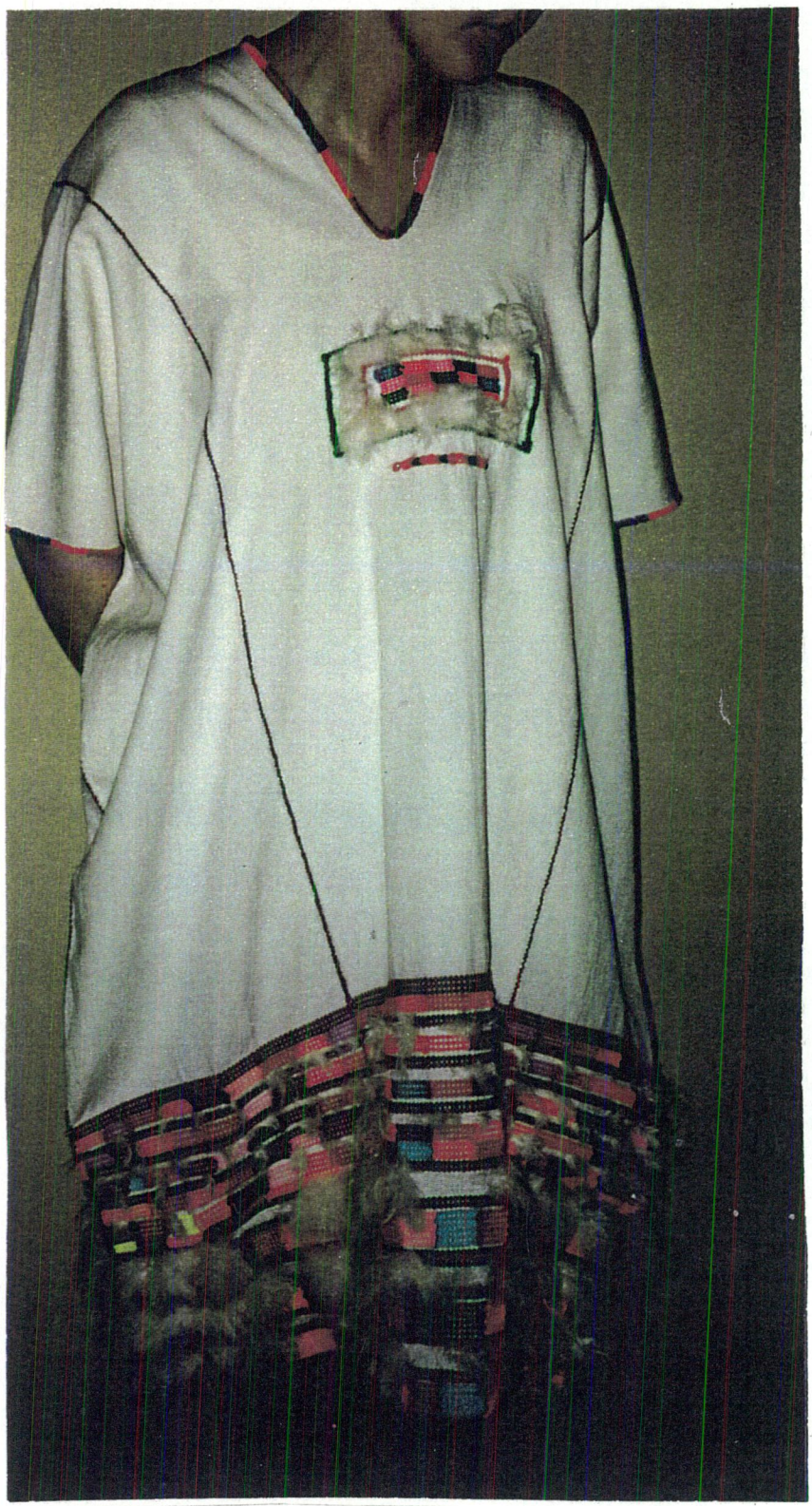
A Study of two special twentieth century Huipils.

Today in Mexico, a vast variation in quality of garments may be found. The quality of each garment usually relates to the reason for its production i.e. a huipil for a special occasion such as a wedding will be luxurious with a lot more work put into it than a huipil to be sold cheaply at a stall in a city. Does this mean the symbolism and meaning of the huipil changes too?

