



**The making of indigenous resistance,
land struggle and
the foreclosure of politics
[Geographies of absence and political identities]**

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__In 2011, the indigenous Purepechas of **Cherán, Michoacán** begun a **resistance** movement against the Mexican government, becoming fully and legally an **autonomous** town in 2012. Why these transactions encouraged the purepechas to become autonomous from the Mexican government? How did they achieve **self-government** and **self-regulation** not only over their own political and social configuration but also in the distribution of natural resources? How violent processes unfold in space and how policies, practices and subjectivities are determined by, and simultaneously shape, the social production of space?

__Power inscribed in social space, defines and materializes what is present and what has to be erased. Absence also has a political dimension, it is **negotiated and contested**. By investigating how memory is inscribed in space and how **social interactions** produce lived spaces and regulated territories, politicizing what otherwise would be a natural physical environment, we gain a deeper understanding on how economical punishment, **social exclusion**, erasure and exception actively materializes and unfold in space.

__Place: 1455 De Maisonneuve Blvd W
Henry Hall Building 1267

__Time: **October 7, 2016 11:00-12:15hrs**

__Organized by **Silvano De la Llata**

__Sponsored by The Department of

Geography Planning & The Environment and **The GeoGrads**

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We all are familiar with the images of violence and the recent drug war narrative experienced in Mexico. This violence is not a new phenomenon, if possibly a material manifestation of decades of economical punishment, social exclusion, erasure and exception. The state of Michoacán, a strategic place for these transactions, carries a long history of exploitation against indigenous people and the natural resources concentrated in the state. Michoacán's vast forestry system has been subjected to years of illegal logging, a fact very well known but little exposed, pushing the indigenous purhepechas to become both slaves and accomplices of those crimes. Drug trafficking clashing with civil war and indigenous resistance movements. They are fighting for nothing more than their right for local jurisdiction of culture and natural resources.

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In 2008 Roberto Bautista Chapina assumed the presidency of Cheran.
(PRI political party)

Former mayor of Cheran, (PRD political party) Leopoldo Urbina Juarez, faced the government arguing they would not allow local police to act as employees of organized crime.

The remains of Leopoldo Urbina Juárez were found on May 9, 2008, after being kidnapped.

Accusations headed towards Cheran Mayor Roberto Bautista Chapina.

Between 2009-2011 in Cheran, 8 people went missing and 27 murdered, all members of the community group that defended the ownership of the forest.

In April 15, 2011, after the murder of Urbina's brother, Pedro Juárez Urbina, and in response to increased insecurity, Indigenous purhrepechas opted for self-defense. Their resistance movement and the process of independence of Cheran began.

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Why these transactions encouraged the Indigenous purepechas to become autonomous from the Mexican government?.

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My research discusses the contested history of these landscapes, drawing from a relational understanding of space and the multidirectional nature of memory, exploring the ways in which this landscape is imbued with meaning, memory and political trauma. By bringing a critical human geography perspective to the contested political space of Cheran, this research aims to fully understand the changing relationship between state, territory, and nation across the Purepecha's communities.

I critically explore the rural landscape as being torn by the politics of territoriality of Indigenous Purhepecha leaders, which resorted to violence and the construction of borders in order to fight the colonial legacy embedded in the national government as they expanded the limits of the Mexican land, attempting to vanish the threshold of the forest and to bring the Indigenous purhepechas under state control.

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All nations represent themselves in some manner, asserting their identity through dominant narratives represented in historic moments, heroes and mythologies, but also geographically. All these are circulating symbols defining borders. Through government propaganda and controlled forms of national representation, such as monuments, parades and ancestry, colonial nations have represented themselves and defined citizenry.

Using these authorized forms of self-representation as starting points, we must ask, how is the landscape of the town -pueblo- to be understood?. We usually think about the little town -pueblo- as a place outside neoliberal struggles, but it is precisely because it is a liminal space between the city and the countryside that peasant land struggle against the culture of colonizers gains visibility. Further more, what if this town -pueblo- is an indigeneous community functioning as a place of resistance against commodified political corruption and environmental conflict?. Can a little town transform from being a physical construct to a place of political resistance?.

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It was a rare opportunity to observe, in real time, the messy, contentious, and uncertain processes of state formation. The so claimed independence from the state became a catalyst for bringing forward issues of identity, nationhood, and place that commonly operate tacitly and unexamined in the background.

I realized that if I wanted to understand the configuration of the rural landscape as a space of unsettled decolonial subjectivities, my research methodology should combine several methods, such as: ethnography, oral history, participatory observation, narrative interview, archival research, and literature review.

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My field research-based in Cheran examines how rural space has been constructed and used by hegemonic groups as a mean to assert their power, turning the forest into a place of resistance where power is contested and space is reappropriated. I analyze how Indigeneous purhepecha inhabitants resist the conventional construction and division of the landscape through practices of transgression and resistance, creating instead spaces of subversion.

In the purhepecha cultural praxis, the symbolic center around which all domestic activities are organized is the parangua, the traditional cooking fire (Dietz 2001). The parangua was used by the Indigeneous purhepecha's in Cheran as an apparatus to organize and mobilize their militarization. They took the parangua -the traditional bonfire for cooking- out to the street and repurposed it as a node in the resistance network, as a location where to find refuge, organize and communicate strategies in their fight against the colluded Mexican police. I argue that it is through the use of the parangua as a practice and site of resistance, that these counter-spaces and places of subversion challenged hegemonic assertions of social space, landscape and identity.

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I'm particularly interested in the notion of geographies of absence (Frers 2013). Geographies of absence is a term recently developed in social geography, which basically brings forward the notion that the power inscribed in social space, defines and materializes what's present and what has to be erased.

Whereas social geography tends to focus in what's present, the notion of geographies of absence basically questions our fixed perceptions of absence and presence, attempting to show how the power inscribed in social space, defines and materializes who has to be absent and what and who is allowed to be present? 'Absence also has a political dimension, it is negotiated and contested' (Meier et al 2013).

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Seeing Absence: How to See What Isn't There



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By investigating how is memory inscribed in space and how social interactions produces lived spaces and regulated territories, politicizing what otherwise would be a natural physical environment, we gain a deeper understanding on how economical punishment, social exclusion, erasure and exception actively materializes and unfold in space.

How the drug wars coupled with civil war and the 'purhepechas' indigenous insurgent movement, has modified and reconfigured their social production of space?. How the drug wars in Michoacán, a crime that leaves no apparent material residue still reconfigure the social production and practice of space? How does it haunt places and individuals subsequently?.

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spatial emancipation, regulations of space, settler colonialism, racial divide.



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I was supposed to be Purhepecha, then came the Spanish Empire and I became Tarasco, then came the Mexican Federal Census Bureau and I became Indian, then came the Ethnic Studies class and I became Indigeneous, then came the activists and I became an act of resistance. Then, who am I?.

