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| <b>Institution:</b> Newcastle University  |   |   |
| <b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 28 History   |   |   |
| <b>Title of case study:</b> Using the Past to Reaffirm Indigenous Identity in Present-Day Mexico  |   |   |
| <b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> September 2003 to 2011   |   |   |
| <b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>  |   |   |
| <b>Name(s):</b><br><br>Keith Brewster   | <b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b><br><br>Senior Lecturer | <b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b><br>September 2003 to present day |
| <b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> August 2013 to December 2020  |   |   |
| <b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N  |   |   |
| <b>1. Summary of the impact</b><br><br><p>Concern over the marginalisation of indigenous communities in Mexico has frequently provoked well-meaning, but ineffective initiatives to reverse the trend. Brewster's research offered an innovative approach to the problem by analysing the past contribution of indigenous communities to the socio-economic development of a rural region in Mexico. By focusing on the nahua community of San Miguel Tenango, the research contributed towards current local NGO programmes designed to revitalise an endangered language and inspired an inter-generational discussion about the past that stretched beyond San Miguel to embrace the whole region. More tangibly, it stimulated the reintroduction of a past form of community labour in which adult members of the community contribute weekly towards the delivery of present and future projects of social and economic benefit.</p>  |   |   |
| <b>2. Underpinning research</b><br><br><p>Research conducted by Dr Keith Brewster at Newcastle University since 2003 has systematically investigated the roles that indigenous communities played in the socio-economic development of the Sierra Norte de Puebla in the twentieth century. The previous historiography had assumed that following the Mexican Revolution (1910-17), indigenous groups were passive recipients of post-revolutionary reforms designed to 'civilise' the rural countryside. However, Brewster's focus on nahua communities within the municipality of Zacatlán suggested something different. The underlying aim of this research was to reconsider and, where appropriate, reassert the political and economic agency of indigenous communities into the region's history and socio-economic development. Using local archives, interviews and various aspects of cultural history, Brewster was able to construct a more nuanced understanding of how indigenous everyday life connected with aspects of national importance during a turbulent period in Mexico's history. His first findings on the topic were published as a monograph in 2003 (<b>PUB1</b>). His article, "Caciquismo in the Sierra Norte de Puebla", however, presented a fundamental reworking of his previous research. Published in 2005, it set out the depth and breadth of the contribution of indigenous communities within Zacatlán to the region's development (<b>PUB2</b>). In particular, this article, and the research that followed it (<b>PUB3</b>), analysed the relationship between local leaders of the region's communities and external political, military and economic agents during a time of rapid post-revolutionary development. In doing so it provided a new understanding of how <i>caciquismo</i> ('boss rule') became a means by which indigenous groups were able to use their cooperation in development projects to negotiate in ways that were previously unacknowledged.</p> <p>In order to make it more accessible to local collaborators, Brewster's monograph was subsequently translated into Spanish in 2010 (<b>PUB4</b>). Further elements of this work were</p> |   |   |

published in Spanish in 2011 (**PUB5**). Sections of (**PUB4 & PUB5**) have also been paraphrased into *nahuatl* in order better to reach the indigenous communities themselves.

Taken together this research represents the only significant academic focus on the history of this region during the period in question (1920s-1940s). No other work, either in English or Spanish, has been published and, as such, the publications offer the sole academic source of material from which the impact activities have developed.

The publications have (i) provided new evidence of the extent to which indigenous language and culture (the *nahua* culture) played a role in offering indigenous communities a measure of political agency in their dealing with regional and national political forces of change; (ii) clearly detailed the previously overlooked contribution of indigenous communities to the social and economic development of the region during the 1920-40s; (iii) provided detailed information regarding the ways in which the voluntary labour of indigenous communities contributed to the construction of essential infrastructure (schools, roads, bridges, telecommunications); and (iv) made rigorous and relevant historical enquiry accessible to local collaborators.

### 3. References to the research

#### Publications

- 1) Brewster K. *Militarism, Ethnicity and Politics in the Sierra Norte de Puebla, 1917-1930*. Arizona University Press, 2003.
- 2) Brewster K. 'Caciquismo in the Sierra Norte de Puebla: the Case of Gabriel Barrios Cabrera.' In Knight, A., Pansters, W, eds. *Caciquismo in Twentieth-Century Mexico*. London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, 2005, pp.113-128.
- 3) Brewster K. 'Survival strategies among the Mexican rural elite.' *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 2008, 27(4), 534-553. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1470-9856.2008.00285.x>
- 4) Brewster K. 'Conviviendo con el caciquismo: Huauchinango en el periodo posrevolucionario.' In Libertad Mora, ed. *Huauchinango. El rumor del tiempo*. México: Pi red a.c. editores, 2011, pp.119-130.
- 5) Brewster K. *Militarismo, etnicidad y política en la Sierra Norte de Puebla, 1917-1930*. México: Educación y Cultura, 2010. (Spanish translation of the monograph published in 2003).