A Wedding Huipil from Zinacantan in Chiapas (K'uk umal Chilil)

While in Mexico, I met Martha Leon Garland, a Mexican textile and costume enthusiast. The huipil in figure 10 is part of her collection which she has in her home. Los textiles de Chiapas (1996) tells us that Zinacantan is the only village that has retained the use of feathered textiles since pre-conquest times. This huipil was one of the most impressive I saw during my stay in Mexico. This was woven in 1990 although few are now being made as they are expensive and very time consuming to produce. Now, in Zinacantan, a huipil like this may be rented rather than bought. The huipil is a very simple shaped garment.

> It is sacklike with openings for the head and arms and is made from rectangular strips of cloth as they are taken off the backstrap loom (not shaped or fitted by cutting). It may be long or short, narrow or wide.(Cordry, 1968, p.50).



(Fig. 10)
Wedding huipil from Zinacantan.

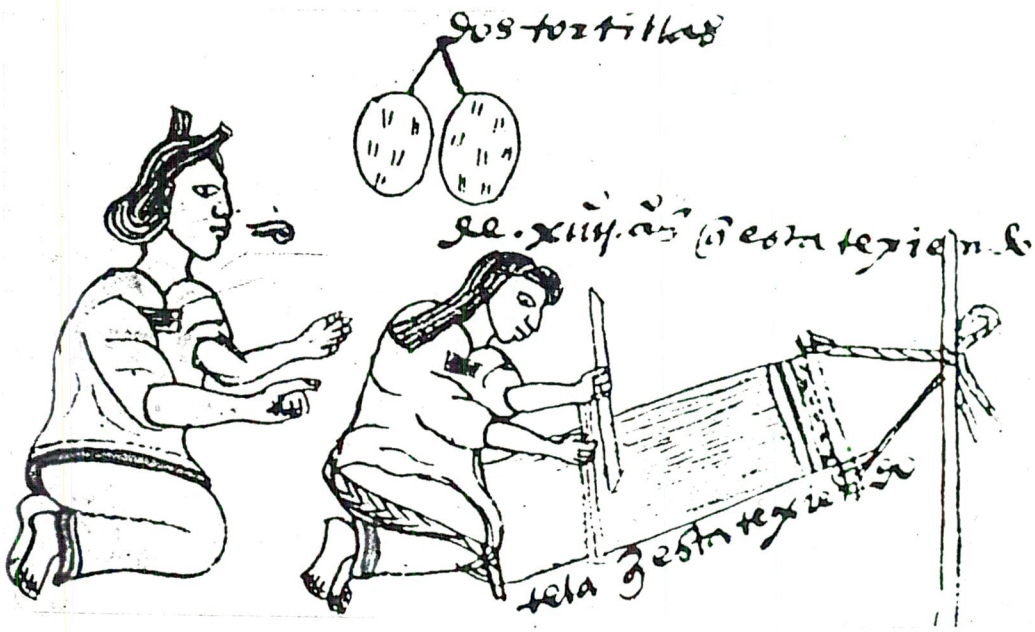
(Fig. 11)
Feathered huipil on loom.

This huipil is a three web huipil meaning that it is three strips of cloth each as wide as it came off the loom. It measures 102cm in length and 88 cm wide. The centre web is 38 cm wide with the two side webs both measuring 25 cm. It was woven on a backstrap loom from white cotton. The neck has been cut slightly crooked. The most striking feature of this huipil is, of course, the feather work. The feathers were spun with the cotton and then woven as seen in figure 11. Heavier feathers are used in the first three bottom layers with coloured sections used in every other layer. Finer, smaller feathers are used in the next four layers of feathers, with more narrow bands of colour used in between. The feathers are very symbolic. Martin Hernandez mentions how this type of huipil symbolises a proper marriage,

> the use of hen feathers is representative of a highly domesticated person. And this is because hens have wings, but are unable to fly; they move on two feet but must be kept in a coop, as they depend on humans for their food, remaining close to home even when they are let loose. That is precisely what is expected of a bride.
> (Lost Textiles De Chiapas, 1996, p. 89).

"Colours embody concepts and emotions" (Textiles De Oaxaca, 1993, p. 81) The colours on this huipil are extremely rich. Red to purple are the predominant colours. This may be for aesthetic reasons but considering the reasons behind this huipil's production it is safe to assume there's a symbolic reason to motivate the use of colour. Red refers to "sexual energy which elevates body temperature and provokes blushes" (Textiles De Oaxaca 1993, p. 86). Red is sometimes worn as a

(Fig. 12)
Rectangular motif on wedding huipil from Zinacantan.