All publications went through a rigorous peer-review system. All English-language publications have been cited in subsequent publications conducted by other academics. The 2 Spanish-language publications give testament to the original research's reach beyond the English-speaking academic community. Publication 1 has attracted favourable reviews in several research journals. Where no doi is given, publications are available on request.

### 4. Details of the impact

At a national level, government and non-government organisations (NGOs) have recently begun attempts to revive indigenous languages, viewing them as a pivotal facet of community unity and development. In the Sierra Norte de Puebla, agencies strive to increase the socio-economic potential of *nahuatl*-speaking indigenous communities by helping them to recognise their relevance in modern Mexican society. Approximately 1,500 villages in the Sierra de Puebla and neighbouring regions speak the same dialect of *nahuatl*. It is currently categorised as at EIGDS development stage 5 of the Endangered Languages scale – source: <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/nhe>.

Within the municipality of Zacatlán, Brewster's research on the histories of local indigenous communities has been deployed by grass-root and local government agencies that recognise how pride in the past might stimulate self-esteem and help revitalise the region's indigenous languages and cultures. As detailed below, the results of this deployment have led to several types of impact. The main beneficiaries of such impact can be found in the indigenous communities themselves: within schools where teachers and pupils benefit from new material with which to appreciate the value of their indigenous heritage; within the family home where increased dialogue between generations is helping to reinforce family ties; within the community where an increased sense of identity has fostered a new appetite for community involvement and voluntarism. Indirectly, a growing awareness by the non-indigenous sector of the region's population has helped foster new-found respect between ethnic groups.

The two strands of the project represent distinct yet overlapping initiatives by which the impact described above was achieved.

### **Educational Outreach: changing perceptions of indigenous history and culture**

The first strand was specifically directed at the youngest generation within indigenous communities. In 2017, the head of Zacatlán Asociación Civil, (an NGO seeking to aid the development of indigenous communities within Zacatlán) and Brewster collaborated to produce a picture and text book for children in pre-school and infant schools in indigenous communities. Entitled *Thanks to our Forefathers*, the book used examples from Brewster's translated monograph to produce cartoon-like depictions of the voluntary labours carried out by their forefathers over 80 years ago. The accessible nature of key findings from Brewster's work has allowed teachers to introduce both Spanish and *nahuatl* vocabulary into the classroom in relation to a previously neglected aspect of local history. In consultation with local teachers, the books were designed in such a way as to encourage intergenerational dialogue regarding the past and to change children's perceptions of their own history and place within society. As the community leader of the local branch of the National Association of Indigenous Translators (UNTI) reports: "This has been demonstrated by the fact that parents have begun to value the *nahuatl* language and have taught their children not to be ashamed to speak it. This had not been seen before! I allow myself to mention the testimony of an influential family within our community who have a girl in pre-school and now speak[s] to her in *nahuatl*. All members of the family now testify that: "We have learned the importance of recognising the value of our culture and our language, and the need not to let it be lost". (IMP3)

The pre-school and infant school project in San Miguel Tenango was taken up by officials in the municipal government of Zacatlán. The head of Zacatlán Asociación Civil arranged meetings with the municipal president and the directors of Education and Indigenous Affairs in which they agreed to adopt the project throughout the entire municipality of Zacatlán. As a consequence, the books were distributed to 575 pupils in 14 indigenous communities and used as part of a systematic program to encourage greater dialogue between children, teachers and families about the past. As the Director of Indigenous Affairs underlined, "we have adopted this marvellous idea as our own, because it has created a great impact in all of those indigenous communities in which centres for pre-school indigenous education and indigenous cultures exist". (IMP1, 6 & 7). As the head of the Zacatlán Asociación Civil's report underlines: "This represents a significant change in local government policy designed to engage with the region's indigenous communities." (IMP2)

In January 2019, Brewster met with the Regional Director for the Development of Rural Education. The Director agreed to adopt the project and, as a result, an electronic version of the books was made available to approximately 150 indigenous pre and infant schools across their region (reaching over 5,000 children). The electronic version allows teachers to modify images to suit local conditions and replace Spanish text with the local indigenous text as appropriate (IMP2 & 7). Unfortunately, due to COVID-related restrictions, details on the roll-out of this initiative and the impact that it has created are not yet available.