(Fig 13)
Illustration (Circa 1520)

mark of respect. It is also worn by pregnant women around their waists to ward off evil. Purple is often used to represent power, nobility and purity according to Textiles De Oaxaca (1993).

A small rectangular ornamental panel below the neck on the centre web (fig. 12) is the only decorative feature on the main body of the garment. Just below it is a sewn in plait. This plait is repeated on the back centre web. Many variants of this ornamentation are used in different regions. According to Irmgard Weitlaner Johnson,

> All of these variants are without a doubt related to the traditional rectangular motif that dates from the pre-Hispanic era and is illustrated frequently in period codices (fig. 13)... today this element constitutes the continuity of an ancient tradition and, with a few exceptions, its original significance is unknown. (Textiles De Oaxaca, 1993, p. 84).

In parts of Oaxaca, a similar motif is embroidered on to the huipil. It is called a "'wo".

"The 'wo is like a door; it is closed to protect the soul. When one dies, the door opens and the soul leaves through it" (Textiles De Oaxaca, 1993, p.85).

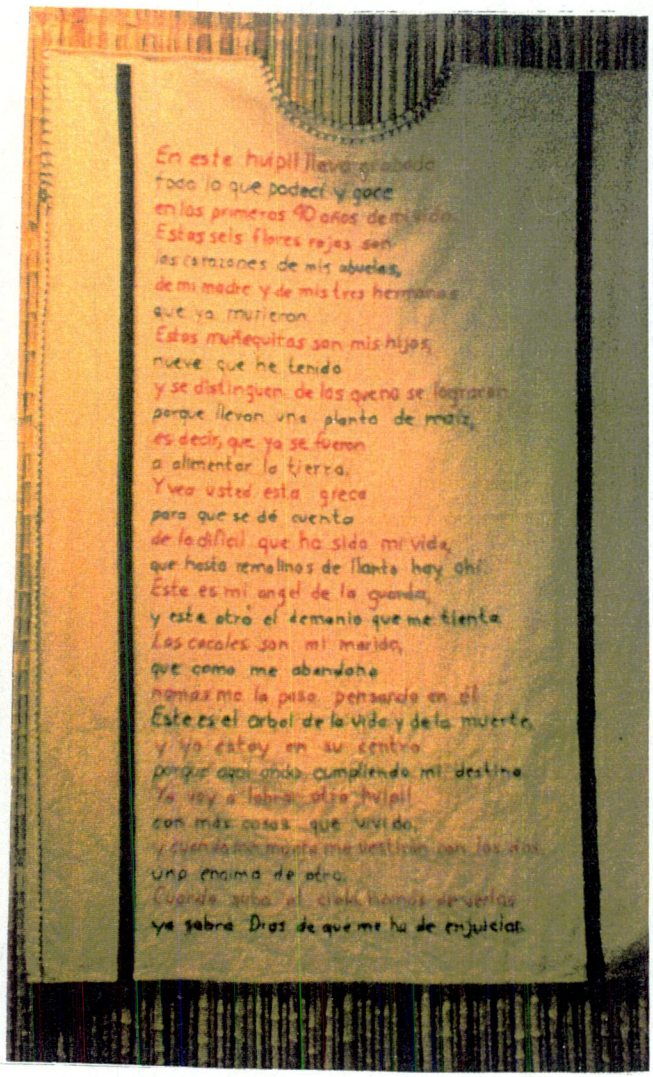
It is likely that the rectangular motif once symbolised something similar, as the people of Zinacantan believe that the soul, which is both heat and vital force, originates in the breast. Now, to the Zinacantecs, it's importance as part of the huipil is continuing tradition rather than what it once may have symbolised.

This sort of huipil is also worn in the fiesta of San Sebastian de Zinacantan. Here however it plays a completely different role. The fiesta of San Sebastian de Zinacantan commemorates the final victory of the Zinacantecs over the Spanish conquistadors.

> The standard - bearers of San Lorenzo and Santo Domingo who have completed their yearly duties wear the "K'uk umal chilil" to represent Spanish women whom they consider vain and materialistic. The character they portray is a commentary on the behaviour of women deemed unfit for marriage. Through the use of humour they expound those ethical values to which the women of Zinacantan should not aspire.
> (Los Textiles de Chiapas, 1996, p. 89).