**Identity renewal: provoking reflections on the present relevance of past practices**

The second strand of the project helped to achieve a central objective of UNTI in San Miguel Tenango, an organisation dedicated to the promotion of indigenous languages and cultures throughout Mexico. Fundamental to their work is the development of cross-generational engagement by encouraging older generations to give voice to the ways and customs of their own past. The team used materials from Brewster's research publications (photographs, interviews, historical analysis) as the foundation of a community discussion regarding the past and the role of their forefathers in developmental projects (IMP3).

As a first step, UNTI invited local people to contribute artefacts, conduct interviews, relay anecdotes and songs that related to the lives of their ancestors. The resulting collection was used in two exhibitions in San Miguel Tenango (22 February 2018 and 21 February 2019) and a larger one in the nearby town of Zacatlán (18-19 May 2018), under the theme of how the past could inform the present and future. The San Miguel exhibitions were attended by over 600 people, including community members, school children, teachers and members of the municipal government. According to the head of UNTI: "The exhibition had a great impact upon young pupils, especially those of secondary and baccalaureate (A-level equivalent), because they understood the role that our ancestors had in the fight for social justice. This understanding has destroyed the idea that our people are passive people and disconnected to national events. It has also begun a perceptible increase in "ethnic pride" that we were losing with the passing of time." (IMP3, 4 & 5)

Using evidence from Brewster's research alongside materials collected for the above exhibitions, UNTI published a book for secondary and sixth-form pupils in January 2019. Entitled *Tlen Amo Icnamiqui Itquilcauasqueh*, (transl. *The past informs the present and future*) the content of the book (40 pages in all, written in both *nahuatl* and Spanish) is squarely focused on the objectives of the underpinning research (i.e. using lessons from the past to emphasise the valuable contribution of indigenous communities in the present and future). As such, some chapters directly relate to Brewster's research while others are designed to stimulate reflection on the richness of indigenous culture, language and beliefs, and to emphasise that far from being a 'dead' culture, it is dynamic and has relevance for Mexico's local, regional and national development (IMP3).

The head of UNTI states: "As can be indicated by the title of our exhibitions and publication, *Tlen Amo Icnamiqui Itquilcauasqueh*, a central part of our focused project is on how the present generations of indigenous can learn from their past. In this respect, the investigation of Dr Brewster was essential because it offered tangible and documented evidence of a history that has been invisible due to the domination of written history over our oral tradition. This work represents the detonator of all the initiatives that we have undertaken, and still more, already represents part of the historical-cultural heritage of our people." (IMP3)

Exemplifying the link between Brewster's research and policy change within the community was the topic of communal work. One chapter of *Tlen Amo Icnamiqui Itquilcauasqueh* directly relates Brewster's findings regarding how voluntary labour was used in the past to accomplish works that benefitted the community as a whole. As the head of UNTI testifies: "This aspect of the life of our indigenous people was being lost for many reasons. Dr Brewster's photographic evidence provoked a certain nostalgia among those who identified with the theme. This section had a great impact among men who expressed things such as: 'Those times were very good'; 'It would be good if we could work like that nowadays'; 'Our children know little about this way of working'. I can say with much certainty, offering photographic evidence, that from the position that we now hold within the local council, **it has been decided to reintroduce this form of community work in order to accomplish much needed improvements that, if they had waited for government support, would not have been carried out.**" (Hernández' emphasis) (IMP3). Further textual and visual details referred to above can be found in (IMP4).

To summarise, this case study has vastly exceeded its original intentions. The schoolbook project expanded beyond one community to be adopted by schools throughout the region. Within San Miguel Tenango, the initiative fed into ongoing efforts to value the cultural heritage of a shared indigenous past. Yet such developments went further still by converting good intentions into demonstrable actions. A grassroots demand to reintroduce voluntary labour assures that this project's impact will leave a highly beneficial legacy for future generations.

#### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- IMP1) Statement from Director of Indigenous Affairs for the local government of Zacatlan.
- IMP2) Final report from the head of the local NGO – Civil Association in Zacatlan.
- IMP3) Final report of the head of local branch of a national NGO, National Union of Indigenous Translators (UNTI) in San Miguel Tenango. [text and images]
- IMP4) Written report and photographic evidence on San Miguel Tenango exhibitions (22 February 2018 & 21 February 2019), by the local head of UNTI in San Miguel Tenango.
- IMP5) Written report and photographic evidence on Zacatlán exhibition (May 2018) by the local head of UNTI in San Miguel Tenango.
- IMP6) Statement from Director of Education for the local government of Zacatlan.
- IMP7) Feedback from teachers, children and parents involved in the schools' project [not available - unable to collect due to COVID-19 restrictions in Mexico, see mitigation statement].

All sources of evidence are available on request.