TWO HUIPILS IN MUSEO DE TRAJE REGIONAL Y TEXTILES INDIGENAS, MEXICO

These huipils (figure 14 and 15) are displayed side by side on a wall in the museum. Woven from "Coyoichcatl" ("Coyote-coloured") cotton and embroidered they show another meaning traditional Mexican dress and textiles hold. Not only is this huipil telling the life of its weaver it is also performing as an "Art" piece. They are woven by an anonymous weaver (Circa 1990-1994) and was collected for an exhibition in 1994. On display, they are to be admired or otherwise, rather than to be worn.



(Fig 14.) (Fig. 15)

Huipils on display from Museo De Traje Regional y Textiles Indigenas, Mexico

En este huipil lleve grabado	On this huipil I carry a record
todo lo que padeci y goce	of everything that I have suffered & enjoyed
en los primeros 40 anos de mi vida.	in the first 40 years of my life.
Estas seis flores rojas son	These six red flowers are
lost corazones de mis abuelas,	the hearts of my grandmothers,
de mi madre y de mis tres hermanas	of my mother and of my three sisters
que ya murieron.	who have died.
Estos munequitas son mis hijos,	These little figures are my children,
nueve que he tenido	nine that I've had
y se distinguen los queno se logracon	and the ones that weren't achieved
porque llevan una planta de maiz,	are distinguished by the corn plant,
es decir, que ya se fueron	meaning that they are gone
a alimentar la tierra.	To feed the earth.
Y vea usted esta greca	And look at this fretwork
para que se de cuenta	so that you realize
de lo dificil que ha sido mi vida,	how different my life has been,
que hasta remolinos de llanta hay ahi,	that there's even whirlpools of crying there
Este es mi angel de la guarda,	This is my guardian angel
y este otro el demonio que me tienta.	And this other, the demon that tempts me.
Lost cocoles son mi marido,	The rhombuses are my husband,
que como me abandono	because he left me

nomas me la paso pensando en el.	I just spend my time thinking of him.
Este es el arbol de la vida y de al muerte,	This is the tree of life and of death,
y yo estoy en su centro	and I am in its centre
porque aqui ando cumpliendo mi Destino.	because here I'm fulfilling my fate.
Ya voy a labrar otro huipil	Soon I'll weave another huipil
con mas cosas que vivido,	with more things that I have lived,
y cuando me muera me vestiran con los dos,	and when I die they'll dress me in both,
uno encima de otro.	On on top of the other.
Cuando suba el cielo nomas de verlos	When I go up to heaven just be seeing them
ya sabra Dios de que me ha de Enjuiciar.	God will know of what I am to be judged.

Translated by Francisco Rebollo Bonnin.

Textiles have until recently, been regarded as a craft rather than an "Art" and would rarely have been seen in an exhibition as a very personal piece of work. This huipil not only works as an example of traditional Mexican craft. It works as a piece of self expressive Art. While it may or may not have been made by remaining rigidly to traditional design elements, the "emotional investment" in this piece is as abundant as one can image any huipil ever being. This personal individual piece is

perhaps what many tourists like to believe he/she is buying when they purchase what they think is a traditional huipil from a tourist shop.

CHAPTER 4

The Position and Significance of the Huipil Today

"Man is the only ape that does not rest until he is dressed in silk" (los Textiles De Chiapas, 1996, p. 85). However, now, man is prepared to rest in less than silk as long as it is got at a good price.

As a direct result of the putting out system in San Antonio, the quality of the huipils deteriorated. The newer pieceworkers were less skilled and less aesthetically motivated. Wholesale buyers became more interested in low prices rather than high quality, which led to the evolution of a "commercial-grade" (Weiner and Schneider, 1989, p. 254) garment.

However, a few very skilled women have continued to specialise in making and trading the finer garments. These high quality garments fetch much higher prices and are still appreciated by the discriminating individual purchaser and museum and exhibition buyers.

Today, the San Antonio blouse has lost both its practical and symbolic values. It's practical value has been lost because nobody really wears them anymore apart from some elderly women in the district. It has lost its symbolic value because the

tradition of giving them as gifts to the Bride-to-be, is no longer practised, thus terminating their use to symbolise the alliance between intermarrying families.

"The San Antonio embroidered blouse is today more a trademark than an authentic cultural form" (Weiner and Schneider, 1989, p. 265). Like most garments, regardless of where in Mexico they are made or by whom they are made, they are generally referred to as Mexican wedding dresses. "Circulation and consumption remove products from their point of origin, their specific ethnic identities become homogenised as simply - typical" (Weiner and Schneider, 1989, p. 266).

Because the output system has control over the colours, the design and the shape of the garment as well as where its sold, it has transformed what the makers do both materially and symbolically. It substitutes the "earlier intimacy between production and use with a pyramid of market relations" (Weiner and Schneider, 1989, p. 267). "Traditional textiles may find a place in the tourist market but that is no basis for the claim that classic [textiles] was saved" (Stockling, 1985, p. 185).

The wedding huipil from Zinacantan is true to traditional techniques, design and symbolism, if a cheaper version was to be made for the mass market it too would be transformed symbolically.

> Art is not necessarily served by resurrecting ancient designs and techniques that perished centuries before - especially when this

> demands the focused energies of talented native craftspersons and artists who must emulate an obscure tradition rather than developing their own visions.
> (Stockling, 1995, p. 187).

Perhaps the huipil displayed in the Muses de Traje Regional y Textiles Indigenas could be described as a good example of a more natural progression from traditional Mexican textiles rather than a forced effort to revive it. Here the artist took the basic shape of the huipil and used it as a canvas to tell her story. However, as a piece of art, it will more than likely, by the majority of viewers, be seen as a piece of "primitive art".

> Irrespective of the degree of Westernization of the contemporary Native Artists, their art is not exhibited in the same galleries where Anglo-American art is shown. Indian art is [regarded as] a separate, distinct aesthetic movement in the United States.
> (Stockling, 1995, p. 187).

CONCLUSION

In the past,

> Anthropologists who witnessed their subjects begin to produce artefacts or put on rituals for the tourist trade were often quick to lament or even denounce such developments. The latter reaction was motivated by the assumption that the commodification of tradition automatically spelled the end of cultural authenticity and meaningful social relations.
> (Howes, 1996, p. 2).

In complete contrast with the meanings and symbolism behind the feathered huipil from Zinacantan and the huipils telling the weavers life story displayed in a museum, the huipil in figure 16 was produced solely for the mass market. It was made from manufactured polycotton which has been cut and machine sewn. It is only 57 cm wide and consists of one piece folded in two across the shoulders and sewn down the sides. This keeps fabric and production costs to a minimum. Both the front and back of this huipil are exactly the same. Just four colours of thread are used in its decoration. Green, yellow, pink and purple synthetic threads are used in the machine embroidery around the neck, the armholes and the end of the huipil. Figure 17 shows that the edges are left ragged and unfinished. Nonetheless, the embroidery motifs still carry a certain energy that is found in traditional Mexican dress. While flowers are sometimes used to symbolise fertility it is doubtful that this was considered during this huipils' production. The embroidery design is likely to have been taken from a pattern or stencil. It is completely symmetric and repetitive thus keeping any colour combination choices to a minimum as well as any "emotional investment".

(Fig 16)
Commercial Huipil

(Fig. 17)
Hem of Commercial Huipil

However many tourists each year will be happy to pay $50 (IR£3 approx.) for this garment as a souvenir.

> In the late twentieth century, maintaining a culture as a living tradition, and not some reified abstraction or projection of the dominant society's fantasies, has become a formidably difficult proposition.
> (Howe, 1996, p. 144).

Despite what I'd like to think, the Mexican Huipil in it's truest sense is almost extinct. Trying to revive it is an option but producing it to simply revive it changes it symbolically. What is to remain of true traditional Mexican dress and textiles should be encouraged and financially supported.

Answering the demand for tourist trade is necessary as it provides many women with a much needed supplementary wage. People, such as Jennifer Musi, acknowledge that changing the product to suit Western taste doesn't save the art but she feels it is more important for the people to live to a better standard. In the end it will be the peoples own decision.

In most cases, the majority of Mexican and Western people do not realize the difference between ancient and modern production techniques, and believe the tradition to be still very much alive. The souvenir huipil is "typical" of Mexican dress and can be recognised internationally. This is very important not only for the

tourist trade and the purchasers but also very important to the Mexican people who have great pride in their indigenous heritage and costume and textile traditions.

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